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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

STRENGTH AND BEAUTY.

By the REV. R. F. WRIGHT, M.A., LL.B., PH.D.

“Strength and beauty are in His Sanctuary”—Psalm xcvi. 6.

THERE are three parts to the ideal holiday : the months of anticipation, when guide books and maps are consulted and plans carefully made ; and there is the second part, which is the realization, when we revel in the beauty of mountain and stream, of sea breezes and pure atmosphere ; and last, but by no means least, there is the recollection, when the holiday is past. In some ways, this last aspect is the best, for it need not quickly end. And we to-day, if we have been wise, are happy in our recollections. The winter is now upon us, and around the fire we shall live again that holiday as we look at our snap-shots and talk together of those happy times, of the places we visited and the things we saw ; and amongst those happy recollections, some of the greatest, I hope, will be the Churches we saw and in which we worshipped.

There they stand in every village, treasures by the wayside, sermons in stone ; and although we cannot all be antiquaries, yet we may all learn something of the lessons which each period of architecture has to teach.

The circular arch carries us back to the Norman period with its massive masonry—simple but of solid strength. It has stood for nearly a thousand years against the ravages of time. We are told that these Normans were not really good builders, but they were wise in using such solid material. Look at any Norman building and it will speak to you of strength.

But one tires of it at length and even in the twelfth century men's minds craved for something more beautiful. And so, above the solid Norman arch, they built a Gothic triforium, with all its beauty of flower, figure and form—carving most exquisite—Beauty. “Strength and beauty are in His Sanctuary.”

May we not take that as a holiday recollection, as we look back ! That is what the Psalmist was doing when he gave expression to this lyrical outburst ; his mind was dwelling on the characteristics of the Temple. What the Temple meant to the Jew it is difficult for us to comprehend ; but two things impressed him : Strength and Beauty.

Two great brazen pillars stood at the entrance twenty-seven feet high. Boaz was the name of one, which means Strength ; and the name of the other was Jachin, which means Support. Strength was in the Sanctuary.

But around the pillars there was ornamental work, copied mostly from nature : pomegranates and lilies. There was beauty in the Sanctuary.

Now the Temple was not merely a landmark, no more than our village Churches are. It was the outward sign of the Invisible God ; and in the strength and beauty of the Temple, the Psalmist saw something of the nature of God ; and from the vision of God we see the ideal character of man.

The strength and beauty of God ! How vividly these are portrayed in the life of our Lord. There have always been great men in history whose strength has inspired us ; but there were few, if any, who had no weak spots in their armour : desire for fame, love of praise, dislike of hard things, or an inordinate love for a worthless woman. History is full of such. But in the character of Christ, strength was perfect. No weakness sapped His moral power. Let me give you two instances.

It was a social gathering in a highly respectable home. Simon the Pharisee had invited Christ to dine with him. It was an act of great condescension, intended as a signal honour. The company was very select. But unbidden, unwanted and unaccustomed to such company came a poor sinful woman of the streets. She had no right there for she was a social and moral outcast. Weeping she stood near to our Lord. She brought Him a present, which although very costly was not always associated with the highest conduct. Her tears washed His feet, and her hair she used as a towel. It was an embarrassing position, and would probably be misconstrued. Simon's thought speaks volumes. "If this man were a prophet, he would know." How many strong and good men would have insisted that the woman be shown out ; fear of their own moral prestige would have weighed too heavily. Pity for the woman would not have made them strong enough to take up an unpopular and doubtful side. But the Christ is unmoved by the thought of social standing or the frowns of men. "His strength was as the strength of ten because His heart was pure." He never swerved from loyalty to truth. Popular opinion left Him unmoved. Men flattered, tried to frighten, feigned to be disciples, threw mud at His character and nailed Him to a cross ; but from the truth He never swerved. "Strength is in His Sanctuary."

What a contrast He forms with the world to-day ! How many, I wonder, would be willing in this present age to go to the flames for their faith. The history of the early Church in this respect is a spiritual tonic for us to-day. Yet, there are some, no doubt, even in this generation, as in every other, whose strength of faith would carry them to the flames or the wild beasts, and then not fail them : men and women whose lives are founded on a rock, and are moulded by convictions and not by conventions ; and in this they reflect their Master.

But the Psalmist saw something else besides strength in the Sanctuary. God was not only the source of Strength, but also the author of Beauty.

"Strength and beauty are in His Sanctuary."

Think again for a moment of those exquisite lilies which adorned Solomon's Temple, or of that beautiful tracery on the Gothic roof ; but what are these compared with the beauty which the Christ revealed in His life ! Let us return to the story of the sinful woman. We have seen the strength of Christ's character ; look now at its beauty.

Jesus not only disregarded the sneers of men, but with what skill and delicate beauty He dealt with the woman. The scornful eyes of the Pharisee are scorching the very soul of the sinful woman. Her position was an intolerable one. Her own shame and the scorn of men were more than human being could endure ; and the Master saw it all, and with the skilful stroke of the great artist He turns the eyes and attention of the Pharisee from the confused and suffering woman to Himself by asking an interesting question in the form of an absorbing story. "A certain creditor had two debtors" : fifty pence and ten times that sum—you know the story ; it is in the seventh chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. The woman is forgotten ; and with unflinching loyalty to truth, Christ lays bare the soul of the Pharisee. What strength ! and yet what delicate beauty is revealed in His dealing with the sinful woman. Great has been thy sin ; great is thy love ; and she went forth into a new world.

Time passes, and the shadow of the cross lies in front of Him. Does His strength fail Him ? No. He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. In strength, not weakness, He went to Calvary's hill. Strength was in His Sanctuary. But from the cross what beauty shines. "Father, forgive them" : he prays for his murderers in the hour of suffering ; and in the moment of His own intense physical need, He thinks of the creature comforts of a widowed woman. "Woman, behold thy son" ; and a home was provided. In the midst of spiritual power there was spiritual beauty.

Now, just as there have always been men of strength in every age, so there have always been men of grace and charm, the beauty of whose words and thoughts and actions has inspired us ; but it is very rare that one finds both these qualities united in the one person as they were in our Lord. Strength and beauty were in His Sanctuary.

David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, gave us exquisite poetry, in which beauty looks at us from every angle ; but was it not marred by the weakness of his character as revealed in the sordid story of the wife of Uriah, the Hittite ? Few men have shown more beautiful love than Peter. "Even though I die with Thee, I will not forsake Thee." "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What beauty of vision and devotion ! But then "with cursing and swearing," he said, "I know not the man." O ! the weakness of it all.

In the age of the Reformation we see these two qualities in striking contrast in the persons of Luther and Erasmus. The unknown monk, stammering and trembling, yet defying the Pope, the Emperor and the Empire, and bringing in the Reformation. There surely was strength ; but how lacking was the beauty. No one can read some of his letters without asking : "Is this a Christian man ?" Erasmus, on the other hand was a scholar, philosopher and humanist ; his was the greatest pen of the century. His thoughts on war, toleration and the beauty of the Christian life form the greatest product of his generation ; but Erasmus was a coward. "I have no desire" he wrote, "to be a martyr" ; and when danger came or witness for truth was needed, Erasmus was missing or became ambiguous.

Men of strong convictions are so often those whose lives are

marred by the absence of beauty. We admire their strength and are thankful that we have not to live with them. The French Calvinists, the Scotch Covenanters, and English Puritans were as strong as they were sincere ; but they were often as ungracious as they were intolerant.

There are others, whose lives are so gracious, their thoughts and words so kindly, their motives so considerate, yet withal, marred by inherent weakness ; they will not stand by you unflinchingly for the truth, or give their unqualified support for an unpopular cause.

In Solomon's Temple, strength and beauty were united. In Christ, strength was beautiful and beauty was strong ; and what of us His disciples ?

Conviction is the foundation of the Christian life ; it must be built upon the rock—" I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able." " Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ." If we cannot say these things then we have built our temple upon the sand ; and as the temple of the Holy Ghost we must possess strength ; for strength is in His Sanctuary. But the pillars must be adorned. There are lilies to be carved, and the perfect beauty of the Saviour to be worked out in the hard, cold stone of our lives, in thoughts, words and deeds ; for

Strength and Beauty

must be revealed in the Christian Sanctuary of life.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE NORTH WEST FRONTIER. 3s. 6d.

INDIA AND THE PACIFIC. 3s. 6d. By C. F. Andrews. Both published by *George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.*

Is Pundit Andrews becoming more and more revolutionary ? Does his love for India and all things Indian lead him to take up positions which are untenable ? Many who read these books may think so. The first is a protest, possibly a timely protest, against the vast military expenditure caused by the maintenance of a large British army on the North West Frontier of India. He believes that India is Great Britain's crucial test and asks : " Do we truly desire that the people of India should govern themselves ? "

In the second book he deals with the problems created in the islands of the Southern Pacific and more especially in Fiji by the clash of interests between the English, Fijian and Indian races. The latter are the descendants for the most part of the Indians who were indentured for work in the sugar plantations. Their condition has greatly improved, but they still suffer from disabilities with regard to the acquisition of holdings and in other ways and are threatened with the loss of the franchise. Here, also, Mr. Andrews calls for the exercise of British justice and urges Englishmen to pass on their birthright of freedom to others.

A. W. PARSONS.