

MISSION FIELD.

Strength in Weakness.*

BY NORMAN H. RUSSELL.

No yearnings are deeper, no prayers more earnest on the part of God's people, than those for *power in service*; and yet the deepening of those longings is always accompanied by an increasing consciousness of weakness. It is about the solution of this difficulty I wish to say a few words; for the Bible reveals to us that this seeming contradiction is the divine order, and that in the words of that wonderful paradox "*When we are weak then are we strong*," (2 Cor. xii. 10.)

1. In the first place let us realize that "*power belongeth unto God*," (Psm. lxi. 11.) It is not physical or intellectual, nor in any way inherent in man, or artificially acquired by him, but is a divine prerogative, dispensed by him at will. From the beginning of history, God has been seeking to impress this lesson upon man. How often in His dealings with Israel did He bring them into places of difficulty and danger, where they were impotent to help themselves, and where as the Psalmist tells us (Psm. cvii.): "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distress." Again at the taking of Jericho, in the conquest of Midian by Gideon, and later on, the victories of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, the great lesson God sought to teach was: "The battle is not yours but God's." "Stand ye and see the salvation of the Lord." Probably there were similar experiences in the life of David which taught him the words that open this paragraph for he says: "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God" (Psm. lxii. 11.)

In contradistinction to this how strong are God's denunciations of those who put their trust in man or man's inventions. "Woe unto them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel neither seek the Lord."

Nor is the teaching of the New Testament different from that of the Old. The power is more spiritual, but it is none the less God given. The disciples were thus bidden: "To tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with *power from on high*;" and they were to receive power only after the Holy Ghost had come upon them. In agreement with this also are the words of Paul in 1 Cor. ii.: "I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom . . . I was with you in weakness . . . My speech was not with enticing words of man's wisdom; but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power. Power belongeth unto God and He giveth it to whomsoever He will."

2. How does God dispense this power? Isaiah tells us (xl. 89) that "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." He "giveth to all men liberally" of such as they shall ask Him, but it is to the "*faint*" that He giveth power; and to those who know their lack of might that "He increaseth strength." Moses plead his want of eloquence and his slow tongue, and the Lord said "go and I will be with your mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say." Gideon plead "My family is poor and I am the least in my father's house," but God said, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites;" Jehoshaphat's prayer was "We have no might," and the Lord answered "Be not afraid—for the battle is not yours but God's"; and Jeremiah said, "I cannot speak for I am a child," but God replied, "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak." How truly then Job answered when he said "How hast thou helped him that is without power"? The old adage says "God helps those who help themselves"; the Bible says "God helps those who can't help themselves." The strong, the proud and the self sufficient have no claim on God's power; only to those who can say "I am poor and needy" is He a help and deliverance, (Psm. xl. 17.) The self sufficient do not go to God for help, or if they do, it is more in the spirit of asking God to be a coadjutor in their plans, than of submitting themselves to His plan. The poor and the needy on the other hand, feeling their own utter helplessness, cast themselves wholly upon God; having no confidence in themselves, their whole trust is in God. To those, then, God increaseth strength. This also is the solution of Paul's paradox, "when I am weak then am I strong." God's strength (or power R. V.) as he tells us is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. xii. 9) i. e. has its perfect manifestation in the weak ones.

3. We are now able to understand the further words of the Prophet (Isa. xl. 29, 30) "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly

fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." How often we have seen the words of the Apostle illustrated in the Christian life, how that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are." And why? Because these foolish, weak, and base things have no power of their own to trust in and consequently wait on God. It is the youths, the strong young men who faint and grow weary because they trust in themselves. God would have us mistrust our own strength, our intellectual acuteness, our learning. Paul had all of these, yet when he went to the Church at Corinth (1 Cor. ii. 3, 4) his speech was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power. The secret of Paul's strength was his weakness, knowing which he put no trust in himself; he was in his own opinion not a strong young man but a weak one, consequently he put no confidence in himself, conferred not with flesh and blood, but went alone into the wilderness to wait on God; and with what result? Surely of Paul, if of any man, it can be said, "he renewed his strength, he mounted up with wings as eagles, he ran and did not weary, he walked and did not faint."

In reading the "Acts of the Apostles" we invariably find that they disclaim the power that worked in them (e. g. Oh. iii. 12.) It is the arrogance to self of that which is only the gracious gift of God, "who worketh in us to will and do of His good pleasure," that becomes a fruitful source of the loss of power. How careful Paul is to acknowledge the power in him to be God's (Eph. iii. 7); and again where he says:—"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." Let us beware lest we commit the sin of Simon; this power is not to be sought for its own sake, but rather are we to wait on God that He may work in us according to His good pleasure.

4. Just another word. It may help us to understand the trials and difficulties of life better to know that through them God is working out our destiny by fitting us for service. We won't realize our own weakness, so God forces it upon our attention by breaking us down. Not till his thigh had been smitten and the strong man Jacob weakened for life, did he gain power with God. It was in the hour of weakness that Samson, lifting up his heart in prayer, received strength to slay more of the enemies of his country than during his whole lifetime. Without, however, multiplying illustrations, how plainly in this lesson is taught the life of Paul. Thrice he pleaded with the Lord to take away the thorn in the flesh, but no, it was needed to keep him humble and weak. God's only answer was "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness," till finally he was able to say "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, etc., for when I am weak then am I strong. Is it not so with us, dear friends, that God is seeking in these many trials and difficulties, infirmities and reproaches, to make us weak that out of our weakness we may grow strong? He has not answered our prayers as we desired, for He saw that the troubles were necessary to keep us humble. Refusal was better than compliance. Instead of worrying, will we not rather learn like Paul, to "glory in infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon us." Power we know belongs to the resurrection life, (Phil. iii. 10.) but we cannot attain unto the resurrection, unless we are first made conformable to Christ's death, by fellowship in His sufferings. It is only through such fellowship, through death in life, that we will learn the secret of power. Let us therefore pray "That we may have our hearts enlightened—that we may know, what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe according to that working of the strength of His might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places."—*In Manitoba College Journal*.

A Christian worker remarked, "I should be glad to help people if I could only find those who are worthy." But Jesus did not refrain from helping people until He found those who were worthy of His help. The one to whom He said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more," had just been proven most unworthy. It was when man had first proved himself unworthy of a heavenly Father's love and mercy, that there was given to him the promise of a Saviour. Jesus came not to call the worthy, but the unworthy to repentance. With Him the question was not one of worth, but of need. Let us, who claim to be His followers, try to catch His spirit:

* Paper read by Rev. Norman H. Russell, M. A., before a mass meeting of the students in Bombay, India.