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STRENGTH IN TROUBLE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

THE CHAPEL

OF

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE,

FEBRUARY 23, 1851.

BY

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THE following Sermon was written without any view to its being printed, and was delivered in the ordinary course of College services. Several of those who heard it having expressed a desire to see it in print, I gladly offer it to them in that form, with my affectionate wishes for their welfare, and especially for their spiritual welfare.

W. W.

TRINITY LODGE,
February 24, 1851.

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A SERMON,

&c.

ISAIAH XXX. part of 15th verse.

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.

THESE words occur in a warning addressed by the prophet Isaiah to his countrymen, in which he rebukes them for seeking strength for their weakness and help for their distress by recourse to foreign allies and new friends; instead of following their ancient guide, the command and word of God, and lending their aid to strengthen His government, as it had long been established among them. They were harassed and distressed by various menaces and assaults of enemies, by invasions and calamities, now on this side and now on that; and so their minds were thrown off their balance; they were shaken out of that position of trust in God, submission to his will, and determination to abide, through all events, in the way in which he had placed them, which was their true course of conduct as the especial people of God, favoured, directed, and protected by him. They wanted to call in the aid of that ancient foe from which God had so signally delivered and separated them. They wished to be sustained by arms and by combatants of a different kind from those which God had appointed for them, and through which he had so often given them the victory. The old polity, the old spirit, the old mode of warfare, they

thought were no longer to be depended on. They were eager for new modes and new helps. On this disposition the prophet pronounces God's condemnation, (chap. xxxi. 1) "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord." And in like manner in this chapter, ver. 1. "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord; that take counsel, but not of me; that cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin: that walk to go down to Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth: to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and trust in the shadow of Egypt." It is supposed by Commentators that some of the Jews, in their consternation at the impending invasion of the Assyrians, even proposed that the nation should renounce its national religion and assimilate itself to the religion of Egypt, in order to obtain the protection of that kingdom. But even if this were not so, the prevalence of a disposition to disregard the ancient commands and ordinances of God, through which the nation had hitherto prospered,—to let slip the trust in God by which they had hitherto been strengthened and supported,—and to look out for some new mode of dealing with the national affairs, some new principles of polity and religion to remedy the defects now supposed to be felt in the old,—was an offence grave enough to call forth the sternest prophetic rebukes, and to bring down upon their heads re-

doubled denunciations of "woe," if they persisted in such a course of conduct. And along with these rebukes and denunciations, the prophet points out to them what is their true and genuine course. He declares that the Lord shall utterly frustrate and extinguish the new policy thus suggested: he shall break it like the breaking of a potter's vessel, so that there shall not remain a potsherd to take fire from the hearth or water from the well: and then he adds: "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Though these words were thus, on their first delivery, applied to a national policy, and uttered with reference to a nation bound to God by a special covenant of service, obedience, and promise; they do not on that account lack adaptation to us, with reference both to private and to public matters. For God's dealings with his chosen people are, we know, full of instruction for us;—contain, in every page of the record, things which were written for our ensample, and warnings and exhortations which have a scope beyond temporal interests and past times. And if, in such exhortations and warnings, the Jews could be reminded, at every step, of a special covenant by which they were bound to God;—which they violated by disobedience and mistrust, and which was for the faithful, full of promises of hope and joy; are not we too bound to God by a covenant of far better promises, and under it vowed to a deeper and more healthful obedience? If under the old law those

were addressed who had made a covenant with God with sacrifice, are not we too included in the appeal, for whom a covenant has been made by a far better and more precious sacrifice, of which that former rite was merely the type and prophecy? If they had been marked as the especial servants of God, have not we also been signed and sealed as the soldiers and servants of Christ? received into His fold, placed under His protection, admitted as inheritors of His eternal promises? Well then may we apply to ourselves what is said to the subjects of that older dispensation, and seek comfort and protection, support and hope, from the mighty Lord under whom we are placed by the dispensation in which we live: well may we too expect to find, as they were taught to believe, that under such guardianship, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength. Let us then consider some of the ways in which we may apply to ourselves this exhortation, and make it a means of guidance and encouragement in the various trials and dangers to which we may be exposed.

In the first place, the exhortation which the text contains may be regarded as enjoining, to every servant of God, a resignation to God's will, a trust in God's goodness, and a dependence on him alone for relief, in all that may happen in the course of his earthly career. When great dangers or great sorrows menace men, it is difficult for them to sit quietly waiting the impending blow. When the heaven grows black with clouds and the coming tempest strikes men's hearts with fear, they rush this way and

that for shelter; often, as if there must be some gain in mere movement, some advantage in being elsewhere than where they are. But yet when a man is once accustomed to feel himself under the care of God's providence, he learns to subdue this feeling of agitated consternation. He knows that his life has been full of blessings. Most likely he can perceive that many things, which at first seemed to him as great calamities, have been among his greatest blessings. He has sought to be at peace with God through Christ. If he have attained to this, what real calamity can reach him? If he have not yet attained, what calamity can be so great as his not obtaining this blessing? He has sought intercourse with God by prayer. He doubts not that God hears him and answers his prayers, in the manner which is best for him. He knows how much better is earthly and temporal adversity, joined with heartfelt prayer to God, than the greatest worldly prosperity of those who do not pray to God, and who live in the world with no feeling of his presence and no intercourse with him. He knows that any adversity which may happen to his body or to his fortunes, is but for a time, and that if he can gain acceptance with God, all such sparks of trouble will be extinguished by the great and exceeding weight of glory which shall be his lot hereafter. All that happens to him, good or bad, here, is but a preparation for that;—a preparation, as bringing him into nearer intercourse with God, here, for a perpetual life in his presence hereafter. In so far as he is already in communication with God through Christ, he is

already at home : whither then shall he flee, however tempests rise and storms rage? His strength is to sit still. To hope for safety or satisfaction elsewhere is mere illusion. It is the result of the well-known deceptive tendency of the human faculties, by which those places which are distant seem smoother and fairer than those which are near. It is the result of forgetfulness of him who alone can save and can destroy. It is wandering and mistrust, instead of quietness and confidence, and therefore it is weakness instead of strength. Our true strength is in the feeling which our Lord's disciples expressed : "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Happy are they who have in their inmost heart this source of strength ; happy they who rest in such a quietness growing out of such a confidence. They remain still, though the world be moved, for they hang upon heaven. Their daily prayer is, Thy will be done on earth, through all commotions, as they know it is done in heaven, through endless ages of serene joy. Their belief, which they are taught to entertain more and more confidently as they grow to the fulness of Christian life, is, We know that all things work together for good to them that love God ; and this belief keeps them, though always active in obedience, and abounding in the work of the Lord, still, in their reliance, steadfast, unmoveable, inasmuch as they know that their labour is not vain in the Lord.

But as there may be sorrows and afflictions arising from outward causes, which may drive men to search

where their strength really is, and may lead them to the happiness of finding that it is in quietness and confidence, if they have really put themselves in God's hand; so may there be internal trials, troubles of the soul, hazards of faith, perplexities of mind with regard to the truth of God, which may, in like manner, make them seek for the best dependence which they can find. As there may be, in the outer world, storms and earthquakes, wars and rumours of wars, so that the frame of the world may seem to be shaken and the foundations of the earth and of man's material life to reel to and fro; so may there come times when the foundations of man's spiritual life seem to be shaken; when opinions rush this way and that, like armies in fierce and wild warfare; when the doctrines which have long been received as most certainly taught in scripture, are called in question, or have a new aspect given to them by men of busy and eager minds; when men ask for more certainty, more light, more authoritative teaching, more manifest completeness and system in the doctrines taught: and when, by the prevalence of such commotion in the atmosphere of religious life, even the calmest and least presumptuous Christian is called upon to consider the grounds and foundation points of his faith; is hardly allowed to abstain from doing so. For it is a peculiar feature of such times of shaking and confusion in the minds of men, that they who have themselves fallen into perplexity and wavering, as to matters of Christian Faith, are vehemently bent upon drawing others into the state of mind in which they themselves are. Though

they own themselves to be astray, and to be unable to find the way to the truth, they are most importunate and imperious that others should come away from the ancient paths, and try to join them, or at least, wander as they are wandering. They are altogether impatient and reproachful with regard to those who do not move either forward or backward, either to the right hand or to the left. And so contagious is this kind of vehement commotion of the thoughts, that it may sometimes shake for a time the most stable of Christians; till they are by some experience accustomed to this tumultuous zeal about knowledge without knowledge, this movement without aim. But when this first agitation of the mind, arising from the impetuosity of such appeals, has somewhat subsided, we reflect that all those vehement cries which we hear around us cannot make the truth cease to be the truth. They cannot deprive us of the belief which is founded on habitual intercourse with God in prayer. They cannot take from us that Saviour who has delivered us from the load of our sins, and opened to our spirits the gate of everlasting life, and shed his Spirit on our hearts in many an hour of private devotion. They cannot blot from our recollection all those servants of God who have gone before us in his faith and fear, holding intercourse with him through the forms of worship which we use; reading in his Scriptures the truths which we from our childhood have been taught to read there; departing this life in the assurance of Christ's second coming, which they have transmitted to us. The truths on which they rested their minds

and hearts and souls, cannot have melted away by the mere lapse of time. That which was true then must be true still. That which was the means of communion with God then must be the means of such communion still. That which was the meaning of man's birth and life and death then, must be its meaning still. God cannot change because man is ever changing his notions and his mode of expressing them. God cannot become farther from us because man is unquiet and mistrustful: or rather, from those who are presumptuously unquiet and carelessly mistrustful, he will withdraw himself; but if we continue quiet and trustful, we shall still keep hold of the consolation of his presence; we shall still feel that he does not leave us nor forsake us; we shall find he has not forgotten his goodness so long bestowed: we shall receive the sure mercies of David, and in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.

There is one form, in particular, which may be taken by these struggles of opinion, these impulses towards religious change without settled religious conviction, these attempts of the unquiet to drag into their mazes those who are quiet in the land. There is one especial form which such attempts may take, in our time, and amongst ourselves, which bears a close analogy to the state of things under which the warning contained in the text was uttered. The prophet condemns those who, alarmed and disturbed from their self-possession by the troubles and dangers of their nation, turned their eyes towards Egypt, and had a tendency to seek safety and strength in friendship

with her, and in the use of her arms;—*that* Egypt from which God had so wonderfully led the nation forth by signs and wonders and a stretched-out arm—that Egypt whose abominations were hateful to God;—that Egypt, their deliverance from which had been the beginning of their national freedom, the foundation of their national greatness. Nevertheless, as in the desert, when any hardship or obstacle came in the way of their progress, there had been among the Israelites those whose hearts turned back to the flesh-pots of Egypt; so now, when they were menaced by foreign enemies, there were, among the variety of opinions called up by fear and mistrust, those who looked to Egypt as a refuge and support, a source of strength and safety. Such a tendency *we* also have sometimes seen among some of our own nation. For we too, as a nation, have, as you well know, had a deliverance from captivity and darkness; from spiritual captivity and spiritual darkness. We have had our Exodus, and have been led by zealous and favoured servants of God into a land flowing with the milk and honey of religious blessings;—with the free grace of God, and the free use of his word and ordinances. We have come out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage;—out of the land of idolatry and the house of intellectual thralldom—into a region of pure worship and reasonable service. We have been enabled to cast off the unrighteous tyranny of those who make themselves lords over God's household, and to secure for ourselves, we and our forefathers, religious freedom, as we have secured also civil free-

dom, in a measure of blessedness beyond almost all other nations. We have thus come forth out of the land of Egypt, by God's blessing, once and for ever. Who would return thither? Who would tread back the steps of our Exodus? Even if at times we are vexed with contentions and struggles, with doubters and gainsayers, with obstinate questionings, it may be, beyond our power to answer; with the weakness of authority which naturally grows up among those who are, above all things, jealous for freedom;—even if such evils at times assail us, who would seek to escape them by returning back to slavery? by again submitting ourselves to a human authority which silences all questioning and decides all controversy by its own absolute sentence? Yet such a disposition may sometimes be discerned among us, amid the whirl of opinions on matters of religious concern. Men, impatient to know more than God has taught in his Scripture, would rush back to the teaching of men who assume the place of God. Men, offended at the conflict of opinions which they see going on around them, would fain have among them an infallible judge of controversies. Men, dissatisfied with the simplicity of the means by which in our common worship we endeavour to raise our hearts to God, desire to behold again Egyptian pomp and splendour. Men disturbed at some of the circumstances of the Exodus by which we were brought to our present condition, are ready to speak evil of that great and blessed event in our history. Men, framing to themselves in their minds an ideal church of God upon earth, and seeing that the visible church in which they live falls short of

their idea ;—as every visible church from the times of the Apostles downwards has fallen short of the pattern which Christ's commands imply, and which would be worthy of what Christ did for us ;—men, I say, thus dissatisfied with that which is near them and which they see, imagine that their idea must be realized in that which as yet they have not truly seen. In all these, and in many other ways, there is called up in some men's minds,—in times of impatience and vehemence and levity and presumption, such as these in which we live,—a disposition to tread back the steps of our national religious history ; to reject all that we have with so much labour gained ; to move backwards, since they see so many perplexities and difficulties in moving forwards. But surely we shall be too wise, too grateful to God for the mercies which we have received, too happy in the spiritual blessings which we at present enjoy, or may enjoy if we will take them ;—to feel any sympathy, to look in any way except with pity and sorrow, upon such a disposition and tendency. We shall see that for us now, as for the Israelites when they were solicited again to put themselves under subjection to Egypt because something at least must be done ;—we shall see that in spite of all these impulses of fear and trouble and discontent to which some yield, our strength is in quietness and confidence ;—in quietly standing on the ground on which we have stood ever since that deliverance ;—in firmly confiding in the doctrines in which so many generations of pious and religious men have found their consolation and support ;—and in holding fast those religious ordinances which have

brought to our nation so many and so great blessings, and would have brought far more and greater if they had been duly and consistently maintained, and extended, as the nation itself grew and spread. The more we calmly examine our foundation and our condition, the more we shall find that we are justified in this quietness and confidence. The very cries that we hear from dissatisfied and vehement voices, persuade us more and more that this is so; for they cry at one season this thing, and at another that: at one period the loud murmur rises that we have, in our Exodus, gone too far; at another, a murmur no less loud that we have not gone far enough. And when, for a moment, these passionate outcries subside, and we can listen to the voice of Scripture, to the counsel given us by the universal history of Christian lands, and to the reasonings which have already been held respecting such matters, by the thoughtful and pious teachers who chose for us the ground on which we should stand, and drew for us the lines of our platform;—we then perceive that all that there is of coherent significance and argument, in these various and discordant complaints and reproaches, had already been fully weighed and answered; and that they contain really nothing which ought to disturb or diminish our quietness and confidence, or make us doubt that in them is our strength.

But it is not with regard to religious matters only that we are importuned to deviate from the courses which we have hitherto held, and seek, in some new appliances, remedies for the evils of our condition. There are many persons who seem to be

overwhelmed and bewildered and affrighted at the many and various forms of evil which they see prevailing among various classes of our countrymen. They see poverty and want, hunger and nakedness, vice and crime, profaneness and blasphemy, dissoluteness and foulness, ignorance and degradation, on every side, filling the atmosphere with gloom, blotting out the light of day, and making, as it were, a darkness that may be felt. Even worse than this, they see, they think, prevailing between one class and another, hatred and envy, malice and revenge, tyranny and servility, a thirst of wealth and a thirst for a destruction of wealth, impulses which seem to them like wild and tempestuous blasts, howling in every quarter of the blackened sky. And so deeming of our condition, they are loud and vehement in urging that something, at any rate, should be done;—some new movement made;—some new thing tried;—some new source of strength and healing sought, before we perish in the ruin which thus hangs over us. They do not themselves propose any remedies for our diseases which will bear a moment's examination;—not any in which they themselves have any settled belief. But they have an impulse to rush this way and that, as the mere animals do when the storm rages above them; flying from every place because it is full of fear, and finding a new fear wherever they go. They would rather that we should move any whither than that we should stand still;—that we should seek relief by any new appliance than that we should go on hoping in those which are already at work. And yet a moment's consideration will

shew us how unwise and weak we should be, if we were to yield to such impulses as these. Even in such a case as that which we have made our image, if a man were assailed by the buffetings of the tempest in the darkness of night so deep that he could not see his path, it might be wiser to stand still than to stumble onwards into chasms and pitfalls. This would be so, even if we could believe our condition to be such as we have said it appears to those who thus exclaim against our quietness and our confidence in the influences which have hitherto prevailed among us, to work on the side of the good and against the evil. But with heartfelt gratitude to God, we say that this is not so. That there is around us much of misery and want and ignorance and vice, we too well know; and let us by all means avoid the disposition to extenuate these inflictions in any way which may relax the zeal with which we endeavour to apply to them the remedies which Providence has placed in our power. But we have good ground for a stedfast confidence that Providence has provided,—not indeed instruments which can extinguish such evils, so long as man is what he is,—but means and institutions and principles by which they may be perpetually resisted and repelled and made to recede, if only we use these means with energy and faith and hope. As powers that may be our strength in resisting the vice and misery and ignorance which are in the world, we have the blessed Gospel, the teaching of Christ, the message of good tidings and the commands of mutual love and mutual help, which he gave to men, and which, however feebly obeyed, have still not been

without their force, and are not now, we trust, without a mighty efficacy. We have, we say, among us, as an aid and support, the Spirit of Christianity; we have, too, the institutions of Christianity,—our Christian sabbaths, our Christian teaching, the Christian superintendence of each local flock, the united worship of the company of Christ's disciples in every spot and region throughout our land; and in every spot and region also, a provision for the bodily wants of the needy and destitute, such as is given to the poor of scarcely any other land. We have growing provisions for combating the ignorance of the growing generations, by Christian instruction, bestowed under the care and with the aid of the ministers of the Gospel. With all these helps and supports, it would indeed be weak and unthankful to despair. It would indeed be unwise to lament and quail as if we had no strength; as if all that we have around us supplied no powers of good to enable us to resist the evil. No! while we thus fear and despond, we are like the servant of the prophet, who, when he saw the place, where they were, surrounded by hostile armies and hostile chariots, exclaimed that he and his master were lost; but when God had opened his eyes, he saw that, on their side also, were chariots of fire and horses of fire, and was ready to receive the teaching which told him "they that are with us are more than they that are against us."

But while we thus open our eyes to the views which shew us that our strength is in quietness and confidence, it behoves us above all things to consider that this is not to be understood, of the quietness

of inaction, of the confidence of carelessness. It may indeed be true, that our strength is in quietly and steadily adhering to the good influences and good institutions that we have, rather than in unquiet and hasty attempts to discover some new remedies for our diseases, some new way of salvation: It may be that our strength is, in our confidence in these influences and institutions: but then, it must be a confidence in them which shews itself in the constancy and energy with which we labour to make them effective. When Isaiah exhorted his countrymen to quietness and confidence in their own national position and divinely appointed ordinances, he did not intend, nor could intend, that they were to be inert in the service of God, or slack in using the means of defence and prosperity and success, which He had of old wrought into their constitution. To shew what strength there really is in our religion, and in the powers and characteristics which God has given to us as a nation, and in the institutions which have been transmitted to us from the earliest Christian Churches, or have grown up among us in the course of our history;—This is the great task for all of us, so far as we take any share in the fortunes of this land. If we would really do our part, in order to resist and repel the flow of evil which sometimes so appals and terrifies even brave hearts among us, it must be ours to persevere, to elevate, to purify the spirit of Christianity in our land; to extend, to all, Christian ministrations, Christian education, the influence of Christian Sabbaths and Christian ordinances. We can all do something in this way; some of you may perhaps be so far

favoured by God as to be able to do much. Indeed there is none of us who, if he keep such objects constantly in view, keep his heart constantly and deeply impressed with the importance of these objects; take every occasion of forwarding them, beginning from this time—if he has not already begun, and going on till God shall call him away from this struggle of good and evil, to answer for what he has done and what he has left undone;—there is no one who, if he thus pursues this great object of the promotion of a Christian spirit and Christian education and Christian ordinances, during the day that is given him to work, may not do what may well be considered as much, if it be compared with that which men in general, languid, and careless, and without faith and without hope and without charity as they are, commonly are content to do. And O, my friends! if you who now hear me, and those who, race after race, occupy the place which you now occupy, would really go from this scene, which you will most of you soon leave, into the world, with this resolution, to use your powers and to spend your lives in thus resisting the long growing evils of the land by means of the antagonist influences which have ever prevailed and still prevail amongst us;—if you would carry into life such a plan of action; (inconsistent with no scheme of life, and with some callings, the only plan of action which is at all consistent:)—if you would do this, what a blessing to our beloved land would this place of preparation be; and how, in a single generation, would the evil spirits tremble for the duration of the reign of evil among us, and how would the angels which surround the

throne, raise a song of joy when they should learn the progress of God's kingdom upon earth!

But there is one thing which we must not omit to say, although on the present occasion it must be said very briefly. In order that we may hope to promote a Christian spirit and Christian training and the influence of Christian institutions in *others*, we must first feel the operation of these things upon ourselves. This must be our first aim; this is a necessary preparation for those larger plans of life of which I have spoken; as such plans, supervening on such a preparation, best support and foster the Christian spirit caught in youth, and supply the fuel by which the early spark of religious earnestness may be fed into a vigorous and enduring flame. While you are here, then, let us exhort you to preserve and confirm in yourselves all Christian habits, and to seek to infuse into these a spirit of true and heartfelt religion. Keep up a lively intercourse with God through Christ by private prayer, and by a reverent and devout disposition whenever we meet here to join in the common worship of God. Let your Sabbaths be to you seasons on which religious thoughts, religious studies, religious exercises recur, and aid in raising your souls above the turmoil and the trifling which so readily creep into every-day life. Let such days especially remind you of the Christian duty of avoiding, not only all sin and impurity, all temptation to evil, but also, all scenes of unseemly levity and unhallowed mirth. Consider how great is the weight which these years of your lives have to bear: how much depends upon your forming here a manly and



worthy view of the value of your own purity and sobriety of mind ; how much to yourselves, how much to your country, how much to your destiny in time and in eternity. Seek to make your weeks roll round like the wheels of a chariot which is to carry you along the road of God's commands and purposes ; which is to bring you continually nearer to the gate of heaven. And so doing, may the Spirit of God descend upon you, week by week, and day by day ! May the satisfaction of Jesus Christ our only Saviour wash out your sins week by week, and day by day. As one day telleth another and one night certifieth another, of God's glory shewn in the visible world, so may they tell and certify of your daily approach to God. As the sun, in his goings forth and returnings, marks and numbers the seasons of your sojourn here, and rejoices to run his course, so may your spirits rejoice, month by month, and year by year, to tell what God has done for *them*, and how much greater his doings are in the spiritual than in the natural world. And especially whenever, as now, you come to that Table at which our Lord himself once sat, and to which he still invites you, may you indeed be ready to offer up yourselves, your souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice to him ! may you find relief from your sins, rest from your troubles, strengthening for your weakness, the feeling of God's friendship here, and the hope of an everlasting life of blessedness, when we and our troubles, our wants and our labours shall have passed away !
