

CHAPTER XIII

The Marks of Discipleship (VI)

THE SPRINGS OF SYMPATHY

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day: and a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; yea, even the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom: and the rich man also died, and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they that would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us. And he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham saith, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead."

(Luke 16: 19-31)

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPRINGS OF SYMPATHY

The Parable of the Rich Man and the Beggar

A drama in two scenes entitled, "The Rich Man and the Beggar." Could any theme be more hackneyed?—or more liable to bathos and a cheap emotion? Yet the Playwright has drawn character with such insight, given the threadbare plot such strange but convincing turns, provided "lines" of such human self-revealing, that it leaves us to this day unmasked and defenceless. Whence came our word "lazar"? The story is scored indelibly on language and life.

Jesus regarded our contrasts of wealth and poverty with troubled eyes. Otherwise this story could never have been written. His swift reproof for unfeeling wealth and swift pity for the uncomplaining poor¹ had their birth in His pain. He marvelled that people blessed with abundance could be deaf to the plea of distress. So do we marvel that medieval barons could glut themselves cheerily while captive wretches rotted in dungeons below the banquet-hall. Perhaps the year 3000 A.D. will marvel that our civilization could tolerate extremes of inordinate wealth and abject penury, and still call itself "Christian." No one has depicted the opposites of human estate more remorselessly than Jesus.

The first scene in this drama is cast in Palestine in the first century. It is a tableau—for not a word is spoken. There are two main characters: the unnamed Rich Man and Lazarus,²

¹ The Lucan version of the Beatitudes (which some scholars believe to be an earlier version than that of Matthew) will occur to mind. See Luke 6: 20-25.

² The name "Dives" is merely Latin for "rich man." "Lazarus" is from the Hebrew *Eleazar*, meaning "he whom God helps." It is the only instance in the parables of the naming of a character. Ambrose and Tertullian believed the story to be historical, and a late tradition that the Rich Man was called Nineus gives some slight countenance to the view. The suggestion that the miracle of the raising of Lazarus is a plagiarization of this story seems quite arbitrary. The other suggestion that the beggar was named Lazarus (after Jesus' time) because Lazarus of Bethany *did* come back from the dead but by his coming did *not* persuade men

the beggar at his gates. We see the Rich Man richly clothed—his outer garment was dyed in the costly purple of the murex; his inner garment was woven from Egyptian flax. We see him richly housed—"gates" betokens the portico of a palatial home.³ We see him richly fed and living merrily.⁴ Then Lazarus enters in ghastly contrast. He is daily carried to the Rich Man's porch. His rags do not cover his ulcerated body. Unclean dogs which infest the street come to lick his sores,⁵ and he has no strength to drive them off. He counts it good fortune to be fed with scraps from the Rich Man's table.⁶

Dives was not unscrupulous; the story gives no hint that he came by his wealth dishonestly. He was not penurious; no miser lives "merrily." He was not cruel in the word's accepted meaning. Doré's picture shows servants whipping Lazarus from the door, but that assumption is unwarranted. The fact that a beggar was brought there daily implies that he had been fed. An oriental beggar is shrewd in choosing his "pitch." Dives dispensed the customary charities; he was no more unfeeling than fifty other men in his town. But his love (if such it could be called) was so thin and perfunctory as to be almost an offence. He passed Lazarus several times a day, but he never really *saw* him. He felt no genuine compassion. Rags and ulcers left him unmoved; they were merely part of life's familiar and accepted scenery. Dives went his carefree way, selfish and essentially heartless. Being rich was not his crime; being rich, the story hints, was his opportunity. His crime was worldly self-love.

The second scene in the drama is cast daringly in the next world. Lazarus died. There is no mention of his burial. Per-

to repentance, has more to commend it; but there is no sure ground on which to assert a connection between the parable and the miracle (however the latter is interpreted). Accepting the name as original in the story, it is not necessary to give it character-content, as if it implied saintliness in the beggar. It is more probably intended to point to his helplessness—nobody but God helped him.

³ See Matthew 26: 71.

⁴ The R. V. translates "faring sumptuously" into "living in mirth and splendor every day." "Splendor" is the secondary meaning of *lampros* but it is the probable meaning in this case.

⁵ Some commentators (*e.g.*, Arnot and Hubbard, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*) have assumed that the ministrations of the dogs were an alleviation of the beggar's sufferings, and in contrast with Dives' inhumanity. The likelihood is rather as above suggested. Dogs were regarded as unclean.

⁶ "Crumbs" is possibly an echo of the word in Matthew 15: 27. The accurate translation is "pieces of bread," *i.e.*, which in such a home were used for table napkins.

haps he was left to the mercy of dogs in his death as in his life. But there is mention of angel hands bearing him to unwonted joy. Dives also died. It is expressly written that he was "buried"—doubtless with elaborate ritual and display. But for him there were no ministering angels: "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." It is as if the first scene had been swung on a pivot to reverse the parts. Lazarus is now affluent; he leans on Abraham's bosom at the Celestial Banquet. Dives is now in wretched need; he craves one drop of water at Lazarus' hands. He sees the erstwhile beggar across the gulf which separates his anguish from heaven's radiance, and beseeches Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his woe.

Let it be remembered that the story is a parable. Its symbols are symbols, not literal facts. Jesus took for granted a Hereafter, but did not describe it. He gave no instruction in the flora and fauna, the history and geography, of the land beyond death. We must be faithful to our ignorance and to His reticence. Such descriptions of heaven as are offered in the name of spiritualism impress healthy minds as being but second-rate projections of this world to make another world of dreary sameness. It is doubtful if we have faculties to understand a true portrayal of the realm that lies beyond "our bourne of Time and Place." Did not Jesus say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"?⁷ That which is pre-natal cannot comprehend the wonders of our natal earth. A man born deaf is dead to the music of the Fifth Symphony. A man born blind cannot conceive the miracle of sunset. So our dull mortal ears are ill-attuned to celestial harmonies; our dust-filled eyes see spiritual realities only "as trees walking." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."⁸ Jesus spoke in symbols. "Abraham's bosom" was the customary phrase for the bliss of heaven. "Hades"⁹ means in this story a place of punishment.

⁷ John 16: 12.

⁸ I Corinthians 2: 9 (A.V.)

⁹ "Hades" generally corresponds to the "Sheol" of the Old Testament. The R. V. rightly changes "hell" (A.V.) to "Hades." "Sheol" is the shadowy realm of the dead. Good and bad are there without distinction or separation incident on judg-

It appears to be synonymous with "Gehenna," "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."¹⁰ Jesus added nothing to conventional Jewish imagery; except in the instance of the "gulf,"¹¹ which is a somewhat significant change. To use this story as warrant for a doctrine of a brimstone hell, or to deduce from it the dogma of the absolute and irrevocable separation of the good and the bad hereafter, is to transplant it violently from its native soil of parable to a barren literalism where it cannot live.

Nevertheless, symbols are the flung shadows of realities. Men do not picture a hell of endless burning except they have known in experience a torment without respite. Nor do men picture a heaven of jasper walls and golden streets except they have known in experience an unspeakable joy. Any one who, quenching the pride of self, has given even a "cup of cold water" to a child has found an inner heaven more radiant far than any heaven of jewelled gates. Let all symbols be swept away; the realities remain, and will promptly fashion new symbols.

"I sent my soul through the Invisible
Some letter of that After-life to spell;
And by and by my soul returned to me,
And answered, 'I Myself am Heaven and Hell,'

"Heaven but the Vision of fulfilled Desire
And Hell the shadow of a Soul on fire
Cast on the Darkness into which ourselves
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire."¹²

ment. The good, it would seem, are worse off, having exchanged light for shadow (see Ecclesiastes 9: 10); while the bad are better off, being relieved of the pains of transgression (see Job 3: 16-19). But "Hades" in this parable has a meaning which involves the idea of punishment. Dr. Plummer maintains ("I.C.C.," p. 394) that the word means "Sheol" in the original sense (cf. Genesis 37: 35, Job 14: 14): "Dives lifts up his eyes, not to look for help, but to learn the nature of his changed condition." But Dr. Grieve is surely nearer the true interpretation when he says (Peake's Commentary, p. 736) that the word "Hades" is here "equivalent to Gehenna, not simply a place of shades, but of torment, which is emphasized by Paradise being within sight." The context of the story and its deliberate staging of contrasts require this latter interpretation.

¹⁰ "Gehenna" is also a Jewish symbol. See Mark 9: 48. Gehenna was the Vale of Hinnom, on the southeast of Jerusalem, and was regarded as accursed because it was the scene of the sacrifice of the children to Moloch—the worse excesses of idolatry. It was used for the refuse and garbage of the city. There worms consumed dead matter and the fires were kept burning.

¹¹ The Rabbis taught that heaven and hell were separated only by "a wall," or a "palm-breadth." See Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

¹² Omar Khayyám, "The Rubáiyát," translated by Edward Fitzgerald.

There are piercing realities behind the symbols of this parable. Self-consciousness remained in that Hereafter both for the Rich Man and Lazarus. Memory remained—and for Dives it was a flame. Recognition remained; they knew each other across the "gulf." Moral decision remained with its alternatives of selfishness and love. Heaven was not a realm of automatic goodness or untroubled peace for Lazarus; the plea of Dives was his problem. Nor was Hades a realm of automatic evil or relinquished responsibility for Dives; confronted by his earthly record, he tried to condone it. Self-consciousness (without which we cease to be human), memory (without which we have only the shreds and semblance of personality), mutual recognition ("Shall we be greater fools in paradise than we are here?" asks George Macdonald), and moral decision between selfishness and love (that power of choice which is the core of character)—these remained. They are the realities behind the trappings of the story, as they are the realities of life.

The drama, thus far consisting of two strangely contrasted tableaux, suddenly breaks into speech: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame." Lazarus now becomes a minor character in the play. Even in the first scene he is hardly more than a pitiable foil of Dives' self-love, a living symbol of Dives' opportunity.¹³ We must assume his piety, for he was carried to Abraham's bosom. The point at issue, however, is not his piety, but his need. Dives could not have condoned his heartlessness by saying of Lazarus, "I did not know he was a good man." The court within himself would have replied at once: "Yes, but you knew he was ragged and diseased; and you knew you had power to clothe and comfort him." So Lazarus retires from the foreground of the scene while Abraham, whose rôle is that of heaven's advocate, makes answer to the plea of Dives:

¹³ Bruce says pertinently, *op. cit.*, p. 390, "In real life men go to heaven because they are good; in parables they may go there because the motive of the story requires them to be there. . . . Lazarus has to perform two rôles with conflicting qualifications. On earth he represents the objects of compassion, who are the miserable, saintly, or otherwise; in heaven he represents the friends who receive the benevolent into the eternal tents, who could not themselves be there unless they had been saintly as well as poor."

"Child,"¹⁴ (the voice is gentle, but inexorable), "remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things." The emphasis is on the pronoun—"thy good things." Fine apparel, soft divans, and merry feasting had been his "good things." How blind he had been to what was really "good"! All his days he had grasped at shadows. Now he could have said of his "good things" as Jacob Marley, speaking from the shades of death, said remorsefully of the business-profits which had absorbed him:

"Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business."¹⁵

Dives had turned his light to darkness. Instinctively he had known that "charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence" were the best of earth's "good things," but he had chosen to live an ingrowing life. Lazarus had been laid daily at his gate—a beggar on whom "evil things" had come; not because he had chosen them, not because they were "his," but because tragic circumstances had thrust on him rags, ulcers, and gnawing hunger. The sight of Lazarus at his gate had quickened a heaven of pity within his breast, but that heaven had perished under the blight of self-love.

"And in all these things,"¹⁶ Abraham continues (his voice a voice of eternal verities), "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed." Who had dug that gulf? It was of Dives' own digging. Lazarus was his brother man, but he had denied their brotherhood. Lazarus had come through the same mysterious gateway of human birth, into the same adventure of mortal life

¹⁴ Brouwer, quoted by Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 392, footnote, contrasts the mild terms of this reply with the harsh language used in similar settings in the Talmudic parables. The rigor of Jesus lives on the edge of gentleness.

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, "The Christmas Carol."

¹⁶ This is a much better translation than, "And besides all this." The gulf was not merely an additional reason why the request of Dives could not be granted; it was the reason. Some commentators argue that the parable originally ended at v. 25, the remainder being an addition by the early church. There is no final evidence to prove or disprove the view. The story seems, however, to be self-consistent and the teaching of the later sentences is harmonious with the strong message of Jesus.

—but he would not own him kin. They were one in human joy and human woe, but Dives forsook the blood-bond. He drove the wedge of selfishness between them. As selfishness hardened into habit, and habit hardened into fixed character, the wedge was driven ever deeper to form a "great gulf." The sin of Dives was not his wealth. Was not Abraham himself a rich man? His sin was that he had quenched compassion. For the sake of his "good things," he had cut himself off from the common brotherhood of man as by a chasm. Chasms of ingrained character are not easily bridged. Dives had driven a cleavage wide and deep—"that they that would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us."¹⁷

The story offers no support to the glib assumption that Dives would have fulfilled all duty had he dressed Lazarus' sores and fed his hunger. True charity is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not spasmodic or superficial. Ameliorations such as food and medicine are necessary, but there is a more fundamental neighborliness, "These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone."¹⁸ Compassion will play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. Soon compassion will learn to look un-easily on our glaring contrasts of poverty and wealth. Soon it will lay hands of imperious love on industry and say: "This is not altogether kind. This monotony of machine labor (which a changing world almost of itself has brought upon us) is not kind. The aloofness between employers and employees is not kind. The threat of unemployment hanging over those who have nothing but mind and body to invest is not kind." Compassion will lay hands on the world-order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not kind. This business of choking men with poison-gas, of pumping propaganda of

¹⁷ The symbol must not be press-ganged into the dogma of irrevocable joy and irrevocable doom hereafter. To make the story a brief for that dogma is one of many mistaken interpretations. Some commentators have allegorized the parable—Lazarus represents the ill-used Jewish nation; Dives and his five brothers are the Herods (though sons and grandsons become "brothers" for the nonce to satisfy the allegory). Trench, *op. cit.*, p. 475 *seq.*, following Augustine and Gregory, makes Dives the symbol of the Jews and Lazarus is the despised Gentile world. Strauss assumed that riches were the rich man's only crime, and felt that the parable was not fully just. It is hoped that the interpretation suggested here will approve itself as reasonable. Bruce's chapter on this story is excellent.

¹⁸ Matthew 23: 23.

hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of darkening a million homes in one campaign, cannot be reconciled with the dictates of love." The Good Samaritan's work only begins on the Jericho road. Soon he is seen molding a recalcitrant planet with bruised hands until he has fashioned it into a brotherhood. And—always his greatest "charity" is the outgoing of his own spirit!

The plea of Dives for his brothers—"lest they also come to this place of torment"—is not so much an ebbing of selfishness as an attempt to justify selfishness. He implies that his brothers were living under a handicap: they had not been properly warned. He implies that he himself had not had his full opportunity; if he had been admonished, he would not have walked in the way of self-love. But the answer of Abraham has the accent of plain truth: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." But Dives protests that the witness of the past is not enough for the saving of men. God has laid on humanity burdens of faith grievous to be borne. Meanwhile the guarantee of human peace is in His hands, if He will but use it! "Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent." But the answer comes with finality: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead."

But—we wonder! Dives' device for our salvation half wins our approval. If only a thin veil divides our world from the next, why are we kept in ignorance of the very existence of that other country? Why does not God rend the veil, and end the agony of our unknowing? Such an ambassador from Eternity would surely conquer our waywardness. Suppose he said to us, "There is no River of Lethe in the After-life; memory abides, a living torment. I have seen the wicked in pains and anguish; I have seen the just receive their radiant reward"; we would straightway turn from darkness to the works of light!

But—would we turn? If one should "rise from the dead," would we take him at his word? We might ask for his credentials; and what credentials could he give except the credentials of good character? Already Moses and the prophets have

that warranty! Would we believe our eyes and ears, if one re-crossed the dark river?

"If any vision should reveal
Thy likeness, I might count it vain
As but the canker of the brain;
Yea, tho' it spake and made appeal

"To chances where our lot was cast
Together in the days behind,
I might but say, I hear a wind
Of memory murmuring the past."¹⁹

Moreover, even such a living sign would soon become commonplace; then we would demand a greater sign. If God plucked a star from the sky at our behest, or removed a mountain suddenly into the sea, or halted the sun in its orbit, these wonders would soon pall. Then a new and more stupendous miracle would be required to validate past miracles. Each new doubt would cry out for a greater marvel, until life would be diseased by overweening curiosity and victimized by prodigies of sensationalism. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign."²⁰

An emissary from the shades of death might arouse our gaping wonder—but conscience lies deeper than the eyes. He might fill us with sharp fear—but the fear would pass, and fear has scant power to change the fiber of our motives. A moral change demands a moral instrument. Only deep can call to deep. Only love can quicken love; and love is its own best evidence. The proof of an inner conviction is not an outer marvel, but the courage to trust God and obey! When love accepts its Calvary and dies, the just for the unjust, it has shot its last bolt. Golgotha is the ultimate resource; if that entreaty fails, nothing but flame and torment can bring the soul back to reality.

So Jesus told a story on the trite and faded theme of the Rich Man and the Beggar, but the story is not trite; it burns with the white light of truth. He leaves us with the picture of

¹⁹ Tennyson, "In Memoriam," Canto XCI, aptly quoted by Marcus Dods in his study of this parable
²⁰ Matthew 16: 4.

a yawning gulf—the immemorial gulf which selfishness drives between a man and his neighbor. Does the fixed and lifelong habit of selfishness leave a man any power or inclination to repent? Can God's love "to the uttermost" bridge that chasm? We do not know. The curtain has fallen on the drama.