

The Crucible of God

Joseph Herrin (revised 1-20-2001)

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship (masterpiece) . . .”

The heat is always the first thing that apprentices and master journeymen alike notice as they cross the threshold into the foundry. It is not a normal heat such as one encounters on a hot summer day. This heat is born of a multitude of individual furnaces, each one stoked and fanned to its appropriate intensity according to the need of the metal being formed, refined, and hardened.

The heat comes from all directions. As you walk among the workmen and their anvils, tools, and furnaces you instinctively turn away from the blast of the fires that are raging. Some are hotter than others and these are given a wide berth. They are only to be approached with reason, and then only after you are properly attired.

There is a sober spirit that permeates the foundry. All the laborers are there with purpose, aware of the awesome nature of their work. They are not cold or impassive, rather they are zealous, but theirs is a controlled and directed zeal that allows for no distraction.

The apprentice this day is assigned to work with a master journeyman of long experience. His assignment is an honor. An excellent spirit has been found in this young workman and now his skills are to be honed as he observes and assists this particular metalsmith.

The metalsmith has a coveted reputation. He has produced masterpieces that are renowned and are spoken of with tones of awe and wonder. The apprentices speak of his work in hushed voices as if they feel to speak loudly would desecrate the sanctity of what is being discussed.

The apprentice arrives early. He has been taught how to lay out the tools and utensils of his trade and he desires to have all in order before his instructor arrives. He has already prepared his heart and mind for this day. He has only one thought, he desires to glean as much wisdom as possible from this opportunity. He will study every move that this master artisan makes. He will record indelibly every word of advice that drops from his lips.

The master arrives. He quickly surveys the work area and sees that all has been prepared. He gives no word of thanks, for this was to be expected. He has personally asked for this young man, with the keen eye and determined attitude, to work with him. He has watched him for some time

and has seen promise in him. He is one that instruction will not be wasted on, nor will he need to be placated by flattery. He has seen in this one a desire to be skilled in his labor, and the quality of the work, not the praises of men, are what bring him satisfaction. II Timothy 2:2 will be fulfilled in this one.

The master picks up the work piece from the table where he laid it after his last session with it. He holds it carefully. It is more than raw material, it has the promise of greatness in it. It is a masterpiece in process. It will require consummate skill and patience to allow all the beauty to come forth without damaging any of its possibilities. This is the challenge of the craftsman.

He carries it over to the apprentice and bids him to look at it. "Do you see the potential of this piece?" he enquires. "Look deep within it to see the purity of metal that is yet obscured by occlusions. This is one of the finest specimens to ever come from our Lord's mines. The metal within is so pure as to be translucent. It is like water, a most rare find."

"In keeping with the tradition of all masterpieces, this one has been given a name. It is called 'The Bride.'"

He continued, "The name represents the purity of the metal locked within. It speaks of the high calling that exists for this piece once it has been cleansed, purified, and refined. It is our job to release it of the slag and impurities that cling to it so that it may one day soon be shaped into a vessel of honor for the Great Master's house." II Timothy 2:20,21

The apprentice carefully views the piece from all angles, holding it to the light to gaze through the outer film to view the treasure within. The master artisan notices the young man gasp as he catches sight of what lies within. The student's knuckles whiten as he tightens his grip on the piece, suddenly aware of the priceless nature of what he holds. In awe, he hands it back to the skillful hands of the journeyman.

"Because of the potential of this piece, we must labor with the greatest of wisdom and patience to bring forth it's beauty. We must subject it to things that would be wasted on a more ordinary piece. We must separate and remove all that does not belong until only the purified and precious metal remains." Thus begins the craftsman's instruction.

Having said this, the artisan gently lays the work piece down on the table and walks over to the furnace. He begins to place fuel into the furnace, but not carelessly as one stoking the boilers of a locomotive. Each piece of fuel is measured and placed with precision into the furnace.

"I have already determined the critical temperature range for this piece," he says. "We will begin at the lower end of the range and then

increase the temperature while we observe the chemistry and reactions of the piece.”

The apprentice is amazed at how hot the journeyman makes the blaze. At first he is worried that some mistake has been made. He has never heated any metal he has previously worked on to such a high temperature, and here is a piece of such exquisite potential that he expects it to withstand much less than the coarse metals that have been fashioned into instruments of common use.

The artisan, anticipating his thoughts says, “The pieces that appear the most delicate and precious often require a much hotter fire to bring them to a point of refining than the common metals. This piece is not to end up in the undercarriage of some vehicle. It is to be set on display in a great house to be shown to many. Therefore, all impurity must be removed. For more base uses, the impurities could be left in and not inhibit the metal’s performance. However, in this one, the usage requires that nothing remain to obscure its appearance.”

The apprentice buttons up his leather collar to protect himself from the searing heat. The journeyman then asks him to lay the metal in the furnace. The apprentice, still half expects the metal to shatter or melt into a deformed heap. Instead, it begins to glow.

The journeyman slowly increases the heat while he observes the metal. Too hot and the metal will become pocked or shatter. Not enough heat and the impurities cannot be loosed.

As they both watch, the pure metal within becomes brighter. Suddenly, a piece of slag on the surface melts, losing its attachment to the piece and falls down into the fire of the furnace.

After a few more minutes at this temperature the journeyman quickly removes the metal and deftly lays it on the anvil. With tremendous strokes of the hammer that startle the apprentice, he repeatedly strikes a rough appendage until it breaks off.

When it has cooled off, he hands it to the apprentice for examination. Where the rough piece had been there is now smooth metal and the purity of the inner work can be seen. The apprentice is filled with renewed awe at the beauty within the piece. At the same time, he is troubled that it has to be treated so roughly.

The master craftsman speaks, “It may seem savage to so harshly handle a piece that is destined to be a remarkable masterpiece, but beauty and fragility are not necessarily synonymous. By repeatedly heating the metal to such extreme temperatures it becomes tempered and strengthened.

As the impurities are removed a greater cohesiveness results. The work becomes not only more beautiful, but immensely strong.”

The apprentice gives an understanding nod. “This is certainly a fortunate thing. The most lovely of objects become the most enduring.”

The master nods his assent to the student’s insightful remark. “Repeated subjection to the heat of the furnace will produce nothing but good, so long as the heat is applied at the right temperature and for the correct duration. Many a promising piece has been marred by not leaving it in the furnace long enough. Sympathy does not produce masterpieces. It will instead lead to inferior workmanship.”

“But aren’t we to love that which we work on?” asks the apprentice.

“Indeed!” the craftsman continued. “We must have a great passion for our work. Passion seeks the very best for its subject, not the easiest road. This piece that has been named ‘The Bride’ is a tremendous find and has the highest of potential, but it will never know its potential if it is coddled and withheld from the trials of the furnace and the anvil. Because I am passionate for it, I lovingly subject it to such torturous treatment. I desire to see the full glory of ‘The Bride’ revealed.”

“That will be all for today,” said the artisan.

“We will let ‘The Bride’ rest for now. Tomorrow we will try the metal further and see yet more of its glory come forth.”

The apprentice nodded. Tomorrow would be a great day indeed.

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Titled by Joseph Herrin

**When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man
And skill a man
To play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try his splendor out –
God knows what He's about.**

Angela Morgan (Adapted)