

ing through all this confusing mystery. His legal training had accomplished this facet of his nature. "If it be of God . . ." That is, indeed, a wonderful pair of scales on which we should place all the movements that are under foot at this very moment. All that besets the human race can be weighed here.

If the march of the masses toward a better plateau of living is also the march of God, if the long, loud groans of the human spirit for freedom and security are at once and the same time the groans of God, if the disconcerted breaking up of old systems and loyalties is accompanied by the Almighty, then man is foolish to buck it. He cannot succeed in the process. Man is no match for his Maker!

Herein is a wonderful source to strengthen our faith. When God ordains that certain things should happen, they are going to happen—all the loud protests of men notwithstanding. This is what we call inevitable providence. Some have called it predestination, but call it what you like, there is a time and tide in the affairs of men which will swell by the sheer force of divine magnetism. God's endorsement to the note of life is all that is needed to assure its being negotiable.

LOSING FIGHT

To fight against the doings of God is just as sensible and consequential as some of the midget submarines that were employed by one nation against its enemies in a recent war. The tiny subs were made of cheap metal alloys, and the few that eventually made contact with the target did practically no damage. Just think of it—a little tin submarine attacking the steel bulk of a floating aircraft carrier. No more absurd, however, than a human being with his little fists doubled and his little tongue profanely protesting the work of God!

This band of humble Christians left from that hearing with Gamaliel, unmoved by his detachment and untamed by his indifference. Rather, they departed rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer in His name. Neither the whip, nor insulting ridicule silenced one mouth. Theirs was an infectious fever and an undying fervor, and to this day it burns with consuming brilliance.

May God give us that inner fire that would face today's Gamaliel undaunted, undismayed, and with daring certainty that this is the work of our God.

IN DELILAH'S LAP

February 9, 1958

The lap of Delilah is no place for a Nazarite. At least, it was not the place for Samson. That young man was born to Godly parents and had all the promise needed to turn out successfully. An angel had appeared to Manoah, Samson's father, and had announced the coming of a boy who would bless their lives. One would think that anyone whose birth was accompanied by angelic enunciation would be bound to succeed, yet the very opposite happened. I want to tell you about it.

His very name suggests strength—force and power. When his name is mentioned now (centuries later), it still suggests a formidable tower of ability. But the boy with the big biceps turned out wrong. Part of his trouble was sensual. Most of it, however, was the fact that he, like many of us, never learned how to fight successfully the battles within him. So long as he was called into battle from

without, he did all right. But on the battleground of the human will, out on the firing line of passionate emotions, he was little more than a puny weakling.

THE WRONG ENVIRONMENT

The morals from this Old Testament lesson are many. A place to begin is with the honest conclusion that in the wrong environment one is most apt to weaken. A good man in a bad place is a questionable set of circumstances—if, for no other reason, a good man cannot always be sure of what his own reactions will be. It is not an afterthought that the Bible admonishes, "Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Peter wasn't sure of his reaction under adverse conditions. In the wrong environment he weakened, drew in the lines of his faith, pinked in the blush of embarrassment occasioned by the question, "Aren't you one of them?"

and in that chilling environment denied the One whom he had sworn that he would follow even if all others completely denied Him.

Samson was a man of extremes. The early accounts relate how he encountered a young lion and killed him with his bare hands. Yet the lap of Delilah proved a more powerful temptation than the lion. In one rage of anger, Samson tore off the gates of Gaza. Bound later by his indulgence, he could not free himself from the fetters around his hands and feet.

Just think of it: Samson, a Nazarite, a Hebrew, now in the company of a Philistine prostitute. But what must be remembered is that Samson had been married before, and his sensual nature was the propulsion by which he went down to the plains. He was out of his element there—a good man in a bad place. This usually presents to Satan his most arduous challenge. Here is a good illustration of how evil is intensified when one is away from home. Away from those who love him, from the familiar voices and radiant faces, one is apt to rationalize his loneliness, to lean toward the sensual, and to encourage unconsciously the worst element of his nature.

PERSISTENCE OF EVIL

Once this muscular man from the hills had reclined with his long shaggy locks in Delilah's lap, she began to press him for the secret of his strength. She began a marathon of questions with the hope that he would divulge it, and the Philistines could riot the Hebrew people. She had the brashness to base her request on the statement that she loved him. My, what a coverall that phrase has been, "I love you"—which, in too many cases, means: "What will you give me?" or "This is the means by which I get what I really want!" etc. Like a jovial kid, Samson told her a variety of misleading things about his strength—each tried on the spot and proved to be wrong. Yet, she did not stop her efforts. As a matter of fact, sin is never done.

The devil can sit up all night, every night to win his point. Yes, he is willing to play second fiddle; or for that matter, fourth fiddle, if by so doing he gains ad-

mission to the secrets by which human life is held together. If he cannot win by a left approach, then he tries by the right. If neither of these yields him vaunted ground, then he tries a frontal attack. Failing there, a rear attack is proposed until one way or another he discovers those locks of dedication.

Under the dim lights of her feminine persistence (as she caressed his long hair), finally he told her that the secret of his strength was in his hair, that from his birth never had a razor touched his head. Hardly had his voice dropped when this treacherous antecedent of fifth columnist cried out to her own people, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson," and he rallied as before to defend himself. This time his efforts were in vain.

Now, there was no real strength in the man's hair. The point of the story is that the hair represented a sacred commitment. He had let it grow as a symbol of his dedication to God and things holy (much as the motive for which one fasts today.) Yes, it is altogether possible that a symbol (especially when it is a part of one's body) can be regarded with such psychological and spiritual devotion that once it is gone, a person is rendered powerless for the time being. In this state of shocked impotence, the Philistines bound him hand and foot. His seven long locks now shorn from his head represented a deeper tragedy than his baldness. The Bible says, "And the Lord had departed from him and he knew it not." The loss of his black locks meant nothing compared to the loss of the divine presence.

WHY GOD WITHDREW

What does it mean to say that the Lord had left him? Haven't we always thought that man left God instead of God leaving man? Yes, there is a time when God must withdraw Himself from a person's heart. When His holy purposes are thwarted with willful and continual indulgence in some Delilah's lap, then God becomes insensed by such travesties on things holy. He gets tired of human nature's insistence on company with harlots, then He makes His exodus. When God leaves a person, it means that the sense of consciousness of God is taken away. Oh, the words and

mechanics are still there. A person still mouths the Shibboleths, goes through the motions, continues his genuflections of religion, but the sense of that which is high and holy has long since vanished. It means that life has lost its common denominator, that the Rosetta Stone by which the hieroglyphics of life are deciphered is no more in man's possession. The slide rule is lost to mathematics; there is no longer πr^2 for the fractions of life. The seas of life are sailed without a compass; the planes are flying blindly with no radar scope.

Look at him—Samson; there he is, a three hundred pound physique lying prostrate. Instead of standing tall with forearm heavenward, now he grovels in the dust bound like a common animal to grind in the grist mills of the Philistines. Now, flat on his back in chains he assumes the position of the dead (that is, horizontal). Like Samson, many a person living today knows exactly what I am speaking about. They know, in their honest moments, that no sense of God or Godliness lives within them.

Like a man who insisted on witnessing the electrocution of a young boy who had been found guilty of murdering an innocent young girl. When asked why he wanted to witness such a pathetic sight, the man replied, "I want to see him burn all the way!" When the agonizing ordeal

was over, the man got up from his chair, turned around in the room, and spat! I think that is something of the reaction of one from whom God has taken all kind of leave.

WHEN GOD LEAVES

What is it like to have God leave you? It is something like the magnificent, colonial mansion which I saw not long ago, a mansion begun by a wealthy capitalist. The man had dreamed of a beautiful old colonial home in a setting of tall pine trees. When the house was framed and roofed, the man died—never to see his dream completed. Ten years later the scaffolding was still around the incomplete mansion. Samson was somewhat like that. He started out with brilliant promise; he wound up in a trough of spiritual decline. They put his eyes out and reduced him to a common slave. Sin will bind you, then it will blind you, then it will grind you—a threefold descent to the grave.

That story closes with one long sigh on Samson's part, a sigh which became a prayer, a prayer that he may take with him in his death more than he had slain in his lifetime. And that he did. Here was blindness of soul compounded by a prayer of revenge.

So Samson died and a fitting epitaph: A man who might have been.

THE POWER OF PAUSE

February 16, 1958

Every living creature needs to cultivate the power of pause. He needs to know when to stop. Trying to keep up the pace and not being able to bear the strain is one of the major symptoms of modern man. One of the early Gospel accounts says of the busy people in Palestine two thousand years ago, "There was much coming and going so that there was not even so much leisure to eat." If that were the case in Palestine (where the mode of travel was on camels or donkeys), how much more true is it today when our pace is measured by jet propulsion?

So, let us look at our pace and see the wisdom of pause and the power that such pause will generate in our lives. Out of honesty I must admit that a diagnosis is

much easier than a demonstration of the cure. Yet, if we do not at least move in the direction of the ideal, we shall never relieve our lives of these destroying tensions. Some visitor from another planet viewing this earth would probably conclude that the purpose of life on earth was a race—a race to catch the next train or subway, the next street bus; a race to work, to play; a race home; a race to church; a race to a cemetery!

JESUS' PRESCRIPTION

Jesus gave us the only excelling prescription by which life is to be lived out on earth in time as well as in eternity. He made it distinctly clear that human life is a unity: it involves the health of mind,