

A Ripened Life




By


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FELLOWSHIP OF FAITH FOR THE MOSLEMS.



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“In that day shall there be upon the bridles (mar.) of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD, and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of Hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts” (Zech. xiv. 20, 21).

Above and beyond the literal prophetic interpretation, do not these verses give us a divine picture of the Christian life in its maturity—a ripened life?

Let us take it point by point, and let us pause over each with hearts subdued and listening, that the Holy Ghost may convict us if it is not *our* life.

“In that day there shall be upon the bridles of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.” The horse seems to stand throughout the Old Testament for natural power. In each of us there is one strongest point; it may be brain power, or some faculty, as music for instance, or the power of planning, the power of influence, the power of loving. And, whatever it may

be, that strong point is sure to be a point of temptation, just as their horses were a temptation to Israel.

Trace the history. In spite of God's warning (Deut. xvii. 16), they "multiplied" them (I. Kings iv. 26; x. 28) and "trusted in them" (Isa. xxxi. 1), and by this multiplying, power was put into the hands of their enemies (I. Kings x. 29) which was afterwards turned round upon themselves for their own ruin (Jer. vi. 23; viii. 16). Can we not, some of us, read our own story between the lines? Have we not given play to these faculties, "multiplied" them so to speak, for the sake of the exultant sense of growing power, not for God? Have we not trusted in our horses? In the well worked-out "subject" for instance, rather than in the Spirit's might? Have we not been brought into soul captivity by means of self-indulgence in these faculties, God-created though they are? and therefore most of us, as we go on, find that God's hand comes down on the strongest parts of us as it came upon the horses of Israel (Zech. xii. 4; Hos. i. 7). By outward providence or by inward dealing, He brings it to the place of death, to the place where we lose our hold on it and our trust in it and say with Ephraim, "We will not ride upon horses" (Hos. xiv. 3). And in that place of death God may leave it for months and years till the old glow of life has really died out of it, and the old magical charm has vanished, and it has become no effort to do without it because life's current has gone into the current of God's will.

Then comes the day as in Israel's case before us, when He can give us back our horses, with "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" written on them, bridled with Christ-

restraint. Where are our horses? Are we riding them in their old natural force, or are they lying stiffened and useless in the place of death, or have they been given back to us with their holy bridles? Let our souls answer and say.

“And the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar.” These pots were probably the pots for oil and meal. They had done good service in the Lord’s house, but they were to be promoted now, promoted to the place of sacrifice.

Has our service gone through this promotion? Is there not much of it that is very good and useful in its way but containing no element of sacrifice? Others looking on say, perhaps, “What a self-sacrificing life!” but our hearts tell us that as to the outline, sacrifice has vanished, for the energies of our being have flowed into God’s work and we love it for its own sake; and that the spirit of surrender has not yet penetrated into its details. But what boundless opportunities for this “ripening” lie in those details. When our plans are thwarted, when the time that we had mapped out is frittered away by interruptions, when a cherished bit of work has to be relinquished to another; these things, and such as these, are God’s opportunities for promotion, the promotion of our service into sacrifice; they are the chances for bringing out our pots to stand like the bowls before the altar, holding up to Him the poured-out life-blood. Do our hearts rise to them with an Amen?

"Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and see the therein."

Does not this mean that in a ripened life all the common things of life rise in the scale in like proportion, in their own degree likewise promoted to sacrifice, standing ready that this, God's noblest end, may be fulfilled in them at any moment?

"If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice."

Here is the secret of sanctifying the common things; "Take them," as they stand there ready to your hand, not going out of the way to look for costlier or more obviously sacred vessels, but using silently just the common earthen pots of everyday life and sealing them for God's service by filling them with the spirit of sacrifice. "Yea, every pot," there is the measure of the possibilities that God has set before us, and we use perhaps one or two in a day!

"And there shall be no more the Canaanite (trafficker) in the house of the Lord." Does not this mean that all the spirit of bargaining is to be banished from our lives as they ripen into their fruition? There are many of God's children whose attitude towards Him is much the same as Jacob's. "If the Lord will be with me . . . then shall the Lord be my God." Take in contrast Habakkuk's cry, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom . . . yet will I rejoice in the Lord." Here is a heart from which the trafficking spirit has been banished, for it has found God.

I was talking some months ago to a friend whose path had led in a very definite manner into the way of the Cross. Speaking of the course she was following, she said, "I do this thing for God, not for success in the work, or for happiness in my soul or for anything else, I am here for God." How those words "for God" rang in my heart for weeks after.

Life is grandly simple when we get there. When the spirit of calculating results and consequences, even spiritual results and consequences, has been left among the things that are behind, when obedience is the one thing that matters, when God Himself, and no mere "experience" is our exceeding great reward. Are we there?

"If I have served Thee Lord for hire,
Hire which Thy beauty showed,
Oh, let me serve Thee now for nought
And only as my God." —Faber.

I. L. T.



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