

The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B. . . . APRIL, 1893.

EDITORIAL.

WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. II. Cor. xii. 10.

The apostle's paradox is eminently worthy of the careful consideration of all, as the aphorism is universal and not particular. It is true of others, as well as of Paul, that when they are weak, then are they strong? Experience proves this, and memory preserves it in its sweet fragrance and utility. The journey of time runs not over smooth planes, but is constantly interrupted by vicissitudes called "the ups and downs of life," and happy is he who so understands and treats these ups and downs as to assign to each its proper place.

Changes are the necessary order of changing time. Our food perisheth with the using. Our clothing grows old and is replaced with new. Even the bodies we now inhabit are earthly and must be put off. God can prepare us for the house from heaven. The true Christian earnestly desires that house, not to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (II. Cor. v.) To be unclothed was only desirable as a preparation for better clothing. Paul desired to be weak that he might have Christ's strength—to be empty of self—to be filled with Christ. He had no desire to glory in himself, but when driven to it by the unkindness of others he would glory in his weakness, because it was in the valley of reproaches and suffering for Christ he gathered his choicest jewels.

The saints of both Testaments rose from extreme weakness to the greatest power attainable on earth. In recording in the 11th of Hebrews the victories of that "great cloud of witnesses," the climax is reached at the 34th verse in those who "out of weakness were made strong"—so strong as to put to flight the armies of the aliens. Abraham had no greater joy than when from Mount Moriah he saw Jesus' day (John viii. 56), when passing through his severest trial. What were his earthly prospects when he led to the altar the son of his old age, the dear son of promise, the progenitor of the Messiah, who asked, "Where is the lamb for a burnt sacrifice?" He had the fire and knife, and Isaac carried the wood, but he had no lamb, and could only say, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt sacrifice, my son." But this answer satisfied both father and son, "so they went both of them together." Isaac's sweet obedience must have bound him stronger to his father's heart. But without any hesitation he bound Isaac, laid him on the altar and took the knife to slay his son.

But He who "spared not His own Son" spared the son of Abraham, who beheld a ram caught by his horns in a thicket, which he slew and offered instead of Isaac. How severe the trial, how grand the victory of the friend of God! (Gen. xxiv.)

Moses chose affliction with the people of God rather than the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. When he was weak, then he was strong—had a strength which came from seeing Him who is invisible.

David was a happy man, and never were his triumphant strains sweeter than when passing through sore afflictions. It was when he fled in weakness before Saul and his armed hosts he composed the wonderful 34th Psalm:

"I will bless the Lord at all times,
His praise shall be continually in my mouth;
My soul shall make her boast in the Lord,
The humble shall hear thereof and be glad," etc., etc.

He was so weak as to be but a step from death and so strong as to make his boast in the Lord, and to call upon young and old to join in his triumphant song. The Lord was with him in the valley of the shadow of death and he would fear no evil, and when the grave claimed him as its victim his tongue was glad and his flesh would rest in hope, because God would not leave the soul of Jesus in hades nor suffer his holy One to see corruption. But David anticipated the superior strength of New Testament saints when God would fulfil the promise made unto the fathers in raising up Christ from the dead. In the 72nd Psalm he speaks of the wisdom and popularity of His son Solomon, how the kings would bring unto him presents and offer gifts. He mentions at the 11th verse His greater Son—Jesus, thus, "Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." Why this universal dominion? "For He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper."

Such are the characteristics of the Son of David, and the languages of earth may be challenged for a better description of a perfect Potentate. He is the warm friend of all the poor, all the needy, all the helpless. He hears their cry and can and will deliver them. Although they deserve all their misery, He died for their sins, and can be just in hearing their cry and delivering them.

The New Testament records the character and life of Jesus as foretold by David. He did deliver the needy when they cried unto Him, the poor and helpless. He was constantly healing the sick, expelling demons and even raising the dead. When two blind men heard that Jesus passed by, they cried, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David," and when the multitude rebuked them they cried the more, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." They were poor and had no helper; they were discouraged and rebuked by others; but they cried to the Son of David and He heard and delivered them from blindness. (Matt. xx. 30-34) When the woman of Canaan in her distress cried to Him for her daughter, who was possessed of a demon, He seemed at first to refuse her. But she had no helper and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, help me." She would not be put off. At last the Son of David exclaimed: "O, woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee as thou wilt." And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matt. xv. 22-28) He heard those who pled for themselves and also those who pled for others. And He is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. He was crucified in weakness, but now lives by the power of God to fulfil this grand prediction.

When the Jewish rulers threatened the apostles with certain death if they spoke any more in the name of Jesus, what could they do? They could appeal to no earthly tribunal, for all were against them. They were poor and had no helper. They met with their brethren and pled with God through the Son of David to strengthen them for the work. The place of meeting was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were stronger and still more successful in their work. (Acts iv.)

Paul and Silas preached in Philippi. In the midst of dying sinners they earnestly and lovingly declared from day to day that Jesus died for their sins and was most anxious to save them and make them happy for ever. But no one seemed to pay the least attention to them, but a maid possessed with a demon. She followed them, crying out, "These men are the servants of the most high God which show unto us the way of salvation." But Paul wanted no such aid, and he expelled the spirit. But when her masters saw that they could make no more money by this fortune-teller, they caught Paul and Silas, drew them to the rulers, falsely accused them of crimes, and without a trial they were severely beaten, thrust into the inner prison and their feet fastened in the stocks. This was

hard treatment for their constant labor and anxiety to make the people happy for time and eternity. But what could they do? Where could they look? All were against them. At midnight Paul and Silas prayed. Surely they were poor enough, needy and had no helper. But they remembered the Son of David—His sufferings, His triumphs and His promises. Their prayers were turned to praises and the prisoners heard them; God heard them, Jesus heard them. An earthquake shook the prison, out of weakness they were made strong, spoke the word of the Lord to the jailor and to all that were in his house, and all of them were rejoicing believers in God before daylight and became the nucleus of the grand church of Philippi. When I am weak, then am I strong?

The Corinthian brethren had been unfair to Paul, compelling him to defend his apostleship, and then calling that defence self glory. He should have been commended of them, for he had among them proved himself not a whit behind the chief apostle. Still he was nothing in himself, and if driven to glory it would be in his infirmity, unworthiness and weakness. He knew a man in Christ fourteen years before caught up to the third heavens, whether in the body, or a disembodied spirit, he could not tell. God knew this. But Paul knew how he was caught up into Paradise and heard words unlawful for man to utter. What great honor was conferred on such a man, what abundant revelations he must have received in hearing the conversation of heavenly inhabitants? This man was Paul. At one time he was in Paradise hearing the conversation of heaven, at another on earth, pierced with a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. This thorn was so loathsome and severe that with all his heroism and endurance he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart, but he must bear it. In which of these states would Paul glory, in the abundant revelation or the thorn in the flesh? In the latter, certainly. Which was the most dangerous, the vision or the thorn? The vision, most assuredly, and it was to save him from its danger the thorn was sent. Verse 7).

If the Old Testament was written for the learning of primitive Christians (Rom. xv. 4), both the Old and New were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. This is true of all Christians, and especially true of those most concerned for the triumphs of the gospel and the enlargement and prosperity of the church. Preachers, good men and true, are often sorely tried when they see so little resulting from their labors, few or no conversions, troubles in the church, a continual decrease by deaths and removals, and, still worse, by exclusions. In the meantime a readiness to lay the blame on others, who, in return, are just as unwilling to bear the blame. How blessed it is when all helps fail, to remember the Son of David, who Himself was made perfect through sufferings, and will not fail to deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor and him who has no helper. We doubt not, but the reader can remember the times of darkness and discouragement and also the bright seasons which followed, "When the enemy came in like a flood and the spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him." Let these words of Christ dwell in us richly, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," and we will find it "better to walk with Christ in the dark than to walk alone in the light," and that His strength will be made perfect in our weakness.

The World's Congress of Churches will be held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition. The Disciples of Christ occupy two days, September 13-14. For three hours our speakers can address the multitudes in the great hall. The rest of the time the speakers will be heard in some of the smaller halls in the building.