

ness are ended, and light shines forth again, and God returns to reveal himself to you in the fullness of his grace, then for you also there is abundant refreshing. And then you perceive and confess that had not God led you through this depth of forsakenness, you would never have experienced such deep joy in your soul, as now became your portion. Only after having led you through this depth of darkness, was God able to bring you out to such abundant refreshing.

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“FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.”

To go from strength to strength is to grow, to wax strong, to increase. It is not to remain what we are, and mostly retrograde. On the contrary it is to advance, to make progress, to become richer, fuller and more abundant in faith, in virtue of which to become richer in godliness and in fruits meet for repentance.

God shows this growth from strength to strength in plants. When the oak first starts to grow, it can be bent over with the hand, but when it obtains size and becomes a full-grown tree, it is able by its strength to resist the hurricane. The same is shown in animals. The young colt which at first is scarcely able to stand up becomes after a few years the strong horse, after whose power man estimates the power of steam, which laughs at the heavily laden wagon, and with rider in saddle leaps over wall and hedge.

But God shows this process more beautifully in our own child. First the helpless babe, which is fondled on the lap, and has to be carried on the arm. Then the struggle with the difficulties of

learning to walk, until at last it succeeds when the ankles have become stronger. And so the growth goes on until full maturity is reached; and then there is strength for a hard run, the bold jump, the climb of a steep rock, the defiance of weariness and fatigue.

All this is material. The growth of oak and horse, and the growth of the child, with regard to the body. But this increase of strength is not confined to the material; from the visible it extends to the invisible. There is also development in the human spirit. Development by training of the artistic talent, which was latent at first, then made itself known, and gradually became capable of mightier utterance. But there is also development through training, education, and self-exertion on the part of the thinking spirit to furnish the store-house of memory ever more richly, to clarify the insight into the world round about, to grasp unity in multiplicity, to feel the relation between dull reality and high idealism, and thus to stand ever more strongly in spirit and might. Always growing, ever increasing, with the excelsior-flag around the shoulders climbing the mountain steeps.

This development from strength to strength becomes different, when we pass on from the invisible in art, and the invisible of the understanding, to the domain where character unfolds, and the moral man is formed and steeled. To obtain strength of will and gradually to steel this will power. To feel the waking up of the sense of honor and to see it come to an ever finer point. To see the bud of fidelity and honesty unfold and blossom ever more beautifully. To

observe by the side of sense and love of truth the rise of hatred against falsehood. To become ever more deeply conscious of the sense of justice, to see the seriousness of life increase. O, it all presents the beautiful image of a going from strength to strength in the inner personality. In body grows the man, in understanding the scholar, in character the person.

But even this does not express the meaning of going "from strength to strength" in the song of the Psalmist. In the child of God there is still another life; the life of Divine grace. In this life also there must be advance, growth and development. Here, too, the law must operate. Not to remain what we are, but to go on and to go further from strength to strength.

In the world of matter, growth has its measure, its limit. In the acorn it is assigned how high the oak which springs from it shall be able to lift itself. At first it sprouts, then grows and gains, but at last the limit, the measure is reached; and then the oak may expand in thickness of trunk and breadth of foliage, but there is no more gain in height. Such is the case with animal growth. From being little, it becomes large, expands and becomes full grown. In the course of a few years, however, sometimes after only a few months, or even weeks, the measure of the animal is exhausted, and its size remains what it is. The same applies to the human form. Far more slowly than animals man gradually reaches his growth in height. This takes sometimes twenty and more years. But at last the measure here, too, is complete. Then there follow changes, fuller strength, and expansion, but he gains no more in height.

With old people not infrequently there is shrinking and diminution.

With the artist also there is a moment in his life when he has reached his zenith, and the fullness and richness of his expression of art rather decreases than gains. In the intellectual domain there may be a few whose minds at 70 or 80 years of age are still fresh and green, and even excel in depth and wealth of scope—but for by far the most the boundary line is here drawn, beyond which there is no more advance, and which indicates the end of development. Only in the domain of morals and of the unfolding of character this limit by itself can not be shown. Love and consecration can ever increase. Solidity of character can advance in strength even unto death. And this claim is imposed upon the child of God. No reaching of limit here on earth, but always a going further and further. Even until death a going from strength to strength.

But here our misery appears, which alas! obtrudes itself inexorably even upon the work of grace. Observe it with yourself, watch it with others. See it in a child of God, after an absence of ten or twenty years. For then you ought to see in him, and he in you, as with eyes, and handle with hands, the ripe fruit of this ten or twenty years' work of grace. And is it so? Can it be truly said, that a child of God, who was converted in early life, at 60 years of age is ten years farther advanced in grace than he was at 50? Do you feel and observe a doubling in the power of grace when you meet again at forty years of age him whom you lost from sight when he was thirty? Do parents, after the measure of their

years, as a rule, stand so much higher? Is the oldest child in the family always farthest advanced in grace? Observe particularly certain defects in character, certain well-known weaknesses and little sins, that showed themselves unpleasantly in a child of God, ten or twenty years ago. Meeting such a brother or sister again after this interval of years, is the change marked as a rule, and is it observed with joy, that all these unpleasant sins and defects are gone without leaving any trace? Or is it not rather true that after twenty and more years you find all too often in your acquaintances and friends, yea, in your own children and parents the same limited grace, which you mourned in them before, and this gift of grace as intricately bound up with the same thorns and thistles as before? Moreover, when you consider yourself, and examine your own life before the face of God, are you not bound to confess with shame, that sometimes ten long years have advanced you no single step in spiritual growth, and that the old weeds still flourish with old-time luxuriance in the field of the heart within?

What is the ordinary course of things? Is it not that one becomes converted; that after conversion he concentrates his mind and soul on holy things, and in all sorts of ways acts differently than before, and that in doing this he becomes conscious of a rupture with his past and the beginnings of a new life. At first it is even too ideally strung, so that after a few brief years a calmer state ensues. And this stage of the life of grace in most cases becomes permanent. It remains what it is, but growth there is none. One feeds on what was gained as spiritual capital in

that first period of grace. There is considerable increase in knowledge, as well as in spiritual experience and in spiritual wisdom, but there is no acquisition of higher strength. Sometimes even there is a relapse, which is not survived except with much difficulty. And so there is considerable satisfaction. There is no striving after higher things. And one remains what he came to be until death.

We do not say that this is the case with all. There are those, thank God, who burn as shining lights in the congregation, and who do not cease all the days of their lives to drink deeply from the cup of grace. But yet how different would the revelation of the kingdom of heaven be among the people, if all they who believe, who know themselves to be children of God, from the hour of conversion until the day of death, would cause the call of progress to be sounded in the soul. Who can say what it would be in the heart, in the home, in the church of God with every one of us if it were and ever continued to be, an uninterrupted going forward *from strength to strength!*

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“BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART.”

A truly sinless, pure heart is the precious possession in the eyes of a child of God which he always prays for, but which here on earth he never obtains. They who stand outside of the faith are not considered here. We fully grant that they value purity of heart. We do not deny that they strive after it. But what they mean by it is something else. For the child of God