

brings ruin to the apostate; 5. That the secret of a Christian's strength cannot remain with the man who violates the law of Christian purity.

(6) See in his last prayer, (as implied, at least :) 1. A *public confession* of his God; 2. A *penitent confession* of his sins; 3. A *perfect consecration* of himself to God.

(7) See, in a dim outline-shadow, the one who gave his life to destroy Satan and to save Israel. As Bishop Hall says: "So didst thou, O blessed Saviour, our better Samson, conquer in dying; and triumphing upon the chariot of the cross, didst lead captivity captive; the law, sin, death, hell, had never been vanquished but by thy death. All our life, liberty, and glory, spring out of thy most precious blood."

An English Teacher's Notes on the Lessons.

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It is impossible to teach on Samson's death without dwelling first upon his life. And there is no life in all Scripture so perplexing. To find the key to it we must consider:—

(a) *Samson's commission.* God raised him up for a special purpose, namely, to deliver Israel from the bondage of the Philistines. It was for this that his great strength was given him. It was for this that, as we are told, (chap. 13. 25; 14. 6, 19; 15. 14,) "the spirit of the Lord came upon him."

(b) *Samson's character.* Here is the puzzle: was he a true servant of God? How could he be when he was so manifestly the slave of sin? And yet if he were not, would he have been mentioned among the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews? Of course we must not judge a wild warrior of the period of the Judges by a Christian standard; but still Samson falls far below Joshua or Gideon. The fact is that he is a *mixed* character. We must regard him as a servant of God at bottom, hating the Philistines as God's enemies, willing to risk his life for God's people, acknowledging God's hand in his victories and resorting to him in his extremities, (see especially chap. 15. 18,) and probably showing himself an upright judge during those "twenty years," (chap. 15. 20,) of which we are told nothing. Yet with all this we see in him a wilfulness, a self-pleasing, a cruel and capricious use, for his own purposes,

of the strength which was God's gift, which quite spoil his character; above all, we see his self-indulgent habits leading him, strangely enough, to consort in sin with those who were themselves Philistines, and drawing him further and further from God, until he was only "scarcely saved"—"saved so as by fire."

But Samson's character and history might well be used for a whole series of Sunday-school lessons, for he is the type of many a boy—and many a girl, too—vigorous, impetuous, wilful, "lusty, and strong," (as the Psalmist calls it,) whose very faults we are apt to admire, whose energy may be of the greatest use in God's work, but who falls an easy victim to the allurements of temptation. And as we have but one lesson on the subject, every teacher should both strive and pray that it may be specially blessed to such scholars.

In coming to our immediate subject, Samson's death, it is essential that we thoroughly understand all that led to it. To this end let us examine the connection of his strength with his long hair.

1. *Why did his strength lie in his long hair?* The answer will be found by a reference to chap. 13. 5; 16. 17; Num. 6. 5; 1 Sam. 1. 11. The long hair was the symbol of his Nazarite vow, that is, of his special dedication to God's service. There was no magical power in the hair itself, but it was what our English Prayer-book calls "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," like water in baptism, like bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Therefore the strength, though bodily, was not of the body, but of the spirit.

2. *Why did the loss of his hair involve the loss of his strength?* Of course it need not have done so, but it pleased God to use the symbol as visibly expressing the reality. Samson sinned; by sin he cut himself off from God; and God might justly have at once recalled his gift. But he did not (see chap. 16. 9, 12, 14, until Samson openly apostatized by suffering the sacred symbol to be taken from him, (which he virtually did by not guarding it sufficiently.) And then those significant words, "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him," show that he had already departed so far from God that he felt no difference when God departed from him. Nor would some of us.

3. *Why did the growth of his hair in prison imply the revival of his strength?* It may be