

Are You Afraid to Succeed?



by Harold R. Medina

Judge of the U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals

A noted jurist asks if today's Americans are making the most of their capacity to grow, as one of Christ's parables advised

(The following article is excerpted from the book, "The Anatomy of Freedom," by Judge Harold R. Medina. Copyright © 1959 by Harold R. Medina. Copyright 1954 by American Bar Association. By permission of Henry Holt and Co., Inc., New York.)

AS A BOY there was one part of the New Testament that I simply could not understand. It seemed fundamentally wrong and terribly unfair. I refer to the parable of the talents in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew in which the master was delighted with the two servants who had speculated with the money he had left them and said to each, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," but said to him who had hidden his one talent in the earth:

"Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."

"Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents."

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This seems fundamentally wrong, doesn't it? And yet we know that Christ understood men better than anyone else ever did.

What He is telling us is—don't be afraid, don't be discouraged, don't be cynical, don't be lazy; but keep plugging away all the time with zest and enthusiasm.

Whether we like it or not, the fact is that human nature stays just about the same over the centuries. What holds most of us back today is just what held people back 2,000 years ago.

Everyone seems to be looking for security. Boys just out of college ask personnel directors what the pension rights are and at what age they will be allowed to retire. Croakers abound everywhere telling us that everything is going to pot, that the world is plumb full of corruption, and that nothing can be done about it.

But the truth is that this do-nothing policy of playing everything safe is just about the worst thing a person can do. When the parable says "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath," it is telling us what really happens. It is the reverse of the principle of the capacity for growth.

From the day we are born until we are called into the Great Beyond, there is never a day in which we stay quite the same as we were the day before. Changes go on continually; some for the

better, some for the worse. We are supposed to use these capacities, to develop them; not to let them wither and become extinct.

How surprising it is to see, after the lapse of 40 or 50 years, how some of the men in a college class who seemed to have such promise, who seemed destined to leadership and the accomplishment of great things which would have benefited their families, the community, and the nation, wind up without having done anything to speak of.

On the other hand, some who seemed far less bright and far less capable attain the positions that you would have expected the others to attain. Doubtless, different persons have different opportunities, and the old adage that "nothing succeeds like success" really means that those who have the opportunity to develop their talents become more and more capable until they truly reach the heights. But it is my experience that hardly anyone goes through life without having had many opportunities which were permitted to pass by.

Moreover, the ten-talent man or woman may be making a significant contribution to society without any blowing of trumpets, without making a lot of money, and without attaining any high political or other offices. He has his reward, and in this life, too. The person who is constantly active, constantly accomplishing some good work, and hence steadily growing in every way is bound to be happy. Melancholy thoughts and despondent introspection are not for him.

SOME YEARS AGO I volunteered to write the obituary articles for the *Alumni Weekly* of Princeton. The first one was about a man named Pat LeFevre. I knew very little about him except that he had been the principal of a high school in Dayton, Ohio. The busy days at the end of each school year in June had probably kept him away from our reunions.

I began to gather material in my methodical way and discovered just the sort of person we are discussing now. He had started by teaching English, then he began working with the football team. Over the years, he influenced the lives of thousands of boys and girls. He kept growing all the time. From day to day, in and out of school, his example and the radiance of his personality were at work. When he died, it seemed as though all Dayton came out to the funeral.

He was not the president of a bank or a famous professor in some institution of learning or President of the United States—but he was a ten-talent man who had heeded the words of the parable. He had met every test, without fuss or flurry, just plugging away from day to day.

How full of meaning are those words, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

COVER:

The star of the week is the succulent turkey. Yours can arrive on your Thanksgiving table looking as appetizing as the one on the cover if you follow the recipe ideas on page 10.

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