

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PAGE

Hartland Mission Station,
Paulpietersburg, Natal,
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Dear Children:

Let me tell you something I saw one Sunday. Faith and I were riding donkeys on our way to hold a meeting in a native kraal. Before we got there, we passed another kraal, near which I noticed a fire. This fire was not a grass fire, nor yet a fire to cook food. I am sure you would never guess what they were doing with this fire. They were burning a clay pot. By that I mean that they were heating it red hot so it would hold water without the clay softening. In due time we arrived and had our meeting. I remember that there was a beer drink on, and what a noise they made, for when they were drunk they shouted when they talked. But those of them who were sober listened well.

But let us return to the subject of making pots. The natives know of places where the clay is good. I know of one place two or three miles away. This clay is dried and ground, for it contains small white stones. It is then tempered and mixed. When all is ready, they first make a sausage-like roll, and then build it round and round, like a rag mat, being careful to shape it properly. First it is flat, then saucer shaped, then like a cup. The spiral ridges are smoothed down to an even surface. Sometimes a stone causes a defect, and again the pot may crack in drying. Again, when the time comes for burning the pot it may mar itself in the fire.

Clay pots are made in different sizes, individual ones for drinking beer or "amase" (thick milk), holding one or two quarts, called "ukamba," to big pots holding many gallons, known as "imbiza," used for cooking beer.

A properly made "ukamba" is a beautiful glossy black, and ornamented with rows of small depressions, or raised spots. Of course, when an "ukamba" comes out of the fire, it is ugly enough, mottled red, streaked with smoke. They make it black by the process of smoking in a fire of small twigs, and then they shine it.

These pots are very useful for cooking, eating, drinking, carrying water, and what not, but, alas, they do not stand much racket. One good smash and they are done for. How different is a metal bowl! When a pot is only cracked they sometimes mend it by drilling holes and sewing the crack up with a kind of small soft wire, they call "utaka."

In the Bible is an account of a man making a visit to a pot maker. I wonder if you can find the place? It says, "... I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work upon the wheels. And the vessel that was made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." God used this visit as a parable to him, and in the parable God gave him a message, and this is the message: "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in My hand."

Let us make a visit to the potter's house, with sharp eyes and keen ears, and see if we may not get a message too. As we walk down the street, we cannot help noticing how strange things are. Ah! Here we are at last; this is the house. How odd it looks, all built of huge stones, and with a flat roof.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter, I see you are busy this morning, with a work on the wheels." "Good morning to you; yes, I am hard at it: and who all are you, and where are you from; you look as if you were from a far distant foreign land." "Yes, we are, and these children are some friends of mine whom I have brought for a visit to see you, your house, and your pots; I see the pot you are doing looks very fine." "It is not as fine as it might have been, will you not take off your shoes and find seats? The roads are very hot and dusty this time of year."

"Thanks, but why do you say the pot might have been better?" "Well, I had it planned differently, using the very best of clay, and I was getting on very well, when the pot resisted my skill, and marred itself in my hands. It happened when my last visitor was here." "Who was your last visitor?" "Someone whom you ought to know well, Jeremiah, the Prophet. He stood silently watching me, and asked only one question, and that was 'What was I going to do now, the pot had marred itself!' So I told him I was going to make it another vessel as I saw fit—it was first destined for the splendid house of a rich ruler, but now I shall have to make another one to take its place, and I will put it on the shelf with the cheaper ones."

"And what is the Prophet Jeremiah like?" "He is like no one else I know, he radiates a wonderful influence, and leaves a lasting impression. I like him, but cannot help fearing him too, there seems to be a wonderful secret to his life. When thinking of it sometimes I recall our wonderful Moses, and the time he was in the mount forty days and forty nights, and when he came down he must needs cover his face with a veil before the Israelites could stand before him, because his face shone so."

"There, that will do for the present. I will set it aside to dry now. Do you all want to see something more?" "Yes, do take us around please!" "What is in that corner?" "Why, only a pile of fragments!" "Yes, quite correct. Yesterday that was a pot as fine as any, but a child was carrying it, and a child's hands have little skill, and a child's feet are unsteady. It is needful for us to look well and see into whose hands we trust ourselves, lest we fall and break, and ruin be great. Yea, let us trust ourselves in the hands of the great Jehovah above, and then shall we have underneath the Everlasting Arms, as Moses said: 'Yes, as One said, 'My Father is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of His hands.''" "Who said those words?" "They are an echo from the future."

"Now here we are at the oven, here are half a dozen pots that have just cooled—and one is badly cracked! How sad that it should have failed at the second test. It yielded itself full well to the potter's skill when it was but a lump of clay, but now, when it seemed to be something of itself, it failed the test by fire. 'A test partly makes us, and partly it reveals us as we are!' It was satisfied with itself as it was, and had no use for another experience. The fiery trial was to have made it able to withstand the subtle effect of the dissolving water, as it met the daily round of duties." "Yes, so that it might continue. . . . grounded and settled, and be not moved away" and "worthy. . . . unto all pleasing . . . in every good work," so that it might

please it's Lord." "You speak in a mystery." "Yes, it is a mystery."

"Let us pass on into the next room, where I keep my finished pots. You see rows and rows, small ones on shelves, big ones on the floor." "But look!" says a small voice, "see how shiny some are." "Yes, some are glazed. A powder is put on them before they are burned, and this becomes molten and runs into a shiny surface, that water cannot penetrate. It is a vessel destined for a place of honour."

"How many different shapes and sizes there are!" "Yes," says the potter, "each has its plan and design. I had a plan for each one while it was still a lump of clay. And as I worked it through each stage, always I had this plan in view. The pots you see here are only the ones that passed successfully through each stage, and some are not what I planned first, but I had to change them over because they marred themselves in my hands."

"What is that small narrow mouthed bottle used for?" "Oh, that is a cruise for oil. Do not you remember the widow's cruise of oil? It was probably something like that." "The widow whose sons were to be taken and sold for debt?" "Yes, and the prophet told her to borrow empty vessels not a few. And when she and her sons had borrowed a good many she was to fill them all from that one small cruise of oil, and sell it and pay her debt. She did so, and enough oil came out of the cruise to fill all the empty earthen vessels, and when she said, 'bring yet another vessel,' and her sons said, 'there is not another vessel,' then the oil was stayed, and ceased to run."

On one shelf stood a row of earthen vessels that the potter tells us are used for drawing water. You can call them pitchers if you like. As the potter looks at the orderly row, there is a twinkle in his eye; he is about to tell us another story. But first, he leads us out to the back, and shows us the rubbish heap. "This," he says, "is where the broken vessels and fragments go. You notice that all sorts and conditions of broken dishes have been collecting here for years. It is a sad necessity, and here lie fragments of the most costly as well as the most humble vessels amidst the ashes and refuse. They are broken, and their usefulness is ended."

"Here is a pitcher, one side a gaping hole. I wonder if you remember the story of the night that three hundred pitchers were broken in one moment? It was the time that the land was invaded by the Midianites, and Jehovah had chosen Gideon and three hundred picked men for Israel's deliverance. They were in three companies on the hills surrounding the countless Midianites. Each man had a trumpet, and a pitcher, hidden in which burned a light. Gideon gave a signal shout at which the three hundred pitchers all went crash at once! Waving their lights, the men all shouted and blew their trumpets with all their might. As a result, the enemy were stricken with a panic and ran away in disorder, killing each other as they ran. So a great victory was wrought that day, for the Israelites followed up the fleeing hosts, and finished their discomfiture. These earthen vessels did not fail at the test, because they each had a light. They served their purpose well. That is the secret of the worth of a vessel, it must serve

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