

RIPENESS IN CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

The Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon beautifully illustrates the marks of richness in Christian character as follows: One mark is *beauty*. Ripe fruit has its own perfect beauty. As the fruit ripens the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colors deepen till the beauty of the fruit is equal to the beauty of the blossom and in some respects superior. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realized sanctification, which the Word of God knows by the name of "the beauty of holiness."

Another mark of ripe fruit is *tenderness*. The young green fruit is hard and stone-like; but the ripe fruit is soft, yields to the pressure, can almost be moulded, retains the mark of the finger. So it is with the mature Christian; he is noted for tenderness of spirit.

Another mark of ripeness is *sweetness*. The unripe fruit is sour, and perhaps it ought to be, or else we should eat all the fruits while they are yet green. It may, therefore, be in order of grace a fit thing that in the youthful Christian some sharpness should be formed which will ultimately be removed. As we grow in grace we are sure to grow in charity, sympathy and love; we shall have greater and more intense affection for the person of Him "whom having not seen we love;" we shall have greater delight in the precious things of His gospel; the doctrines which perhaps we did not understand at first will become marrow and fatness to us as we advance in grace. We shall feel that there is honey dropping from the honey comb in the deep things of our religion. We shall as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness towards our fellow-Christians. Bitter-spirited Christians may know a great deal, but they are immature. Those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgement, but they are as yet immature in heart. I know we who are young beginners in grace think ourselves qualified to reform the whole Christian church. We drag her before us and condemn her straitway, but when our virtues become more mature I trust we shall not be more tolerant of evil, but we shall be more tolerant of infirmity, more hopeful for the people of God, and certainly less arrogant in our criticisms.

Another and very sure mark of ripeness is a *loose hold of earth*. Ripe fruit easily parts from the bough. You shake the tree and the ripe apples fall. If you

wish to eat fresh fruit you put out your hand to pluck it, and it comes off with great difficulty you feel you had better leave it alone a little longer; but when it drops into your hand, quite ready to be withdrawn from the branch, you know it to be in good condition. When, like Paul, we can say, "I am ready to depart," when we are set loose by all earthly things, O, then it is we are ripe for heaven! It is a sure token of ripeness when you are standing on tiptoe, with your wings outspread, ready for flight; when no chain any longer binds you to earth; when your love to things below is subordinate to your longing for the joys above. When we get to this in our very hearts we are getting ripe, and we shall soon be gathered. The Master will not let His ripe fruit hang long on the tree.

TAKING A STAND.

The following extract of a letter from an elder to a younger brother who had decided to follow Christ contains a truth which all our young people should lay to heart.

"I think that it will help you to do good all your life if you begin to take a stand on the side of Christ at once. One does not need to jump upon a stump and shout out to the world 'I'm a Christian' in order to be standing on the Lord's side, but there are scores of proper ways and times for letting the fact be known naturally and quietly. One of the best of these is by attending the prayer-meeting, and taking a brief part as occasion offers. Of course you pray a good deal. I am more and more happy in the privilege of leaving myself, my plans and my business in God's hands. Of course I do my best in the matter, but I try to watch which way He points; and, following that, leave the burden of responsibility with Him. I find that my mistakes and falls occur mostly when I am trying to get along alone. Whatever success I have had of late I trace to his kind care; seen in many instances and unseen in many others, no doubt. Be good to yourself.

"Your affectionate brother.

Nineteen years ago there were only ninety one Christian missionaries in China, now there are four hundred and twenty-eight, of whom a hundred are single women.