

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

STRENGTH OUT OF WEAKNESS.

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is the inspired hymn of Love. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is the sublime epic of Faith. Sometimes Christ gave an explanation of His own parables; and in the opening verse of this glorious chapter the Holy Spirit defines faith to be "the confidence of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." One of the achievements of faith is that "out of weakness" many were "made strong."

One of the chief processes of life is to strengthen the weak. This is the purpose of our daily bread and our nightly sleep. For this object the physician employs his skill in clearing evil humours from our systems and lifting off the weights that drag us down. Every good school has the double aim to fill ignorance with knowledge and to train brains how to think. Now, what food is to the body, what medicine is to the sick, what the school is to the ignorant child, divine grace is to our sin-diseased and sin-enfeebled souls. As sin is the one fatal weakness of every "natural heart," so conversion is thorough and transforming just in proportion as sin is subdued in the soul. My old grandfather used to cut up Canada thistles by the roots, with a long knife, and then throw salt into the cavity, to prevent their sprouting again. Conversion requires both knife and salt.

The real element of weakness in every Christian is his or her remaining sin, which keeps scattering its thistle-seed and propagating afresh. Our daily battle is with the sin that doth beset us; or, as Dean Alford translates it, "doth so easily enwrap us." The constant conflict with such brethren as Gough, or Sawyer, or Murphy is with the appetite for the bottle. When God's grace reigns within them and they keep a tight hold on the arm of Christ, then out of weakness they are made strong. Pride is a constant source of moral weakness, because, like a bloat of the face or the figure, it is a deception. Pride is simply self-exaggeration and light-headedness, and therefore it goes before destruction and when the strain comes we fall. Humility is the chief element in every healthy, robust Christian. It keeps him from soaring up into self-conceit, and holds him down in an implicit rest on Jesus as his rock of strength. Anteus was invincible as long as he stuck to his mother earth. When Hercules got him up into the air, he strangled him. No Christian is ever conquered while he lies low and firm on Christ. Then the divine strength is perfected in the Christian's weakness.

This explains Paul's famous paradox: "When I am weak, then am I strong." He means: When I feel most my own utter weakness, then do I use most the strength of Christ. Paul's constant endeavour was to empty himself of Paul, and to be filled with the fullness of his Lord. In October, the farmer is careful to get the chaff and the bran out of his granary, in order to make room for his wheat. He empties, in order to fill. Some of my readers may have observed this summer, at the seaside, certain molluscs sticking tightly to the rocks. Each mollusc clings so tenaciously that the concussion of the waves cannot smite it off. The secret of its hold is that the mollusc is empty. If it were to be filled, either with air or with flesh, it would drop off immediately. This illustrates literally the condition of every humble, honest, healthy believer who has been emptied of self, and so clings, by a divine law, more closely to the Rock of Ages. As soon as he should become puffed with pride or gorged with fleshly lusts, he would yield to the wave of temptation and be swept away. But while he is weak in himself he is immovable "through Christ strengthening him."

Faith in the Lord Jesus is power. It is the believer's only real and enduring power. All those heroes who figure in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews were made strong out of weakness by their grappling on God. Abraham believed God, and it counted for righteousness and strength. It made that noble old "friend of God" strong enough to undertake the journey into an unknown and unmapped land, and strong enough to bear his only son Isaac to the altar of sacrifice, in the trust that God could even "raise up from the dead." Faith made Elijah at Ahab's court and Daniel in Babylon to stand like adamant. Faith links us poor, feeble creatures to the Omnipotent. I often think that our churches and all our schemes of

Christian philanthropy are like the loaded trains in a railway station, which remain stationary until an iron coupling attaches them to the locomotive. We need the coupling of faith to God's power, and then we shall begin to move. Out of weakness (for pew-rolls, and pulpit eloquence, and prayer meetings have no spiritual power in and of themselves, we may become strong in the Lord).

Our spiritual strength requires constant renewal, just as the body requires to be renewed by food and sleep, and as even the outworn face of Nature must be renewed by the repose of the winter and the resurrections of the spring. One object of Sabbath worship and Bible teaching is to repair constant loss and to build us up. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not grow weary; they shall walk and not faint away. But even an eagle would make but a sorry plight if it were not fed and if it lost the practice of its wings. So shall we, if we cease to feed on God's Word and cease to exercise ourselves to good works every day. Bible diet and Bible duty are the regimen to make athletic Christians.

Perhaps some of the readers of this article may have run down to a wretchedly feeble condition of heart and life. In a vague way, they look for their minister to wake them up, or for a "revival" in their church to restore them. This is a delusion. If the burglar's alarm in my house gets in such a condition that the "indicator" only mutters feebly or has gone dumb, I do not tinker with the indicator. I go to that closet where the battery stands, and fill the jars with fresh chemicals. Then the weak apparatus becomes strong. The trouble with many of our church-members is that their "indicators" act strangely. Their lips do not always speak the truth, or their hands drive honest bargains, or their lives display the power of godliness. Recovery can only come by repentance and by a new infusion of Christ into the soul. This requires heart work; it requires sincere prayer; it requires a reinforcement of Christ and a fresh baptism of his Holy Spirit. One honest hour with Jesus, in confession of sin, and an emptying of self, and a new surrender to Him, would work wonders in strengthening "weak hands and feeble knees." When you are thus converted afresh, you can strengthen your brethren.—Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D., in *N. Y. Independent*.

GETTING MARRIED.

It is very unfortunate for many that a subject so practical and important as marriage is often spoken of as if it were a mere jocular incident in human life. The opportunity to fill young minds with just and pure ideas concerning it is partially lost, and from the habit of treating matrimony as a comedy it is sometimes turned into a horrible tragedy.

Marriage has its *social* side. Persons rise or fall, or are kept from rising or falling, in a great measure, by the companions for life whom they select. Mr. Small would never by himself have amounted to much, but he had the good fortune to marry a capable, energetic girl, and the result is the Small family stand among the foremost in the town.

Marriage has its *prudential* side. When the young people set out in disregard of the first principles of honest living, they lay the basis of many a bitter sorrow. When self-denial, forethought, and careful calculation are made at the beginning, and even overmastering affection is made to bend to practical wisdom, they have laid a foundation for safe future prosperity. Tom Fawcett was desperately in love with Miss Greer, but he knew just how much it would take to "set them up," however modestly. He told her his ideas and plans; he got a savings bank book; she kept it for him; it was a salutary check on any little extravagances to which she might have been tempted. Mr. Fawcett is now a bank president, and Mrs. Fawcett keeps four domestics, and makes every one of them keep a savings bank book.

Marriage has an *intellectual* side. A man with a handsome face and figure, but without brains or any wish for knowledge, makes it hard for a wife of average capacity to maintain the "looking up" attitude. On the other hand, a refined and educated woman with an active mind lifts up a man who has inherent force, though, perhaps, without early advantages. A wise young fellow ought to say to himself, "When that hair is less thick and glossy, when that cheek is paler, when that eye has less lustre than now, will

there still remain a mind that will stimulate and strengthen mine?"

Marriage has a *moral* side. Harry Bell admired his "girl," but he did not respect her. There was nothing wrong about her, but he did not in his heart do honour to her principle. She dazzled others, she fascinated him, he was proud of her in society. But that was all. When he had his home and his wife in it he did not keep away the men whose looseness or coarseness would shock a good woman. Wit might be wicked, but she enjoyed it if it was witty. So his tone was not kept up, but let down; and, unfortunately, the boys are "bad," and the girls are "not turning out well." It might have been different if Mr. Bell had set up a higher standard of goodness.

Marriage has a *personal* side. A little high temper, a little dull moroseness, a little looseness of the tongue, a little—a very little—jealousy of disposition, may be the ruin of two lives that ought to have been happy as one. Dear Edith was a lovely girl, but her girl friends knew that she had a temper of her own; and, unfortunately, now that she—temper and all—is Charlie's, he knows it, likewise. He is most cautious in her company. A man who carries about a bag of gunpowder needs to avoid sparks. She might blow him up. On the other hand, Dick Brown is, in many respects, a nice fellow, extremely precise in manner, but so jealous that his wife's own relations are watched, snubbed, and at length driven from his house by him, lest they should get the affections of his wife. He has in various small ways "cribbed, cabined and confined her," till a sprightly, warm-hearted girl, with frank manners and an honest nature, is changed into a restrained, timid, hesitating woman. It is pitiable to see her sidelong glance at him, that she may find out whether, unobserved, she may cordially receive an old friend of her childhood. Dick might scold her sideways all the evening, if she showed too much warmth.

These and many such matters are little thought of by too many young persons, and hence, the "incompatibility," the "unpleasantness" and quarrels, ending too often in separation. The union was formed under the influence of admiration, or self-love, or ambition, or sordid gain, and it was not happy. Ah, Mr. Looker, you may buy gold too dear.

There are cases in which marriages not abstractly wise are yet robbed of their evil in a good degree by prudent friends. A young girl becomes interested in some one, commits herself, and when he comes to ask permission of her parents to address her, every one knows that it is of no use for them to refuse. She will have him whether they like it or not. The parents are reflecting, self-controlled persons. They say to one another, "This is not the wisest choice that poor Mattie has made, but she has made it and we must make the best of it." So he is brought to the house; arrangements are prudently made for them; he is conciliated, influenced, guided. His respect and confidence are secured, so that instead of standing on his insulted dignity and defiantly employing his power, he becomes ambitious to win the esteem and affection of his wife's "folks," so he is lifted up and saved. The relations of young married people can do much to make or mar them.

There is a curious felicity some have in the circumstances of their marriage, which gives them a good "send-off." They do not surprise any one when it is announced. People say it is just the thing. They do not run about the town, telling everybody of the "catch," but they cement the friendship of many years by timely confidences, which say, informally, "I wish you as one of my friends to know it." Their wedding is nice, there is no meanness, and no "splurge." "Her own minister," who has long known her, watched over her, and shares in her hopeful satisfaction, marries her, and his voice trembles a little as he says, "The Lord bless you!" He feels as if giving his own child to another's custody, and the bridegroom knows again from the very tones of the clergyman that he would be bad and base beyond expression if he held lightly that sacred trust. Quietly and naturally the young couple settle down into their new life, forgetting no civilities, taking on no airs, and provoking no criticism. They are beginning as they mean to end. They will not be the "talk of the town," they will never occupy the time of a divorce court.

How to mend matters is a hard problem; but rash, inconsiderate, selfish, wicked marriages are a sore evil in society. The making of such matches is a topic of talk which in itself demoralizes, and the