

Strength Growing With Days.

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., LITT. D.

"As thy days, so shall thy strength be."—Deut. 33: 25.

We generally hear these words misquoted, and put into the shape, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be," as if the substance of the promise was strength proportioned to the special exigencies of each movement. That is very beautiful, and may well be deduced from the words, but it fails to take into account that little "s" at the end of the word "day," which obliges us to understand the promise as meaning: "As thy days" (increase) "thy strength shall" (increase). The older a Christian is, the stronger Christian he ought to be. Then there is another thing to be noted, and that is that in their original connection the words are a promise, not to an individual, but to a community. It is the last of the series of promises to the various tribes of Israel which occupy this last chapter of Deuteronomy, and are ascribed to Moses; and it crowns the whole. Possibly we may go further than that, because this saying is the last directly addressed to the tribes, the rest of the song being a hymn to Jehovah. It may be that the change of person from the "he" that prevails throughout the rest of the benedictions to the "thy" that is found in the last two clauses, of which my text is one, indicate that these final blessings belong, not to Asher exclusively, to whom they seem to be immediately and directly addressed, but are intended for the whole community. Be that as it may, we have to keep in mind, if we would understand the depth and blessedness of this promise, these two points: "As thy days," not "as thy day," and the original application of the words not to an individual but to a community. And so now, just look at what lies in the promise thus expressed.

I.—INCREASE OF STRENGTH WITH INCREASE OF AGE.

Now let us take that first of all in its application to the individual life, and then in its application to the community.

In its application to the individual life. Here is a promise dead in the teeth of nature, because all living things that belong to the material universe come under the law of growth, which ultimately passes into decay. The same sea of time that flings up its spoils on some shores, and increases the land, when you get round the promontory is eating away the coast. And so, the years, which at first bring us strength, very soon begin to reverse their action, and imperceptibly draw strength away from us, and muscles become flaccid, the eyes become dim, and limbs are stiffened. Nor is it only the physical life which dwindles as the days increase, but also much of the inner life is modified by the external, so that the old man's memory becomes less retentive, and the old man's impulses less strong, and his mind as well as his limbs become stiffened; and new things are a burden to him; and, as the years go on, drop by drop there ebbs away the mental as well as the bodily strength he once had. Some of us know this. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall." "But as thy days so shall thy strength be," and when the eyes become dim, it is possible that they may be longer-sighted, and see the things that are, just in proportion as they begin to fail to see "the things that do appear." They may be able to discern more clearly what is above them, as they see less clearly the things on their own level. And it is possible that, whilst all other lights that have been hung in our chambers are dying down for want of oil, or for want of wick, one light that is not kindled in any mortal wick, nor fed by any earthly oil, may be enlivened by that oil of the Divine Spirit which forbids that the lamp which it feeds shall ever burn dim. It is possible that as the days increase, and the strength drawn from externals decreases, the power of the spirit, the maturity of the soul, the insight into the Eternal Christ-likeness, and assimilation to that which we more clearly behold, as the clouds thin themselves away, may all increase. Leafy buds are fair, but it is when the leaves drop, and the winter is begun, that he who stands amidst the trees can look upwards, and see more clearly anampler heaven than the foliage in its greenness had shut out.

And so, dear brethren, in all that makes the Christian life, it is possible that there shall be increase with the increase of our days. Why so? Just because the Christian life is a supernatural life that has nothing to do with dependence on physical conditions. If it were not so, if my Christian validity stood exactly on the same plane as my vigor of intellect, my retentiveness of memory, my energy of purpose, or other capacities which make up the non-material part of my being—the "soul," as people call it—then I, too, would share in the decrepitude and decay which silently dims these capacities, however brilliant, as the years roll on. But we know that it is not so. Much rather, it almost seems that there is an opposite and compensating action sometimes set up, so that as the outward man perishes day by day, the inward man is renewed, and as one scale goes down, the other often goes up. We sometimes see people, in the measure in which their physical strength decays, drawing into themselves more and more of that supernatural and

divine strength which has nothing to do with the material or the external.

Is that not a reason for believing that that life which thus obeys a law, as I said, dead in the teeth of nature, is a life altogether independent of this bodily existence, and our connection with this material universe? There is no better proof of immortality, if you except the fact of the Resurrection, than the way in which, right up to the edge of the grave, and even when a man's foot is on its threshold, there burns in his soul, brighter and brightening as the darkness falls, all that makes the Christian life. Can anybody believe that a life which thus, throughout its whole course, has been independent of physical conditions, and triumphs over them at the last, is going to be extinguished by the accident of that impotent shape which fastens its skeleton claws on the body, but never gets near the true self? If we have Christ in us, the Bread of immortality, though we die yet shall we live, and, in a nobler sense, than the old singer dreamed it, "as thy days" increase unto the unsetting day of the heavens, "so shall thy strength be."

But if this contradiction of Nature by a supernatural life is to be ours, as it may be, let us not forget that this promise, like all God's promises, is a promise with conditions. They are not stated here, but we know them well enough. Remember the sequel of words that we have already quoted. "The youths shall faint and be weary; the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength"—they, and only they. And what is "waiting on the Lord" but communion with him, desire for his gifts, carefulness not to put barriers in its way by our own conduct, prayer and purity, and without use of the strength we have? God does not give gifts to men who see as wasting them, and the gift of growing strength that is promised to us is strength that is to be used for his service. That thought as to the conditions of the promise reveals the reason why so many professing Christians know so very little about that paradox of strength that grows as the days grow. The very notion of increasing conformity to Jesus Christ, and deeper and fuller and more rejecting possession of power and life derived from him, has faded out of the creeds, because it has faded out of the experience, of so many of us professing Christians. The greatness of the promise constitutes the sharpness of the test when we come to apply it to ourselves. Has my strength grown with years?

Let me say one word, and it shall be but a word, about the other application of this great thought. As I said, it is a tribal benediction, and all the benedictions of all the tribes have passed over to the great community of New Testament believers. The church is heir to the Divine promise that as its days increase its strength increases. And though, of course, there have been fearful instances to the contrary, and churches, like other institutions, are apt to stiffen and decay in their old age, and though people are saying to-day, with some show of facts to support their saying, that Christianity is effete, and the church worn-out, yet the only institution in the world that has lasted so long, and kept up so much vitality through centuries, is the Christian church. Why? If there were not, a supernatural life in it, it would have been dead long ago, not because of the persecutions of enemies, but because of the sins of its friends and members. The church would have killed Christianity and itself, unless there had been that seed of eternal life in it. They used to say, in the old days, that vessels going on a long voyage liked to take in Thames water into their water-butts, because it had the property of working itself sweet again after it had gone bad. So, over and over again, when its corruption was greatest, there has been an outburst of that supernatural life that has cleansed the church, and made it strong and vigorous once more. I venture to say that time writes no wrinkles on its brow, and that the existence of the Christian church to-day, remembering all the weary welter of blood and error, during these nineteen centuries, is a demonstration that a life, not of the will of man nor of the will of the flesh, but of God, himself, is in it. Though we may be, and ought to be, burdened by the sense of the feebleness of the vitality of much of professing Christendom, we are blind to the lessons of the past, and traitors to faith in the power of the Lord, unless we transfer, with unhesitating confidence, to that great community, the words of my text—"As the church's days increase, so will her strength grow."

One more word—"You and I are members, most of us, of this smaller community assembling for worship here. It has a long history. Ah, dear brethren, I wish I could be as sure about the church in Union Chapel as I am about the church in the world, that the older it gets the stronger it gets. We know the conditions; God help us to fulfil them, and to "wait on the Lord" that our strength may be increased.

But the promise of our text is susceptible of another application, though that is not its true signification, and may be taken as meaning the necessities of the days shall determine the nature of the strength given. And that adaptation of supply to need will be true in many directions.

It will be true if we consider the tasks imposed by

each succeeding day. For God never sets his servants to work or warfare beyond the limits of the strength which they have or may have, if they will. If anything is plainly his will, it is plainly within our power. Even if it is obviously beyond our felt strength, the consciousness of our inability is meant to be the signal to us to take to the prayer which will bring us into possession of strength that equals our desire and our need. His commandments are all promises of the bestowal of ability to fulfil them, as the man with a paralysed arm found himself able to stretch it out when, in obedience to Christ's command, he tried to do so. So, however heavy our responsibilities, however trying our tasks, however we may be disposed to answer God's call to "some hard or unwelcome office with the old excuse: "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak for I am a child," we have a right to expect that, if we say: "Here am I, send me," he will infuse his strength into us, will put his words into our stammering lips, and fit us for all which he lays on us. "Give that thou commandest, and command that thou wilt," says Augustine. Our text may be taken as the answer to that prayer, given ages before it was offered.

Again, this adaptation will shape the day's strength according to the day's wants. The "matter of a day in its day" will be given. There will be daily bread for daily hunger. There will be daily supplies for daily needs. The manna is given morning by morning, that every day may renew the sense of dependence, and that the children of the Kingdom may feel not only their continued dependence on God, but may joyfully realize his continual care expressed by his unremitting gifts. Whatever, then, may be the coat of the days, the strength given will correspond, be they joyful or sad, summer days of heat and beauty, or winter ones, short and cold and dark. God makes no mistakes, sending furs for June or muslin for December. His gifts are never belated, nor arrive after the need for them is past.

That adaptation takes effect for us on the same condition as the increase does, of which we have been speaking, namely, on condition of our waiting on God. There must be habitual desire, faith, and use, if we are to realize this uninterrupted flow of strength corresponding to the moment. If our lives are daily sacrifices, if we take up our crosses daily, if we daily watch at Wisdom's gates, if we die daily, then we shall daily get our daily bread, and as our days increase, so shall our strength grow greater.—Baptist Times and Freeman.

King's and Dalhousie.

FOUR ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO UNITE THESE COLLEGES.

Shortly after his consecration in October, 1787, Bishop Charles Inglis urged the assembly to establish a seminary of learning. "The whole proceedings of the Provincial Assembly relative to the Academy first and then to the college were evidently characterized by a disposition most friendly to the Church of England: The Dissenters in the House cheerfully united with churchmen to make the requisite provision for this undertaking, under the impression that the college would meet fully the existing requirements of the people, and would raise the character of the Province." (Akins).

When the statutes were being prepared in 1803, Judge Croke insisted in spite of the continued protests of Bishop Inglis that "every student at his matriculation (on joining the seminary) be compelled to subscribe his assent to the 39 articles of faith of the Church of England," and that no member of the University be permitted "to frequent the Roman mass or the meeting house of Presbyterians, Baptists or Methodists . . . or be present at any seditious or rebellious meeting." The majority of the Governors supported Judge Croke. The Governors were Sir J. Wentworth, Lt.-Governor, Bishop Inglis, Chief Justice Blowers, Judge Croke, Att'y.-General R. J. Uniacke, Solicitor-General J. Stewart, and Benning Wentworth, Secretary of the Province.

Within a year Dr. Thomas McCulloch began a movement to establish an academy at Pictou for Dissenters. When the Bill, authorizing its conversion into a college similar to that at Windsor, came before the Council, that body inserted a clause requiring the trustees and teachers to be members of the English or Presbyterian church.

Lord Dalhousie found King's College and Pictou Academy, exclusive through design or accident, and distant from the Capital of the Province, the seat of the Legislature and the Courts, and the centre of the military and mercantile life of the colony. He determined to found at Halifax a college like that at Edinburgh, "open to all occupations and sects of religion." The Earl, in his communication to the Council, Dec. 11th, 1817, stated that he had thought that the Castine fund "might have been applied to the removal of King's College to a situation here more within our reach; but I am better informed now and I find that if that College were in Halifax, it is open to those only who live within its walls and observe strict College rules and terms."

After the Dalhousie College building had been made ready for occupancy, the friends of both Colleges thought