

## CHAPTER XIV

### *The Marks of Discipleship (VII)*

#### TRUE NEIGHBORLINESS

##### THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, 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. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Jesus made answer and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him; and on the morrow he took out two shillings, and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

(Luke 10: 25-37)

## CHAPTER XIV

#### TRUE NEIGHBORLINESS

##### *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*

This story begins in a theological controversy and ends in a description of "first aid" at a roadside. It arises in a question of eternal life and works out to a payment for room and board at a hotel.

The question was asked by an expert in the Jewish law: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>1</sup> It was not a captious inquiry. The scribe was not laying a trap; rather he was putting the new Teacher to the test. Perhaps he hoped that Jesus would recommend certain fasts and sacrifices—"what must I *do* . . . ?" Perhaps in self-confidence he was taking up the cudgels of debate. It was disconcerting to have Jesus reply, "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"<sup>2</sup> as if to say, "The law is *your* profession. You ought to know." But he rallied from the retort and recited smoothly: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself." Then came the conclusive word: "Continually do that, and you *shall* live."

The scribe was placed in a poor light. He appeared to have asked a needless question, whose sufficient answer was the best-known pronouncement of the law in which he was an expert.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "eternal life" was in use prior to Christian times and can be found in apocalyptic writings. In the Synoptics it is conceived as a possession to be claimed after death; to be "inherited." In the fourth gospel and notably in the Johannine Epistles it is described as the veritable life which a man may enter in this present world. See I John 3: 14.

<sup>2</sup> It is conjecture to suppose that Jesus pointed to the scribe's philactery as He answered Him. The philactery would probably not contain the second part of the "great commandment." The first part was preeminent in Jewish law; the second was originally lost among a ruck of trivial rules, though later given higher standing. See Deuteronomy 6: 5 and Leviticus 19: 18.

<sup>3</sup> It is natural that the scribe of this incident should have been identified with the scribe reported in Matthew 22: 34 *seq.*, and Mark 12: 28 *seq.*, where Jesus is represented as reciting the law in answer to the scribe's question, and where the scribe does not ask the second question, "Who is my neighbor?" These scriptures both hint plainly that the original questioning was asked in an insidious motive. Arnot, following Stier, protests that Luke's "scribe" is therefore not to be identi-

A sorry end to a promising debate! He must absolve himself in the eyes of the bystanders. He must show Jesus that he was not without discernment. Jesus' reply, as he would demonstrate, was far from conclusive. So, "desiring to justify himself," he said, "And who is my neighbor?"

It was a clever thrust, for it impaled Jesus on one of the sharpest questions of His age. The Jew did not regard a Gentile as a neighbor. Even if he slew the stranger within his nation's gates the Sanhedrin (so one writer asserts)<sup>4</sup> did not condemn the slayer to death. The law forbade a Jew to lift up his hand against his neighbor, but a "stranger" was not a neighbor. The Greeks held the "barbarian" in similar contempt; they denied the title "neighbor" even to the horde of Greek slaves (human goods and chattels) on which the City States were built. The glory of Greece, which we rightly acclaim, was built on a foundation of human servitude, which we wrongly ignore. How would Jesus define a neighbor? Was a Samaritan a neighbor?—was a publican?—or a sinner? Where did the line run? Jesus had shown, strangely enough, a friendship for outcasts: how would He define a "neighbor"?

So Jesus defined a neighbor in a story which age after age lays its constraint on the conscience of mankind. He lifted the question out of the atmosphere of controversy, since in that atmosphere real questions can never be settled, and set it down—where? He set it down on a dangerous road in Palestine!

"A certain man" (name and nationality not cited!) "went down from Jerusalem to Jericho." Jerusalem was some two thousand feet above sea level and Jericho over one thousand feet below it. The twenty miles between the cities wound through mountainous country, whose limestone caves offered ambush for brigand bands, and whose sudden turns exposed the traveller to unforeseen attack.<sup>5</sup> The road became known as the "Bloody Pass." Many among Jesus' hearers had trav-

elled with the "scribe" of Matthew and Mark. No final solution of the problem seems possible. The original question was basic and may easily have been asked of Jesus more than once. If Luke has taken the incident as related in Mark and attached the parable to it, the arrangement has the appropriateness of a living record.

<sup>4</sup> See "I.C.C.," *ad. loc.*

<sup>5</sup> See "I.C.C.," *ad. loc.*, for further facts about the red history and evil name of this particular strip of road. Perhaps Jesus was on the road when the story was told, for Bethany was located between the two cities.

elled it. They listened and saw the "certain man" stripped, beaten, and left half dead. Soon the scribe's wordy quibble was forgotten in the rough and bleeding facts. . . .

"And by coincidence a certain priest." The "coincidence" was in the parable, not in the purpose of the Teacher! *He* was moving with unerring intuition, dissecting with sure fingers the motives of men. The priest was a fellow Jew and withal a pillar of the Temple. By birth and by sacred calling he was a "neighbor" to the robbed and wounded man, but he left him to his fate. "And in like manner a Levite"<sup>6</sup> . . . a door-keeper in the house of God, a member of the hereditary order from which were chosen the singers in the Temple choirs—a "neighbor" to the life! Yet he passed by on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan . . ." He was a half-breed, of a race which the Jews counted religiously in disrepute and with which they had "no dealings." But "when he saw him, he was moved with compassion."<sup>7</sup>

In print the conduct of the priest and Levite seems monstrous, but in the print of our own experience it assumes a different color. Can we be sure that we would never play their part? Perhaps they were "too busy" with other good works. Perhaps they shrank, as we naturally do, from "getting mixed up" in such a case. Moreover, it was better to cure injustice at the source; better, even if one man's wounds went unintended, to lend voice and influence to secure strong military protection

<sup>6</sup> See Dr. Baudissin's exhaustive article on Priests and Levites in Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible."

<sup>7</sup> It is generally believed that the Samaritans became a mixed race, after the overthrow of the "northern kingdom," by the intermarriage of the unexiled "poor" Israelites with the conquering Assyrians. Their religious offence was that they used only the Pentateuch as their Bible (thus denying canonicity to the other parts of the Old Testament), and Mount Gerizim (not the Temple) as the center of their religious zeal. See John 4: 20-21. Halévy (Peake's Commentary, *ad. loc.*) thinks the characters in the original story were Priest, Levite, and Israelite—a frequent grouping. He suggests that a Samaritan would be an unlikely traveller on the Jericho road, and that Luke, through his Gentile sympathies, is responsible for the "Samaritan." There is some show of reason to this conjecture, but it can be urged in rebuttal that the contrast of Jew and Gentile to the disparagement of the former is not unusual in the teaching of Jesus. See Matthew 11: 23, Luke 4: 25-27, Matthew 8: 10. The frequency of a grouping of characters is insufficient ground on which to question the authenticity of the story as Luke records it. In either event the message of the story remains intact. As Dr. Montefiore has written: "The Samaritan is in the parable now and the world will not easily let him go." Arnot, *op. cit.*, p. 351, footnote, warns us that not all priests and Levites were hard-hearted, nor all Samaritans generous. Some of the priests were not unfavorable to the Christian cause. Acts 4 is interesting in this connection. Jesus was teaching by a dramatic story a universal truth and was not launching a sweeping indictment against a race or a class.

thereafter along so dangerous a road. Besides, how were they to know that the man was not himself a brigand, some victim of a robbers' wretched feud? Wise men steer clear of vendettas. There were a hundred good excuses for their callousness. If it was monstrous for them to quench the sudden uprising of sympathy, the monstrous mood is very commonplace. Our diffused compassions are not often brought to the focus of actual help in an actual need. We herald the dawn of a new earth more easily than we lend our fingers to binding up present and particular wounds. Our distributed sympathies have the same sinister effect as our distributed conscience; as responsibility is spread over the crowd the sense of personal obligation grows faint. The priest and Levite felt cowardly on the first few occasions of their "passing by," then cowardice became indifference, until finally they deemed wounds and poverty an intrusion. The lament is not out of date:

"Alas! for the rarity  
Of Christian charity  
Under the sun."<sup>8</sup>

"And who is my neighbor?" To ask the question is a condemnation. True neighborliness is not curious to know where its boundaries run; it cares as little for boundaries as sun and rain care for the contour lines upon our maps.<sup>9</sup> It seeks not for limits, but for opportunities.

"Who is my neighbor?" Nearness does not make neighborliness. The priest and Levite were near both by race and by office, and the Samaritan by race and office was remote. People may live divided only by a narrow wall, and yet not be neighbors. People may live with no intervening wall, and yet not be neighbors. Only the eyes and the spirit of the Samaritan make neighborliness.

"Who is my neighbor?" "I do not know," Jesus retorts; "but life will reveal him to you. He is not of one class or nation. He is anybody—in need! You will find him as you journey. You will come upon him 'by chance.' He is not of this or that religious allegiance, he is not a 'sinner' or a 'saint,'

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hood, "The Bridge of Sighs."

<sup>9</sup> Both G. H. Hubbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 428, 429, and Marcus Dods, *op. cit.*, p. 260, have admirably expressed this implied teaching of the parable.

he is not brutish or refined. He is 'a certain man'—any man needy at your roadside." Thus Jesus replies not in a definition but by an instance. He gave us "truth embodied in a tale."

The neighbor had *insight of sympathy*. He was the only man travelling the Jericho road who really saw the victim of the robbers. The priest and the Levite saw a bruised and bleeding body, a vexatious interruption of the customary day, but they did not see a man made in their own likeness. Rarely do we see people; rarely do we wish to see. We are content to look upon the sheaths we wrap around them to excuse our ignorance or selfishness. We say, "He is an American," a "Japanese," a "negro"; it is astonishing how the "national" sheath can save our sympathies. We label him "catholic" or "protestant," the creedal sheath being more opaque even than the national. Rarely does our sight pierce beyond the accidents of wealth or poverty. Rarely do we discover a *human*, gifted with our meed of longing, broken by our wreck of grief. Perhaps we should allow merit of eyesight only to those who see in others the immemorial human realities—joy and pain, shame and longing, terror and hope. Max Mueller has written that to the Greek every foreigner was a "barbarian"; to the Jew, every stranger was a "gentile dog"; and to the Mahometan every alien was an "infidel." Then Jesus came, and erased these contemning titles from the dictionaries of mankind, and wrote in their stead, "brother." The stricken man was brother to the Samaritan because the stricken man also was human. It is required of a neighbor that he shall pull aside the sheaths long enough to see "a certain man."

The model neighbor rendered a *personal service*. It would have been easier to be compassionate by proxy—to have phoned the hospital and despatched an ambulance. But *he* bound up the wounds with his own hands. *He* himself poured in oil and wine. *He* placed the unfortunate on *his own* beast. He might have paid toll to the customary charities and held himself aloof. He might have sat on the committee and directed relief from afar. But in giving help he gave himself.

Philanthropy must be organized. Indiscriminate compassion quickly becomes a curse. Unguided pity like unguided water stagnates into a malarial swamp. Charity needs channels. The

State has its duty of neighborliness—a recognized duty as many state institutions prove. There are governments which have established old-age pensions so that the poor may receive at the end of their years, not a dole, but deferred wages from the commonwealth. All this is proper and commendable; Jesus organized His own disciples into itinerant bands. But the wellspring of neighborliness (as of everything that is human) is personality in the strictest sense of the word—the spirit of the individual! Not all the channels ever cut can atone for the freezing of that wellspring! Love radiates only as life touches life. The coin must be held in understanding fingers or it cannot transmit blessing. The committee must be instinct with compassion constantly expressed or it will be a “clanging cymbal.” A card-index easily becomes a non-conductor. “If I give all my goods to feed the poor and have not love, it profiteth me nothing”—and it profits the poor hardly more! “I may hire a man to do some work, but I can never hire a man to do my work,” said Dwight L. Moody.<sup>10</sup> A check may buy bread, but if the check is not written in the genuine ink of sympathy the bread which it buys will soon turn to ashes. Thus social problems move to a bitter climax just because each man fails to act the neighbor on his own roadside. Life holds us to no forfeit for our failure to realize the sorrows of the race. That failure is universal and only Jesus is without blame. Two hundred people die each day in greater New York, and it is not within the spirit of common man to carry in sympathetic realization the piled-up blackness of that woe—any more than to carry the piled-up brightness of commensurate joy. That burden life does not lay upon us. But life does demand that we choose our road through life (noble men choose a Jericho road) and act the neighbor to those who fall at our roadside.

The model neighbor rendered a *thorough service*.<sup>11</sup> Beginning to help, he “saw it through.” Of spasmodic and inadequate relief it has been wittily said that it creates one-half of the misery it relieves, but cannot relieve one-half the misery it creates. But the Samaritan’s love was painstaking and complete. He made himself responsible even for the prolongation

<sup>10</sup> W. R. Moody, “The Life of Dwight L. Moody,” p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> G. H. Hubbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 426, 427, has clearly itemized it.

of help beyond the limits of probable need. “Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back, will repay thee.” Such love is costly. His beast was wearied and his saddle stained with blood; property rights surrendered at the demands of love. His journey was broken and his business errand hindered; profits capitulated to human need. The Samaritan suffered, but he counted the suffering all joy. . . .

Therefore his service was thorough in a manner which the story does not straightway reveal. He bound up wounds of the spirit as he bound up wounds of the body. He poured in the wine of love as he poured in wine from a humbler flask. He gave rest to a broken spirit as he gave rest to the broken flesh. Bestowing charity, he bestowed “God, Freedom, Immortality,” because he acted from the impulse of a Godlike, free, and immortal soul. Altruism is merely fragmentary—a morsel which but accentuates the hunger—if it fails to provide (through the spirit of the giver) that meat “which the world knows not of.”

To be a neighbor with a thorough zeal answers both for “him that gives and him that takes” the deeper question: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The inheritance is ours already; it is the impulse to be neighborly. We realize the inheritance when the impulse is translated into the better language of deeds.<sup>12</sup> The spirit of the Samaritan does not come “by chance.” It is the bestowment of God—His best gift to us. Though neighborliness may be suddenly proved (being invoked by crises as we journey), it is not suddenly grown. Heroism in the crucial test has its source in that habitual readiness to the heroic, that courageous bent of soul, which is induced by minor braveries day after day. Only so does neighborliness become instinctive. Such a quality and “set” of character *is* eternal life; the God-given heritage has been realized.

Nor is the Samaritan spirit to be conceived merely as humaneness or as a substitute for religion. In truth religion in its outworking *is* neighborliness, and neighborliness in its final implications *is* religion. A religion which “passes by on the

<sup>12</sup> The Greek reveals the emphasis which Jesus placed on His closing question: “Which of them *proved* neighbor?” and also the emphasis of the answer: “He who *did* mercy.”

other side" is a mummery, not a faith. But let no man say, on the warrant of this parable, "Kindness is enough." Let him remember rather that Jesus fashioned the parable from the fibre of His own spirit; that Jesus died as a Good Samaritan at the world's dark roadside; and that the fountain-head of the motive of Jesus is found only in that mystic depth from which He said: "I and My Father are one."

"In Paradise," says Fiona MacLeod,<sup>13</sup> "there are no tears shed, though in the remotest part of it there is a grey pool, the weeping of all the world, fed everlastingly by the myriad eyes that every moment are somewhere wet with sorrow . . . or vain regret. And those who go there stoop and touch their eyelids with that grey water, and it is as balm to them, and they go healed of their too great joy; and their songs thereafter are the sweetest that are sung in the ways of Paradise." The Samaritan bathed his eyes in the "grey water" until the spirit sang within him. That singing spirit *is* eternal life.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Alexander Smellie in his introduction to the "Journal of John Woolman."