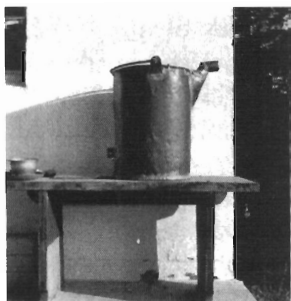


Come Alive to the Splendour

Anne Tomlinson



A watering can on a wooden bench, a sunlit wall, shadow. An ordinary scene, unspectacular, hardly worthy of note; undeserving of a second glance.

And yet. And yet Merton's photograph invites us to pause, to turn aside and take off our shoes, to stand and stare. To pay attention. To look at the bucket, its body bruised and dented, its spout and handle lovingly repaired; to look at the texture of the wall, the flaking paint, the grain of the wood, the interplay of light and dark. To let the silent eloquence of these 'common and natural and ordinary things' speak to us; to let them slowly, steadily, communicate their inner essence, reveal their hidden wholeness, bear witness.

Let Merton's encouragement to Sister A., a young Carmelite, seep into your soul:

It is good and praiseworthy to look at some real created thing and feel and appreciate its reality. Just let the reality of what is real sink into you, for through real things we can reach Him who is infinitely real.

Take your time; contemplate this photograph; focus upon its particulars; move into a state of attention and concentration, a state of awareness. Disappear into the silence of God. Let Merton's reverence for the holiness of created things be yours too. See the imprint of God's creative hand in this bucket, beautiful in its simplicity of form and purpose. Become aware of the sacredness of everything in front of you. Come alive to the splendour that is all around you, and within you - and give thanks.

Anne Tomlinson is Principal of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, the training agency for ordinands and Reader candidates in the Scottish Episcopal Church. Merton's photographs have fed her for over 20 years.

The quotation comes from *The School for Charity* (letter 'To Sister A' dated May 21, 1953).