

THE WALLS OF JERICO

MARY I. MESECHRE

THE Scriptures narrate many incidents analogous to our experiences in the journey from sense to Soul, and often are heavy burdens lifted, countless problems rendered less obscure by even a slight understanding of the lessons learned by the earnest student. The writer has recently been greatly helped by the account of the children of Israel before Jericho, and has noted some of the lessons drawn, hoping to aid others thereby. All are familiar with the story,—how at the moment of entrance to the land of promise their former leader, Moses, passed from them, and further progress was commanded under a new and untried leader, Joshua; how at the outset the formidable walls of Jericho confronted them, and they were bidden to its conquest; how each further step was divinely and definitely directed, and unfaltering obedience was accorded; and finally, how the complete overthrow of the city followed the claim of victory and praise for its accomplishment.

Every student of Christian Science duplicates the experiences of the children of Israel. All of us have our period of wilderness wandering, our glimpse of the eternal law of God, our timid drawing back from offered opportunity to "possess the land," our unwise attempts to force our way into the land of promise; at some stage of our journey we rely more or less completely upon some human leader,—friend, practitioner, or teacher,—until by divine authority such a sense of dependence is withdrawn and we go forward, fearing and trembling lest our own untried understanding of divine Principle fail us. Even the marvelous demonstration at the brink of Jordan, where the waters, touched by the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant, receded and all went over dry shod (which is repeated whenever the pure understanding of God's presence touches the waves of mortal mind and rolls them back harmless before the onward march of Truth) did not, nor does it now, always seem to afford sufficient proof of God's omnipresence and omnipotence before the frowning battlements of Jericho. In their admitted helplessness the children of Israel looked to Joshua for advice

and succor, and our divinely appointed Leader has counseled us that our first resource should be reliance upon divine Principle.

How often at the outset of our following, when we have for the first time acknowledged divine Principle as our sole guide, does a test come to us such as came long ago to Israel. Let us see how sturdily the problem was faced. The story tells us they were encamped in the plains of Jericho, evidently in full view of the city, and we learn that this encampment was maintained and strict order and system were observed during all the period of waiting for the city to surrender. Often when a problem confronts us, if it be one of such seeming magnitude as to require the exercise of continued patience, and more especially one which is constantly presented to our thought, do we yield to temptation, become impatient and confused, and thus break camp, forsaking the orderly marshaling of our thoughts and depriving ourselves of that repose and restful confidence which betokens full trust in divine guidance. Not to be routed by the appearance of error, but to know that God is the only real power, that He will disclose His power in outward manifestation at the right moment and in the proper manner, is to ally one's self with Him in imperishable covenant, and to render constantly available that "operation of God" which recognizes no obstacle to progress and admits no impediment to success.

This divine order not only maintained the camp, but indicated every step necessary to the conquest of Jericho. Daily were they to march once about the city,—the armed men first, then the priests with trumpets, bearing the ark of the Lord, followed by all the people. The real leader of the hosts was God, the ark was His visible sign; therefore in the line of march all attention centered upon the symbol of the divine presence, the priestly trumpets were continually sounded, and no other utterance was permitted. The armed men who preceded the ark were thus constituted its vanguard instead of a force arrayed against an enemy. Absolutely no attempt was made to approach the city, to enter its gates, or to scale its ramparts. The sole requirement was that all the people, in an appointed order, should once daily march about the city, and should then return into camp and lodge there.

Our problem is to be approached in the same way. The

foe may appear gigantic and formidable, the stronghold quite impregnable, but no matter how hopeless of solution the difficulty may seem, we can once daily compass it with the sign of God's presence. Centering all our thoughts upon God,—placing as the leader of our mental hosts our highest concept of Him, giving alone to our purest thoughts the power of utterance and the privilege of close attendance upon this leader and making all else in our mentality subordinate thereto, the armed or prepared thought (an active, confident, and obedient mental attitude) constituting the **vanguard**, and all else the **rereward**, we shall compass **unhesitatingly** every difficulty that would hinder our advance into the land of promise, thereby "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

This daily journey was brief, since on the seventh day it was seven times repeated, but with each issuing forth of the hosts the same absolute adherence to the appointed order was observed. No opportunity for obedience is ever so insignificant as to excuse the slightest deviation from God's law, and we need be on guard constantly that all our thoughts be included in this daily march, that there be no loiterers, that no one stray heedlessly away or remain idly in the camp. Our earnest desire must not be permitted to become belligerent, and so rush forth alone as an armed force, but it must serve as guard to our pure thoughts, which herald our highest concept of God, the true leader of our hosts. And finally, when the prescribed daily duty is completed, we are to return into camp and lodge there. No time is to be spent in watching Jericho for possible breaches in its walls, no scouting nor parleying is permissible, and above all, the enemy is not to be invited into the camp through constant thinking or talking of evil as present or powerful, since to him that "ordereth his conversation aright" will be shown the salvation of God in the complete destruction of every foe.

Six days this order to compass the walls was to be observed. Repetition of actions or words sometimes grows a trifle irksome; it is tiresome and monotonous to go over the same ground again and again; we are apt to feel indifferent, and our work is done mechanically. We long for a change, we want to digress a little from the appointed way, to miss

a day now and then, to take a different direction or a more roundabout walk or a shorter path. But when we acknowledge God as leader we are in honor bound to do His bidding, and His method of procedure never changes, for although He knoweth "the end from the beginning," with Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." This daily march is part of the discipline meted out to each true child of God, and loving obedience murmurs not against the Father's will.

Again, we are prone to fret at what seems to savor of inactivity, to lament the time spent in camp, to rebel against enjoined silence, forgetful that, as Isaiah says, "in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." No wise general keeps his men on the march continually; he sees that they have proper rest and are supplied with the best food and shelter procurable, thus conserving their strength and energy that it may be available and reliable in time of need. Why can we not see that fretfulness and worry and criticism and rebellion but deplete our strength and render us less able to face our problems, besides being positive contradictions of God's omnipotence and ever-presence? Quite as disobedient is it to go into camp and then keep darting out every little while to survey anxiously the walls of Jericho; this is merely doubt in another guise. The order that we go into camp provides also that we lodge there, in full trust not only that God will lead us forth at the right moment, but that He will supply all things needful during the waiting time.

Quite as important is it to be alert and watchful that we be not taken by a more subtle temptation. When for a time we seem limited to a certain amount of work, the daily march, we sometimes feel disinclined to do more, and are even aggrieved when further effort is demanded, and this especially if we have grown to prize the sense of ease to which a quiet sojourn in camp has accustomed us. This, however, is requisite to the completion of our conquest, and every sacrifice must be made; all ideas of the work we can and should do, often based entirely upon what we have done or want to do, must be discarded, and we must acknowledge and accept gladly and readily every increased demand upon us, though it require that we rise "early about the dawning of the day," for this seventh day is to witness the overthrow of Jericho.

But this increase in work in no wise renders implicit obedience less imperative; we are still but followers, though we may need to watch carefully lest a sense of self-importance tempt us to assume leadership and thus involve the entire host in confusion. In the appointed order, for seven successive times, are we this day to march about the city. No laggard thoughts of weariness or monotony must be allowed to disaffect the hosts; none must be permitted to glance longingly toward the deserted camp and so lose step in the ranks; there must be no hurrying to get the march over quickly, for "he that believeth shall not make haste;" but with every thought steadfastly directed toward the covenant sign—the highest concept of God—press forward until all have compassed the walls full seven times; then, as with one voice, praise God! Only fear and doubt are silent in the face of promised victory, and these belong not to the Lord's hosts; so each thought shall utter praise, because is seen "the salvation of the Lord which he will show to you to day."

When the children of Israel had compassed the walls of Jericho for the seventh time on the seventh day, they saw no change. The walls still stood. Their seven days' marching seemed all to no purpose. Not until was heard their united shout of praise to God because He had given them the city, did unmistakable evidence of victory appear,—“the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.” There was no looking around to find the easiest place to get into the city, no curiosity about what some one else was doing; each was so intent upon his own share in that wonderful accomplishment that no time was left for anything but going “straight before him;” there was no interference with another's duty, no neglect of one's own, “and they took the city.”

What then completed the downfall of Jericho? Not alone the daily march for six days, nor the seven-times-repeated compass of the walls on the seventh day; not the quiet sojourn in camp nor the daily issuing forth, nor yet the early rising on the seventh morning; not the silence of the people during the march, nor the continual trumpeting of the priests. All these served to train the people in such habits of obedience that when they were bidden to shout, for the Lord had given them the city, such was their confidence in

God that they unhesitatingly praised Him for victory, despite all appearance to the contrary. It was the spirit of obedience which entered into all their doings, and which stimulated this sustained note of praise and thanksgiving that effected the overthrow of Jericho. All else would have availed nothing, lacking this!

We may face a problem which bars our further progress; we may marshal our warriors, we may robe our priests in pure garments and send them forth with sound of trumpet and bearing the covenant sign to lead our hosts to victory; daily we may march about the city and return to camp, on the seventh day we may rise early and compass the walls seven times, and then—silence. Even the trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound, and we retreat dismayed. The walls stand unscathed; where we hoped for victory we see only defeat. And why? We failed to praise! Not one iota of the divine decree can be disregarded if we are to be victorious, and praise to God is the signal for complete triumph. Only when all the people shouted in accord with the trumpet blast did the walls of Jericho crumble and totter to their fall. Only as we, in utter disregard of all sense testimony, claim victory and voice gratitude therefor, can we receive the full reward for obedience, for not until then is obedience complete. The appearance of the walls was but circumstantial; the evidence of God's word was conclusive, and its acceptance enables us to declare, as did Jesus, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."

One lesson more. When the children of Israel entered Jericho they were commanded to destroy utterly the city, with all its idolatry, and a curse was pronounced upon whomsoever should again build Jericho. There is a tendency when one has seen a signal victory over error, to mark the place and refer to it frequently. The destruction of the error may apparently be practically complete, no least expression may remain, yet from some thought-picture unwittingly retained may arise the ruined walls of Jericho, to seem a barrier even more formidable than when its ramparts first frowned against our entrance to the promised land. In the overcoming of each difficulty the destruction of the error is to be so complete as to cause "all their memory to perish," for "the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day," and as our Leader says (*Science and Health*, p. 276), "real consciousness is cognizant only of the things of God."