

of God that He has given us in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ an ideal not human, but divine. But notice that the more early this battle is undertaken the more surely it is won. Hercules, while yet an infant, strangles the serpents sent to slay him. He who strangles serpents in his youth will slay monsters in his manhood. He who has early had strength to conquer temptations will not be so likely later to lose his self-reverence and his self-control. If in the flush of youth he has sat at the feet of law, he is little likely to rebel afterwards. And these were the truths which the Greeks succinctly expressed by representing their hero in the skin of the lion he has slain. Thus in early life men can best win this victory while yet they are not dominated by a corrupt present, and are still unhampered by a faithless past. Victory is won more easily at fifteen than at twenty, more easily at twenty than at twenty-five; and ten thousand times more easily at thirty than at sixty. Samson, while he is young, while yet the sunny locks of his obedience to the moral law lay in waves upon his illustrious shoulders, could meet the young lion that rose against him as easily as if it were a kid. He could do so no longer after his locks were shorn, after his life was sullied, after he had yielded to sensual temptations. When his heart had been corrupted, his will more effeminate, his hopes depraved, you will see him rending lions no longer, but toiling as the drudge of his enemies, the companion of slaves in turning the mill at Gaza. And David, while he was a pure and ruddy shepherd, while his heart was white as the lilies he twined round his harp-strings, and his thoughts as pure as the dew upon their leaves, when a young man uncontaminated by the life of cities, he could fight for his lambs, and with unaided arm overcome the lion and the bear; he could

not do it after that sin with Uriah and with Bathsheba. Then the rustle of a shaking leaf was enough to terrify him, and the crown fell from his head; he became weak as water and fell before his own worthless son, sobbing, barefooted, cursed by his enemies, and followed with those dark spirits of lust and murder. Which of us has not been in one way or other defeated as Samson or David was? Which of us can encounter that poison-breathing lion in the dark caverns of his heart, and strangle it as fearlessly as he might have done? How grandly has Milton expressed this idea that sin is weakness when, in "Paradise Lost" he gives Ithuriel's rebuke to Satan, and proceeds:

So spake the cherub, and his grave rebuke,
Severe in youthful beauty, added grace
Invincible. Abashed the devil stood
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Virtue in her shape, how lovely; saw and pined
His loss, but chiefly to find here observed
His lustre visibly impaired.

And again, in the case of our first parents and their unrest and weakness after their first sin. An American writer of genius describes the first transgression which he can remember. "Time," he says, "has led me to look upon my offence more leniently. I do not believe it or any other childish wrong is infinite, as some think, but infinitely finite, but often think—had I but won that battle!" Oh, my brothers, we may be unable to recall the first time we do wrong; the memory of your first transgression may be clouded over by time; but is there one here who does not from his heart regret that he did not win that battle? But let us not despair. It is never too late to fight, never impossible to slay that lion, or to feel that you should tread the young lion and dragon under foot. If the grace of God shows exquisitely in some soul pure from its youth upwards, growing, like the Lord Jesus, in wisdom and