



The

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Collection

Ancient Prophets

Chapter 9 – MUST YOU BE FED WITH A SPOON?

I

I am watching with much interest and some personal profit the development of my grandchildren. They are a luxury to my old heart; but, like all children, they are somewhat of a problem as well as a joy to their parents. At first, when brought to the table, they were fed with a spoon, but one day the spoon was put into their tiny hands and they were permitted to feed themselves. I was fascinated. Plunge would go the spoon into the porridge or apple sauce and come up at various and sundry angles and start on a wobbling journey to the sweet, wee, wide-open mouth. Sometimes it would hit and sometimes it would miss. If it reached the open mouth, well. Its contents were soon lost in the dark 'little red lane' below. But if it missed, or if there were miscalculation as to time, and the mouth closed before the spoon arrived, it was awesome. The little mouth closed on air, and another plunge and wobbling effort was made. The bib and platter were often a fearsome sight, and the small face was often battered and buttered in a way that was a joy to behold, but they were learning. It was the only way they could learn. They could not always be fed with a spoon by others. They must feed themselves, and some day they may have to feed others. But their first lesson is to feed themselves.

Of course, their food is all prepared for them by other hands. But the day will come when they will not only have to feed themselves, but they may have to prepare their own food. But before the food can be prepared, it must be found. The farmer must cultivate the soil and raise wheat and corn. The fisherman must catch the fish. The horticulturist must grow the fruit. The herdsmen must raise the cattle and sheep. And it is just possible that in some far-off day these children must not only feed themselves, and prepare the food, but go out and find the food to prepare and eat; or they may toil for the money with which to buy of those who have labored to produce.



The feeding of men is a complex process, which we may live a lifetime without considering, but which is most instructive and humbling to consider.

II

Can you feed your own soul, or must you still be fed? Do you prepare your own soul-food, or do others prepare it for you? Do you labor for it, or do others give it to you?

'I will guarantee I can send the worst kind of a backslidden Officer to the Corps at W., and in three months the Soldiers will have prayed for him and helped him, and loved him and gotten him so blessed that he will be on fire for God and souls.' So said young Divisional Commander Thomas Estill, as reported to me the other day by an old Officer who knew him in those days of long ago, when we were returning from the graveside of our friend and comrade, the Commissioner. Those Soldiers were no longer spiritual babies that had to be fed with a spoon. No doubt they had vigorous spiritual appetites, and enjoyed a meal of 'strong meat ' prepared for them. But they were no longer dependent. They were independent. They were no longer babes in Christ. They had 'exercised their senses' and become spiritual men and women, able to feed themselves; able to prepare their own food; able to work and forage for themselves and find their own food. And not only so, but they were able to feed others. If their Officers did not give them suitable soul-food, then they fed the Officers. If nobody blessed them, then they rose up in their splendid spiritual manhood and womanhood and blessed somebody else, and so blessed themselves. Like the widow of Sarepta, who divided her poor little handful of meal and her few spoonful of oil with Elijah, and found the meal and oil unwasting through months of famine, so they gave of their spiritual food to more needy souls, and found themselves enriched from God's unfailing supplies.

I know one of the finest Bands in the U.S.A., composed of a splendid group of Soldiers, who for years would not have, and for ought I know to this day, will not have, as Bandsman, one who has



not the Blessing of a Clean Heart. 'We want our Band to be not only a Combination of musical instruments, but also of harmonious hearts. We want to produce melody from our hearts as from our instruments. We cannot have discord in our Band. We must have sweetest harmony.' And so, before a man was admitted as a member of the Band, he must not only give evidence that he could play an instrument, but that he could live peaceably, humbly, lovingly, loyally with his comrades. They were prepared to pray with him and lead him into the blessed experience of Holiness, of perfect love, of purity and power, and then gladly accept him as a comrade in the Band. They could feed themselves and others too. And that Band became a great spiritual influence in that city and famous for a hundred miles around.

One day Paul came to Corinth and found a certain Jew and his wife, Priscilla, and because he was of the same trade he lived with them and worked, for they were tent-makers, just humble, lay people. But they later moved to Ephesus, and then one day, Apollos, an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, came to the city, fervent in spirit and speaking and teaching diligently the things of the Lord. He was a great orator, teacher, and preacher. But this humble tent-maker and his wife had learned more from Paul than Apollos knew, so they invited him home to dinner with them, 'and expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly.' Read the story in Acts xviii. 1, 2, 24-28.

Aquila and Priscilla had learned to feed themselves and others too, even such a man as Apollos, eloquent, burning with zeal and mighty in the Scriptures. They must have had fullness of love and very gracious ways, and a divine tact to approach a great man like that and lead him into fullness of blessing. Oh, for an army of soldiers like that!

III

We found ourselves sitting together after the Meeting on our way to our lodgings. 'I was at the penitent-form,' said he.



'Were you? I missed you and wondered where you were.'

I had seen him sitting down in the audience while the Commissioner poured out his heart in a torrent of searching truth upon the crowd. There was a look on his face that puzzled me. I was not sure whether defiance, cynicism, questioning, indifference, or soul-hunger was revealed in that look. When the Prayer Meeting began every head was bowed, but he sat erect with that puzzling look in his face intensified. People were melting and flowing down to the penitent-form, but still he sat erect, open-eyed, apparently unmoved. I knelt to deal with seekers, and when I looked again he was gone, and not till after the Meeting did I learn that he had been to the penitent-form.

'Yes, I was at the penitent-form. An old Officer came and asked if he could help me, but I told him, "No, I want to be left alone." I was vexed; half angry.'

'Angry! What were you angry about?'

'Well, while I listened to the Commissioner, I wondered, "Why don't our leaders feed us young fellows? They don't have Meetings with us. Why don't they help us?"'

I had up to that time thought of him as a youngster. He belongs to the younger set of Officers. I had known him since he was a small lad, and I had always thought of him as a young man, but when he called himself a 'young fellow' my mind turned a somersault. I looked at him and asked, 'How old are you?'

'Thirty-five.'

'And you have been married thirteen years and have a family of children, the oldest of whom is twelve. You are not a young fellow. You are a middle-aged man. And you want your leaders to feed you. But that is not what you need. You need to feed yourself. Your leaders cannot tell you



anything you do not know. But do you diligently practice what you know? You don't pray enough. You do not search the Scriptures and feed on the Word of God as you should. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Is not that your trouble? Do you deny yourself as you should? Do you search for soul-food in good books? Or do you not spend more time reading the sporting page of the morning and evening papers, than you spend over your Bible and books that would enrich your mind and heart? Are you not starving yourself and waiting for some one to come and feed you, when you should be feeding yourself?

I knew a Field Officer who, when I first met him, was sodden with drink. But within a few days he was saved and sanctified. Shortly after he became an Officer, and then got himself a small, but choice library of the most deeply spiritual books. He would sit up till after midnight reading, praying, and meditating on what he read, until in a short time I marveled at him. His mind was all alert, his soul was on fire and his mental and spiritual equipment was a joy to those who knew him. He labored for spiritual food, and grew in mental and spiritual stature and in favor with God and man. And he was soon able to feed others. Whenever I met him he wanted to talk on spiritual things. His grasp of doctrine, his knowledge of Scripture and the literature of Holiness, and his intimate acquaintance and communion with God delighted and refreshed me. He was an ordinary country boy, but he became extraordinary by the diligence with which he sought fellowship with God, and the eagerness with which he hunted for truth from books and from experienced comrades, and the loving zeal with which he sought to impart the truth to other souls about him. Officers should feed their Soldiers; Commissioners and Divisional Commanders should feed their Officers. But both Officers and Soldiers should learn to find spiritual food and to feed themselves.

'Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared,' said wise old Nehemiah (Nehemiah viii. 10).



Learn to feed yourself, and not only so, but to share your soul-food with yet needier souls, and so you shall know no soul-famine, but be 'fat and flourishing.'