

water like a conqueror. It renders the waves subject for a time, and compels them to carry the boat whither it directs. But let that oar slip from the hand of the rower; let him lose his hold and allow it to fall away, and it lies on the water a helpless thing, tossed hither and thither at the caprice of the waves over which it had hitherto held sway. And there is only one thing that can restore it to its former position and usefulness, namely, that the hand of the rower should again grasp it and handle it as before.

In the passage for to-day we have, first, the picture of a man fallen from his position of power. What had this man been before? The strongest man that ever lived; the champion of Israel and the terror of the Philistines. Rage as they might, his enemies could not withstand or overcome him. He had spoiled their crops, he had taken away the gates of their city, he had slain them by thousands, and he had foiled them time after time when they hoped to have captured him.

Whence came his wonderful strength? It did not lie in his bodily frame or stature. It was a distinct gift of God, given according to his need. He was destined by God to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines," and it was for this purpose that, time after time, we are told, "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him," and he was as an oar in the grasp of a powerful man, smiting the hostile waters, and scorning all their attempts to restrain his course. Of this he was himself aware. And he knew that the continuance of his strength depended on his remaining faithful to his calling as a Nazarite consecrated to God. Chap. 13. 5, 16, 17.

How did he lose it? He had used himself too much to his own way; to please himself, instead of simply pursuing the work to which God had called him. And so in a moment of temptation he slipped from the mighty hand that had held him; he lost the outward mark of his consecration, and found, in his time of need, that "the Lord had departed from him."

And now what was his position? He became like a mere piece of wood, drifting helplessly on the waters, tossed hither and thither at their wild will. His enemies bound without hindrance the man who had so often eluded their grasp; they put out his eyes; they took him a prisoner to Gaza, the city he had once robbed of its gates. They set him to do the work of a woman or a slave, to grind at the mill. And when the day of their festival arrived they brought forth their captive to make sport for them. How low had the warrior, the Nazarite of God, fallen!

But Samson might have said, in the words of the prophet: "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, then shall I arise."

Micah 7. 8. For we have, secondly, the picture of a man restored to the position he had lost.

How could such a restoration be effected? In but one way. The hand of the rower must once more grasp the fallen oar. The clasp of the Mighty One must once more encircle the wanderer. And so it was. The Lord did not forget his erring servant. The outward mark of his consecration began again to show itself. The repentant captive was encouraged to cast himself once more upon his God. It was a large request that he made; but as he felt the hand of Jehovah round him, his faith grew bold and expectant. Yet it was not for personal freedom that he asked, but that he might once more be used to carry out the Lord's design of deliverance for Israel. The answer followed, and at one blow a crushing national disaster was inflicted on the enemies of God's people by means of the very instrument over which they had been triumphing. Samson died a conqueror.

The Golden Text indicates for us what we are to learn from these two pictures. The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people. Most young people have some desire to do good in the world, to fight, and with success, on the right side; to overcome evil both in themselves and others. How may such desires be realized? Only by placing themselves in the hand of the great Worker, or rather, by suffering him to lay hold of them, to fit and use them for his purpose. The hand once pierced for their sins can use them mightily. All their attempts apart from God must be futile. The sea of this world's evil is stronger than they. And though they may seem now and then to be victors, it is but as the drift-wood floating on the top of the highest wave, to be presently dashed down again, and flung, perchance, as a worthless thing upon the shore.

And there is comfort for those who, once held and used by God, have slipped away from his hand. That hand is ready to grasp them again, to restore them, and work with them whatever he sees good.

BEREAN METHODS.

Hints for the Teachers' Meeting and the Class.

Draw a map, showing the location of Samson's exploits and death.... Briefly present his life, especially showing how great were its possibilities, and how great was its failure.... Show the causes of Samson's failure in 1. Selfish use of power; 2. Frivolity—spirit of play and jest; 3. Worldly companionship; 4. Sensuality—the domination of lusts.... Show in Samson in the prison the condition of the man of God when backslidden into sin—weak, blind, enslaved, burdened, despised.