

“AND WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?”

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PROBABLY no question ever asked is fraught with such profound and universal import to humanity as is the question once put to Jesus by a student of the law in these words: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The question occurs in an incident related in the tenth chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Jesus made no direct answer, but by a counter-question drew from the student his own knowledge as to what rule the law prescribed upon the subject of gaining eternal life. “What is written in the law?” was Jesus’ return question, and the student proved himself no mere tyro in legal knowledge, for he at once replied by quoting from the law the commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”

The student’s answer was correct, for the approving reply of Jesus was, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.” In view of the fact that Jesus, at this incident, says of this commandment that obedience to it brings life,—gains immortality,—and that on another occasion he had said “there is none other commandment greater than these,” and on still another occasion that “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,” there can be no limit to the importance of a scientifically correct understanding of the answer. The commandment calls for motive, activity,—activity in contradistinction to mere passivity, and that activity is love. It will be noted that there is only one verb, viz., love, in the whole commandment, and hence there can be but one motive, one activity or kind of love, notwithstanding that this one motive includes within its single embrace both God and neighbor: “Thou shalt love . . . God . . . and thy neighbor.”

One may without any great difficulty form some kind of a concept of the meaning of the first branch of the commandment, viz., “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,” and may flatter himself into a belief that his concept so formed is fairly correct and may, upon some vague

theory, hope that he is obeying it and entitling himself to the reward of obedience; but when he comes to the formation of a concept of the second branch, viz., "Thou shalt love . . . thy neighbor as thyself," he is liable to run into such vagueness as not to be able honestly to affirm that he understands. Such seems to have been the condition of mind even of the student whose accurate statement of the commandment won from the great Master an unqualified approval, and hence his further question to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" His understanding failed him as to this latter yet integral branch of the commandment.

As above suggested, the motive which is called into activity is the one motive, love,—love for God, the All-good, the First Cause, the divine creative Principle, the All-in-all,—while at the same time there is embraced within its same activity "thy neighbor." One can hardly refrain from inquiring what it is or who it is that is worthy to be so inseparably associated in the consciousness of loving, and yet must be so associated in order that the commandment in its entirety may be obeyed; what must be the rank or character of that which consciousness must hold along with the divinely infinite in its one embrace, however feeble that love motive may be. Certainly the concept should not include simply the dweller in the next dooryard, or the individual just jostling one in the throng of the crowded thoroughfare, or the dweller upon the next cattle-ranch, twenty miles away, when by such inclusion the intent or effect would be to exclude all other persons comprising at the same time the human family.

Shall one be tempted to say, I cannot gain eternal life for the reason that I am so crowded in this press that I cannot distinguish any one as my neighbor; while another is tempted to say, I cannot gain it for the reason that I am so alone in this world I have no neighbor to love? Must not the concept be one equally available to the wanderer upon the lonely desert and to the crowded occupant of the slums of a modern city—a concept which one can take with him into the closet when he prays and which will dwell with him "in the secret place of the most High"?

Jesus did not answer the student's question in words

purporting to be by way of definition of who or what constituted his neighbor; on the contrary, Jesus spelled out his answer to the question by a train of connecting ideas which constitute the story of the “Good Samaritan.” Probably the reader is familiar with the details of this story, but if not, let him read Luke, 10 : 25-37, with us while we try to find the neighbor whom we must thus love.

The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, was stripped, wounded, and left half dead by the wayside. A priest “by chance” came down that way and saw him. To the Israelite the priest stood as his representative in “things pertaining unto God.” The priest made prayers for him, offered up his sacrifices, served the altar, performed religious ceremonies for him, taught him the statutes of the Lord, and was depended on almost entirely as a way out of the discordant conditions of mortal life into the harmonies of heaven and immortality. Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place where the man lay, “came and looked on him.” The Levites were a tribe among the other tribes of Israel who stood next the king. They were interpreters of the law, teachers and trainers of the people in morality and religion, administrators of justice, and were regarded as representatives of the holiness of the people. But both the priest and the Levite, who came first upon the ground where the wounded and destitute man lay, when they saw him, passed by on the other side of the road.

If the incident had closed here what lesson could be drawn from it save a lesson in cold, cruel, sordid selfishness? Not one ray of spiritual light, not one throb of love, not one hint of a neighbor to be loved would have come into view. Mrs. Eddy says (*Science and Health*, p. 480), “If there is no spiritual reflection, then there remains only the darkness of vacuity and not a trace of heavenly tints.” But the incident did not close with the passing by of the priest and the Levite. Comes now the Samaritan, bringing with him the oil of healing, the wine of inspiration, providing food, shelter, and protection for the present and assurance against need for the future. He sees, but does not pass by. Not only did the material sacrifice of the Samaritan drive from the consciousness of the injured man the sense of want and hurt

and helpless destitution, but the spiritual import and significance of that sacrifice ascended out of "the darkness of vacuity" into heavenly tints of spiritual reflection.

"Which now of these three"—the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan—"was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?" asked Jesus. The student's answer was, "He that shewed mercy on him." And Jesus replied, "Go, and do thou likewise." The reader will please note well that with this last direction of the Master the story ends, and the answer of Jesus to the question, "And who is my neighbor?" is complete. What is this answer? How shall we interpret it? Where does the neighbor appear? Neither the priest nor the Levite was neighbor to the man that was hurt, nor was the man that was hurt neighbor to either of them or to the Samaritan; nor had anything come into view which either the man or the priest or the Levite loved. "He that shewed mercy" on this man was neighbor to the man, and the only neighbor appearing; but who was loving this neighbor as himself, "thy neighbor"?

Far be it from the writer to attempt any dogmatic interpretation of this Scripture, but the following thoughts gained through the study of Christian Science have proven so helpful and so satisfying both to reason and consciousness that they are offered in the hope that they may prove in some degree helpful to others. Think for a moment how much is depending upon our right understanding of this answer of Jesus—that only by obedience to this great commandment can eternal life be gained. The rule for working out this grand result is simply stated: It is only to love God with all your being and "thy neighbor as thyself"—just this and nothing more. To fall short of doing this is to fail to gain eternal life, and to do more does not add one particle to the gain. Observe also that the loving of the neighbor cannot be delegated. Whatever our so-called lot or station or position in this world of ours, each must do this loving for himself. The prince, the arch-potentate, the prelate, you, I, and the humblest little street-gamin must do just this—nothing more.

The command to "love thy neighbor as thyself" came down from the time of Moses, and is not the "new commandment . . . that ye love one another" given by

Jesus. It is a command which seems to imply a concentration of the love-motive, objectively, in such manner as that one shall not invade or interfere with the consciousness of any other person, for each and every individuality is charged with exactly the same individual duty and invested with exactly the same individual rights. And here another seemingly necessary implication comes in, namely, that each and every person must be in some way connected with or have within them or within the reach and grasp of their understanding something lovable,—so lovable indeed that one may embrace it in the same love-motive with “the Lord” his “God,” for surely the Father-Mother does not leave even the street-urchin in “the darkness of vacuity” in regard to what he must thus love in order to gain eternal life. “Your heavenly Father feedeth” even the “birds of the air,” and “man’s goings are of the Lord.”

That one must embrace in this love-motive and love as himself that aggregation of pride, envy, greed, passion, lust, hate, and general discord which constitutes self in the flesh as we all know it, whether it be our own personal self or some other like personality, is a proposition which seems absurd on its face and unworthy of consideration. That which is to be thus loved must certainly be separate from all the above elements of character. It must be a self which is unselfed of all that is selfish, which is equivalent to saying that it must be a self so far dematerialized as to become a self which is spiritual only. Such a self is and can be but a reflection of the one infinite Spirit—a reflection or image which is the ideal man.

Returning now to the Samaritan, may we not say that, in “seeking his own in another’s good” (Science and Health, p. 518), the Samaritan had brought into manifestation that which constituted his own true selfhood, the image and likeness of the one Divine individuality,—a true reflection of the divine Principle, Love radiant in light and power, destroying the illusions of darkness and error. Does not the neighbor stand revealed? Is not that which the Samaritan loved into manifestation as his own true selfhood the neighbor,—the neighbor to the man that was hurt and the neighbor which the Samaritan loved as himself?

One may at least approach a concept of that which constitutes "thy neighbor" through the thought that love, as applied to man, is a subjective activity of individual consciousness which expresses externally an individualized image or reflection of the divine Principle,—Love. It is that reflection which, finding on its journey want and woe by the road, does not "pass by on the other side" as did the priest and the Levite, but it does "likewise" as did the Samaritan. This reflection, our own true self, is worthy to be loved in the same embrace with "the Lord thy God," for it is His image and likeness. It is that direct or immediate manifestation of the divine impulse, or expression of that consciousness of God, which constitutes our true individuality. It is that expression of our true being which is for us what the Samaritan was to the man "that fell among the thieves." This is our neighbor whom we must love as ourselves, and who will appear only as we obey Jesus' command to the student: "Go, and do thou likewise."

Jesus' outlook upon life was from the standpoint of a perfect understanding of the All-truth. From premises which he laid down in his teaching no conclusion can follow but truth, and even though we hear that truth as only a single tone, it is still harmonious with the whole truth of being. Not only did he see the end from the beginning, but, as the great Teacher and demonstrator of the All-truth, he saw also all beginnings from the end.

The only lesson which the student sought to learn at the interview was how to gain eternal life, and Jesus, confining his teachings to the student's want, pointed out only the loving way with its two branches: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor." The command, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," as a way to gain eternal life, cannot be regarded as a command to love something which must or even can disappear. It cannot be that, through obedience in loving, the command effects the destruction either of the lover or the loved. Love, the divine Principle, is creative and sustaining. Hate is the impersonal demon which exists only as destruction. When Jesus said to the student: "Go, and do thou likewise," he did not sentence him to oblivion; on the contrary, in the reflection of Love which shone forth in this Samaritan, Jesus saw the glow of the true image of

Divinity; he recognized the kinship of one of “the branches” of that “true vine” which he had declared himself to be, and knew the union of an individualized member of that one spiritual body of which the Christ is the head.

Later on, in the further intellectual unfoldment of the Christ-idea, Jesus plainly showed that the loving way with its two branches led to spiritual understanding,—to a knowing of the Father, Principle, and to a knowing of the Son, the perfect manifestation of the Father,—and this united understanding, this end of the loving way and union of the two branches, he declared to be in itself “eternal life.” In the Christ-prayer, in communing with the Father concerning the gift of eternal life to “as many as thou hast given him,” Jesus said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Thus he who has obeyed the whole commandment has gained the supreme end—eternal life. By loving the Lord his God with all his heart, he has come to know God. But how did he come to know Jesus Christ, whom the same unchanging God has sent? Where is the neighbor whom he has loved as himself all the way up to knowing God? Has “he that shewed mercy” disappeared? If not, where in the final end does he appear? Where indeed can he appear, save in and as part of the perfect reflection? In loving God he that has gained eternal life knows “what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,” and knows that as God has appeared he has seen Him “as he is,” and is therefore “like him” in the reflection of Him. Obeying the command, “Go, and do thou likewise,” his own true self appears in the likeness—an emergence of his own neighbor.

CHURCH TREASURER.

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