

## Our Contributors

### A Strong Man's Failure.

(A TALK TO YOUNG MEN BY REV. PROFESSOR  
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Samson is commonly regarded as the typical strong man. In the great gallery of portraits where Abraham represents faith, Job patience, David kingly chivalry and Daniel moral courage, he is the embodiment of physical strength with its privileges and dangers. Samson lived in a restless, turbulent time when the very life of his people was at stake, and when he was able to play a great part just in so far as he was willing to use his strength in an unselfish spirit to patriotic purpose. It may seem that there is little similarity between such disorderly days and our own orderly life and quiet circumstances. But human nature is the same, the principles that rule in society, the passions that dominate the souls of men are similar. The truth that receives such rhythmic repetition in this book is real however much we may differ as to the arrangement of the actual historical facts. The hour of a nation's weakness is the hour when it has forgotten God and forsaken righteousness. This is written in many forms of history and parable "Lest we forget."

But we are now concerned with this striking picture of a strong man and the leading principle of his life as seen in the part that he played in a rude restless age. In his day war was not a matter of scientific strategy and death dealing machinery. The time had not come for men to say:—

"By sleight of sword we may not win,  
But scuffle mid uncleanly smoke  
Of arquebus and culverin.  
Honor is lost and none may tell  
Who paid good blows. Romance, farewell!"

It was well known then who paid good blows, Samson had that credit and reputation; the big burly fellow ravaged like a lion among the crowds of weaker men, his deeds of daring were on a large scale and struck fear into the heart of the foe. In his life we may read with gold letters the lesson that strength of body is God's gift to be used for His glory, and for the good of men. This lesson still needs to be enforced, and warning against the "falsehood of extremes" is not out of place. One extreme is to treat the body as a coarse vile thing, a part of our nature that hinders our highest progress and of which we need almost to be ashamed. The other is to make the cultivation of physical strength the chief end of life, and then to use it in base sport or reckless pleasure, or in other words to apply a sacred gift to profane purposes.

There is little need now to spend one's strength against the first position. There was a time when many believed that the cultivation of physical strength clashed with the claims of religion. It was thought that the saintly men must be pale and thin. It was not merely the subjection of the body but its utter abasement that was demanded as a condition of saintliness. Now we have changed all that, we have learned that there is nothing specially Christian about dyspepsia, and that a man's melancholy is no proof that he is near Heaven. The change has not been brought about by scoffing at fanatics and hypocrites, but by advancing

knowledge of physical science and by the thoughtful teaching of broad minded Christian men. We have heard much about "muscular Christianity" and have been reminded that soul and body are closely connected and come from the same source. Hence manly sports and athletic exercises for our young men are vindicated and glorified. In this there is good but there is also danger. When we see wild enthusiasm over a game of football, we are painfully reminded of the many good causes that are languishing for lack of similar energy. We are glad to see such interest in this side of life, but we see clearly that the new oneness may be worse than the old. If it is true that England's battles were won on the playground, it is also true that battles may be lost on the playground. Kicking or striking the ball cleverly may be a poor thing if the man is poor in nature and has no higher aim than the amusement of the hour. The glorification of brute force has its dangers, and the determination to win at all costs may be a delusion and a snare. Professionalism and gambling bring false excitement and real degradation into many forms of amusement which otherwise might be healthful and helpful in the fullest sense. The fact is that only the man who possesses high moral and spiritual qualities can make the right use of extraordinary physical powers.

Samson's Glory:—Samson is not by any means the highest type of man, indeed it is not fair to compare him to men like Paul and John. The Christian religion has produced a loftier ideal of manhood, its great heroes and martyrs are men of refined thought and gentle feeling. Samson shows a wild recklessness which is not saintly in its style; but he came from godly parents and had some real religious zeal. Every man to his own work, he lived in unsettled times, and his work was rough requiring great force and dashing bravery. His glory was largely in his physical strength, but he must have possessed some noble qualities of mind and heart to be in any measure a champion and judge. A mere big bully could not have held a useful position among intelligent and high-spirited people. In his own way Samson realized that his strength was God-given and that it meant a call to special service. This strength was wonderful but it was not miraculous in the modern sense of that word; it came along the ordinary channels of nature when these were sanctified by the influence of religion. It has been well said that a man's education should begin with his parents, it is so also on this plane. Samson owed much to the self-denial and wholesomeness of his parents. The story of his birth as well as his life contains a protest against the use of fiery stimulants which burn up strength while they create excitement. If such warning was needed in those days when life was simpler and freer and so much time was spent in the fresh air, how much more should we heed it now when the conditions of life are more artificial and complex. Cleanliness and temperance are the conditions of physical strength; the strong arm, the clear eye and steady nerve cannot be long maintained by those who indulge in wild revelry. Samson at his best represents the soberness of at least two generations and hence there came to him this great glory that he was a man of extraordinary strength and was

called to fight the battles of his country.

This was patriotic just as in our own time it was a patriotic thing for many of our young men to give their lives in the defence of the Empire. The patriotism that fights the visible foe we can all understand and in our moments of war-like enthusiasm we cheer lustily for those who have risked their lives in their country's service. But let us remember that there are many enemies to be met that cannot be conquered by strength of limb and muscle. The glory of a young man is his strength but the question is, will he so use that strength as to attain to higher glory. This was a real glory, it is a splendid thing to be strong, not troubled by aches and pains, not easily tired and vigorous for work and for battle, to move about among one's fellows with a feeling of safety and superiority. Who would not covet such strength and the glory that it brings!

Samson's Weakness:—Samson was strong and had great glory in this sense that he was able to scatter great hosts of outside enemies but his weakness is shown in his inability to conquer the stormy passions of his own soul. This weakness does not ruin him at once, it grew upon him and was carelessly neglected. In his career there were many days of vigorous working and glorious fighting, times of success when all seemed to be well, but all the while there were forces at work in his life that boded no good. Without being over critical it is easy to note, as we read the story of his life, faults which it allowed to grow bigger and blacker may cast down and disgrace the strength of men.

He shows even in his deeds of daring a love of display. There is an air of bravado about his most splendid performances. He rushes recklessly into great danger that he may show how grandly he may come out again. He seems to display himself continually and say "Look what a strong great hero I am." We know that strength is naturally joyful and what seems to be boastfulness may be but the manifestation of uncommon energy. If a man has extraordinary strength it may well show itself in his whole bearing. All this is quite true but when strength is too self-conscious, when it grows boastful and seeks applause for itself instead of using itself in service, something of its real glory has already departed. All this is especially true when this activity takes the form of fighting. If a man uses his fists in defending one who is wrongfully assailed, that is a noble use of the "art of self defence," to fight thus in a ring for the sake of money and vulgar fame is a degrading business. To fight in the political realm for a good cause is inspiring and uplifting, but to contend in the same sphere merely for "gain" is a low form of activity however much skill may be displayed. Now Samson made his public work too much a personal matter. He ceased to carry on his country's warfare on a high plane of patriotism, and used his strength and his public position for private purposes. His own intrigues and quarrels became of supreme importance. He fought for himself instead of for his country and his religion. Hence that in his life which might have been a real glory shrank into miserable littleness.

In this way the strong man forgets that his special strength comes from God and is given for sacred purposes. Then