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2 Cor. 12: 7-10.

William Marsden.

Many and various have been the speculations on what was the apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh," or "stake in the flesh" as it ought to be. Although speculations are by no means certainties, experience has abundantly demonstrated the ease with which they take that shape in the mind, gathering to themselves in consequence an importance and an influence to which they have no manner of right. The apostle's "stake in the flesh" has not escaped this experience. From the days of the early fathers down to our own times writers have pronounced upon it, giving their views with more or less certainty. But worse than the tendency to speculative dogmatism have been the reflections on the character of this noblest of men in some of the theories advanced. Roman Catholic writers have been the worst offenders with their prurient and unclean theory of a tormenting carnal desire. The monks of the middle ages in their lonely cells took comfort in thus finding the apostle afflicted with a weakness which made him a man of like passions with themselves. To-day this revolting view is the generally accepted teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. An appreciation of Paul's character, in its beauty and elevation, as so clearly revealed in his writings, ought always to have been a sufficient vindication against lewdness. And it is more than likely that this would have been so apart from the proneness in men to see in great leaders, especially moral and spiritual, the frailties of which they themselves are victims. Then, too, an appreciation of the apostle's words in verse 9: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weakness," would equally have saved him; for it is not within the range of possibility that he could have gloried in a carnal weakness. The early fathers more soberly, and with a proper regard for exegesis, decided the "stake in the flesh" to be some form of bodily ailment. And now again the commentators are back to the original theory—that of some severe and disabling physical malady. This is a conclusion warranted by the apostle himself in the text before us, and in the kindred reference, Galatians 4: 13-15, which provide the only facts in the case. We are told by Paul that his weakness was an affliction given to him as a counterpoise to, and to save him from, spiritual pride, a danger of the "exceeding greatness of the revelations" he had received; that it was an infirmity of the flesh the agony of which was as a stake running into the body; that it showed its self outwardly, and was repulsive to look upon; that he dreaded it as a hindrance to his work by making him

repellent to those who would see and hear him. An assumption remains, which may be considered a fair one, from the reference in the Galatian account, that the eyes were the seat of the affliction, or at any rate were a part of it.

Whatever the malady it took a loathsome and almost unbearable form, and to the apostle's sensitive mind was as a stake in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. Three times he solemnly implored the Lord to remove the infirmity from him. Then came the answer. His gracious Master spoke to him: "My grace is sufficient for thee: power is made perfect in weakness." The



W. MARSDEN.

implored petition was ungranted, but the prayer was answered, and answered with infinite compassion, infinite insight, infinite wisdom. The affliction was to continue, but its meaning and purpose were explained. The words were a new light to the suffering servant. For the first time he understood. Never again would his petition be repeated. It had only been made because he saw in the affliction a dragging, useless hindrance to his him. No doubt to which his Lord had called him, but that meant less to him than did the success of the gospel. His Master knew the urgent need, and would surely listen to his repeated requests, and remove the dreadful embarrassment from him. When understanding came, Paul was a man made over again. Eternal issues were involved in the matter of his prayer, issues that involved first of all his own soul's welfare. The integrity of his spiritual life had been in jeopardy. That which he had looked upon as pulling

him down, as crushing him, had been the saving of him. In this way the Lord had been guarding him against himself, saving him from a self-exaltation that would have soared above measure. It was all so new, so startling, so beyond his own computations, yet wital so full of divine regard for himself and promise for his heaven-given mission, that his whole being went out in full surrender to his thrice beloved and all-loving Saviour. The apostle knew already something of the wonderful power of Jesus in the saving of men from their sins, and the restoring of them to the life of God; he would surely know something of the uses of afflictions in the divine purpose; but what he did not know was that bodily weakness or any other hard experience could become the soil out of which spiritual strength would grow to perfection. But knowing it now he is forever satisfied. To have the grace of the Lord always sufficient in his affliction; to know that he was being kept from even a taint of self-pride; that he would grow from strength to strength till the highest was reached; that this would make him mighty to the pulling down of the ramparts of Satan and the freeing of sin-bidden men; and that each day he would be realising more and more, even to the end and beyond, the best that life held for him. Can it be wondered that he accepted, welcomed, rejoiced in, the very burden which, but now had seemed so well-nigh fatal a drag?

But we must avoid any mistake. The apostle does not rejoice in weakness, but in the finishing, perfecting power of weakness. Weakness of itself will perfect nothing. There must be power as well as weakness. Paul understood this. The good result required the two in combination. The weakness was the divine discipline; the power, struggling against and striving through weakness, was the gift of his Lord. The marvel was in the fact that weakness could be used to such mighty purpose. This being so, where weakness is and must be, then welcome weakness. Thus the apostle welcomed it, saying truly, "for when I am weak then am I strong"; and joining on to bodily weakness those other ills that press from without—injuries, necessities, persecutions, distresses—and borne for Christ's sake.

The inestimable value of divine strength working through the apostle's weaknesses is seen in the after results. Surely never another life is to be compared with the life of Paul. Is not this man, in bodily presence so painfully handicapped, a marvel of character and accomplishment? He compassed sea and

and with his immortal message, braving and enduring terrible hardships and dangers; he faced the might of the world, standing before kings and governors; he answered all gain-sayers with a wisdom and power they could not withstand, winning myriads in contrition to the feet of Jesus; he gave to that vast heathen world the foundations of a new and holy life, which still holds the ground against the contending but barren theories of worldly philosophy. All this he did and more with a loftiness of life, a force, a passion, a purpose, that may only be explained as he himself explains it—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The merely human will not account for the sum of a life like this. It is a phenomenon that can only be understood in the grace and power of the Son of God. In this way we have an adequate cause for this outstanding life, a cause that demands no limitations nor toning down.

What food for reflection is provided in this soul-searching experience of Paul's! We see in him one who found in affliction the summum bonum of life. He found it in conquest over sin and self, in perfecting holiness, in merging himself in the life of God. He found it in the hard way, which he travelled so willingly, so unflinchingly, so long, but sustained by the comfort and power of his Lord; and never forgetting that suffering had its prerogatives. He won not thinking the cost heavy. Even after his accumulated sufferings, with his mind and heart surging as he dwells on the end in view, he can say, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." How blessed and how to be longed for is such exaltation!

The most practical outcome of a study such as this is in its application to individual needs. The God-given lessons of life are for all time, because for all time man will require them. Notwithstanding the generations of people that have come and gone since Paul, and the changes which time and place have effected, man remains the same, and life is still the same rough road—the necessary sequence to the unchanging tendencies in human nature. We cannot escape the rough road, nor would escape be to our good. Whilst the world's experiences of its past, the ever-gathering experiences of its past, the essential things have no deep or settled place in its life. The primitive instincts of the race, even in so-called advanced peoples, are still equal to the worst savagery of the past. Moral and spiritual stagnation or decline may go hand in hand with material prosperity and advancement. When the great moral collapse comes, as it did come, we are proved to have lived in a fool's paradise of moral security. Out of its sufferings the world is being called back to truer ideals. But ideals are of value only as they are revered in the hearts of men, and as they are operative in subduing evil passions in individual lives. And here, again, ideals in themselves fail of this result from lack of quickening power. They have never been known to come to maturity in the lives of men except under the life-giving impulse of belief in and subjection to the living God. This thought is capable of much development, but we must pass on to a conclusion.

It is evident that the Lord's words, "However it is made perfect in weakness," are an axiom—a law of life, the "my," having no place in the original text. It is not difficult to find examples of the operation of such a law in the lives of people about us. All the better elements of human nature are quickened by suffering, whilst objectionable traits are modified. Many a man, hard and self-sufficient in his strength, has learned compassion, considerateness, tenderness, and humility in his affliction. There are those who remember with sweetness that which was bitter to endure. But it requires men of Paul's pattern to prove its sublime possibilities, with the grace and strength of the Lord of life for its foundation. That redemption meant the conquest of sin, and the conquest of the love of sin, as well as its pardon, was, to Paul, its wonder and its glory. To please Christ, to win against sin, became the master pas-

May 6, 1900.

sion of his being. These are the conditions for the operations of divine logic. What matter then the roughness of the road, the end be reached? A true saint of God is a marvellous corroboration of this law. He is the product of the sustaining grace and superhuman power of Jesus. His weakness has been made strong. Out of perfect strength. He did not show the hard way, and found therein a love that lightened the way to victory. To show Christ's presence, companionship, support is more than compensation for the way of the way, for all who are prepared for the way with him. To go with him, to go hand with Jesus, assured of realizing our full privilege, is surely the highest and most desirable. Would it not be, too, that Satan to buffet us, would prove to be an angel's visit to point the way of immortality?

New South Wales Conference.

Stuart Stevens.

The thirty-fifth annual Conference of the forty-two churches in the State was held during Easter. Mr. George Stimson presided efficiently over every session.

Messages of greetings were received from the various States and "the regions beyond." These were warmly received and suitably reciprocated.

The church at Parramatta was admitted into the Conference. Rev. C. Forbes, D. C. M., Senior Chaplain of O. P. D., presented a claim on behalf of returned men by affirming that work was still possible upon the streets and in hospital visitation.

Considerable discussion followed the mention of "Conference with the Baptists." During the day Mr. C. Black, President of the Baptist Union, presented greetings.

It was generally regretted that more brethren were not available for gospel preaching. Many training classes were in vogue; and with a view to providing a suitable course of study, a resolution was passed.

The "Book Depot" work, commenced last year, proved many speeches of appreciation. It is hoped that this work will extend.

Considerable disquietness was occasioned when "Statistics" showed a net decrease of 277 for the year. Revision of the roll-up accounted for 557. Delegates did not comment publicly upon the fact. At present there are 3779 members in the State. At last Conference 334 additions were reported, that year 581.

The erection of a suitable church home at Dumbleton and the formation of a church there was a cause of considerable gratification.

The State has now 3286 scholars and 454 teachers in its Bible Schools. During the year 72 scholars became church members.

The Foreign Missions Committee raised £1107 14s. this year as against £1007 14s. last year. The 50 per cent. rate of exchange to the fields was emphasised as a reason for increased gifts.

"A Visit to the Grade of the World" was the title of a lecture by Mr. Cecil R. Hall at the Bible Schools demonstration.

Mr. H. E. King (Sec. China Inland Mission) told of their work at the Foreign Mission session. Bren, Whelan and Eaton delivered forceful addresses.

Mr. John Hindle, who had just returned from a tour of England, delivered a vigorous address at the Speakers' Session on "Some Impressions Gained during a Recent Visit to England."

The Conference Sermon by Bro. A. Eaton, on "Our Plea and the Present World Situation," delivered at the City Temple on Sunday afternoon,

was considered to be a masterly, timely utterance, and worthy of the audience which enjoyed it. The Huttons Rally was a most successful gathering. Bren, Stimson, Forbes, Black and Payne delivered helpful speeches. The sisters were warmly praised for the many and various meals provided at each session on good Friday.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES.

The following elections were made for the year: President, George Stimson; Vice-President, Arthur Hutton; Treasurer, W. H. Hall; Secretary, A. M. Webber; Assistant-Sec., H. Gilmore. Executive and Home Missionary Committee—Dr. E. A. Bardsley, J. Crawford, A. Eaton, M. H. Hilder, H. G. Harward, L. Rosell, J. Stimson.

Foreign Missions—Chairman, J. Crawford, W. Arenell, M. Blok, W. Crossman, J. Clydesdale, G. Corbitt, A. Graham, W. Gale, J. Holt, Quan Wang. Bible Schools—Chairman, S. Stevens, T. Edmond, P. Gilmore, S. Gole, C. Smith, S. M. Matthews, W. Rofey, A. Smith.

Temperance—A. Clerdy, C. Cook, A. Fisher, W. Grant, S. B. Hibbard, E. Lewis. Union Baptists—J. Clayton, A. Hutton, A. Eaton, M. Blok, J. Crawford, F. Gilmore, C. Hibbard, E. Johnson, L. Rosell, A. H. Webber.

RESOLUTIONS.

"That this Conference pledge itself to support, in conjunction with the Baptist and Congregational bodies, Chaplain Riley, who has been appointed by the Synodical Committee for street patrol and hospital visits, a one year."

"That the Faculty of the College be asked to arrange for a course of study which may be followed by the training classes of the different States, successful students in these classes to be awarded certificates of proficiency."

"That this Conference expresses its profound thankfulness to God for all his blessings during the past thirteen years of the work of the College of the Bible, and its sincere appreciation of the faithful and able work of the Faculty and Board of Management. This Conference is ready to contribute every confidence to the work of the institution in years to come."

"That a General Conference between Conference of the Churches of Christ and the Baptist Union be arranged on the basis of one to one, very numerous or part thereof of each individual church."

"That New South Wales pledges its support to the urgent study of the Holy Scriptures during the term of study in preparation for Foreign Mission service."

"That we request the Federal Foreign Mission

Committee to prepare something more suitable for Christmas Day exercises.

That the Conference Executive take into consideration the advisability of commencing work among the Jews in Sydney.

Among the resolutions which regretting the compromise clause in the "New Liquor Act," recommending the brotherhood to vote for Prohibition at the referendum, believing it will be better to pay commensurate traffic than leave it to destroy our people."

"That a special conference be called during the year to amend the constitution of Conference."

FRUIT OF EXECUTIVE AND HOME MISSIONARY REPORT. **FRUIT OF EXECUTIVE AND HOME MISSIONARY REPORT.** A Bible School at Blakehurst. Parramatta is growing rapidly. Loftus Park have erected a church growing slowly. It is hoped that a preacher may soon be engaged to care for three congregations in this district. Steps are being taken to begin meetings at Burwood.

The Book Depot and Home Missions Office in the city has justified itself, in that it has been a means of propagating the distinctive message of the Church of Christ.

The gross additions to our membership were 581, although a rigid revision of roll has very seriously affected our State figures.

The fund to conduct an aggressive evangelistic campaign was inaugurated at a men's dinner in the City Temple on August 10th, 1919, and a special appeal to all the Churches was made on September 7th. The original aim was £1000; but after the promise of some large amounts, it was decided to aim at £2000. The campaign will begin in N.S.W. about the end of May.

The Committee subsidised thirteen fields, ten in the city and three outside the city. Auburn is now erecting a new church home. Bro. Forbes is having good success. Merewether reports four baptisms for year. This was the first year of Bro. Martin's work. The church has become self-supporting. Bro. Gale said Paddington presented a bright prospect—seven baptisms. Wagga and Inverell reported drought baptisms and consequently many problems. At South Kensington the work is full of promise. Bro. Robbins commences there immediately after Conference. Mosman reports sixteen baptisms for the year. N. S. W. is a preacher. Rockdale reports 59 baptisms. This work is two years old, and has a membership of 110. A church home is urgently needed. S. Stevens, preacher. Bro. Eagle concludes at Brakenville. The present property to be sold and another site and home to be obtained. Bro. S. B. Hibbard has recently commenced at St. Peters and reports five baptisms.

In view of the special mission work to be conducted in the State, the committee consider the time opportune for all of our churches to give special emphasis to our distinctive position by regular preaching, special meetings, and distribution of literature.

For the Peace Offering there was given £1443/13/4. The total for the Conference year, including the above, was £2876/7/11. Last year the total was £1863/3/8. The actual debt balance was £233/0/7.

Concerning Bro. C. Rush, there is the following: "Four committees desire to record their appreciation of the fine work done by our Organizing Secretary. As Organizer he has overcome many difficulties and carried the work on well."

"The Home Mission Committee recommend to this Conference that claims of the high cost of living our churches be urged to pay their evangelists a sum of not less than £5 per week.

BIBLE SCHOOLS.

New schools have been commenced at Loftus Park, Parramatta and Blakehurst.

The work of supporting a cot in the Royal Alexandra Hospital, which is still in progress, £26/2/1 being raised for that purpose during the year.

Although the influenza epidemic prevailed for months and our schools were closed for a considerable period, a creditable examination was conducted.

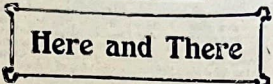
The income of the committee for the year was £148/4/2.

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"This fund has aided six congregations in their land or building operations since its inception in 1913-14, and at present has a paid up capital of

£727/1/7, practically all of which is on loan or arranged to be loaned to our various churches.

During the year the loan to Hamilton church has been repaid and land has been purchased for the church at Dumbleton. The erection of a building on this land has been approved, and the newly established church at Dumbleton will be meeting in a building entirely owned by the brotherhood, a fact rendered possible by the existence of such a Fund."



Two confessed Christ last Sunday at Balaklava, S.A.

Five confessions at Norwood, S.A., last Sunday, Bro. Better preaching.

Bordertown, S.A., held a very successful Bible School Anniversary on May 2.

At Echuca, Vic., a young girl confessed Christ on Sunday, Bro. L. E. Clay preaching.

Australian brethren are reminded of the next big offering—Foreign Missions, July 4.

G. T. Walden passed through Melbourne en route from Tasmania to Adelaide on Tuesday.

One confession at Horsham, Vic., and two decisions at Haven last week, Bro. Bassard preaching.

At Wahroonga, N.S.W., on Sunday a young lady made the good confession, Bro. Johnson preaching.

We regret to learn that Bro. P. J. Sivy, B.A., preacher of the Moreland church, Vic., is seriously ill.

The monthly meeting of the Victorian C. E. Committee will be held at Lygon-st. chapel on Monday, May 10.

The secretary of the Belmore church, N. S. W., is now Mr. Alf. Morton, "Ebenzer," Allen-avenue, Belmore.

The secretary of the church at Hastings, N.Z., now Mr. Matthew H. Biggs, Havelock North, Hawkes Bay, N.Z.

Encouraging meetings are being held at Grote-st., S.A. A lad from the Bible School confessed Christ on April 25.

Bro. Lionel Johnston made a good start at Preston, Vic., last Sunday. His address is Hutton-st. (west), Thornbury.

Elliot, Q., had a successful Bible School picnic on April 24. Bro. Larsen's visits and addresses are much appreciated.

A man and his wife confessed Christ at Wagga, N.S.W., last Sunday. Interest in the mission to begin May 30 is growing.

Two confessions at Brunswick, Vic., on Sunday last, Bro. Corlett preaching. Good meeting. Church doubled quota for Bible Schools.

A great rush of reports at the last caused unusual compression in a number of cases and unavoidable postponement in others. We are sorry.

Bro. and Sister E. Clegg has left Fremantle, W.A., after twenty years of service, for Victoria. The work in Fremantle continues to progress.

We hear of good Bible School day services in South Australia and Victoria. A number of decisions are reported and many good offerings were made.

P. R. Baker has made a good start at Launceston. Bro. Walden's visit was much appreciated. The officers are planning for progressive work amongst the young.

A young lady was received into fellowship at Swanston-st. last Sunday morning. In the evening three young ladies confessed Christ, Bro. Blakemore preaching.

The church at Gardiner, Vic., is progressing. A combined School and Church service last Sunday. 88 were present and 26/2/2 was given for Bible School Offering.

The Lochiel Sunday School, S.A., celebrated its anniversary on April 11th and 14th. Bro. Cuttriss's messages were much appreciated. Special singing was rendered by the scholars. The work continues steadily. A preacher for the district is hoped for.

Geelong, Vic., had good meetings on May 2. Feeling reference was made to the death of E. Thomas, at whose funeral service Bro. Schwab assisted.

Three lads decided for Christ at North Richmond on 2nd inst., Bro. J. E. Allan preaching. A large number of Bible School scholars attended the worship service.

Eighty were in Glenhenty, Vic., Bible School, last Sunday. A similar number was present at night. Best day yet. The church will be formally organised next Sunday.

Those who did not have a share last Sunday in the Bible School Annual Offering will be able to do so next Lord's Day. In most churches the offering is kept open over two Sundays.

A young woman confessed Christ at Williamtown, S.A., on April 11, Bro. Blackburn preaching. Bro. Blackburn preached farewell sermons on 18th. He is taking up the work at Tumbury Bay.

South Yarra, Vic., anniversary passed off very successfully. On Bible School night, the chapel was crowded. W. H. Hinrichsen has been re-engaged for another twelve months.

In place of Bro. Thomas, who was absent at Geelong, the Annual Offering will be able to do so next Lord's Day. In most churches the offering is kept open over two Sundays.

A baptismal service was held at Stawell, Vic., on May 2. The social to departing and incoming preachers and their wives was most successful. Bro. Wakefield has created a very good impression.

There was one decision for Christ at Nth. Carlton, Vic., last Sunday. Bro. R. K. Whately recently accepted a short engagement to labor with the church. A growing interest is manifested in the work.

Bro. J. McKenzie, M.A., from Canada, preached at South Melbourne on April 25. He will take services there for a few months. On May 2 there was one confession at the close of an address by Bro. Northcote.

Bro. Taylor has made a good start at Kadina, S.A. One lady was received into membership on April 25. Bro. and Sister Nightingale, on leaving, received many beautiful and costly gifts. Their work was much blessed and appreciated.

On May 2, Lipson Sunday School, S.A., celebrated its anniversary. Bro. Harkness, from Adelaide, conducted services after noon and evening; his addresses were much appreciated by good congregations. The brethren hope to have Bro. Blackburn with them shortly.

Meetings are keeping up well at Hurstville, N.S.W. During April several have been baptised, some of whom were from Dumbleton. At special Anzac service on 25th ult., Bro. Crossman preached, and one young man made the good confession. Week of prayer and self-denial commenced on May 2.

Mr. J. Ingham writes re Wallaroo mission:—"The meetings are fine, and interest is growing. The whole town is talking about our plea. Chatter's exposition of our position has been masterly. The second week closed with a total of 20 decisions. Many more will soon follow. There were 11 adults came to two night meetings."

Good meetings at Belmore, N.S.W., on April 25. Mrs. Hall was received by letter from Hobart. An in memoriam service was held at night to the late Sister Hawkins. Bro. Hutson preaching. A splendid welcome to Bro. Walden, F. M. Secretary, and a farewell to Bro. and Sister Black, our new missionaries, were given last week.

Moomta, S.A., Bible School Anniversary was a record success. Chapel overcrowded. Hundreds turned away at evening service. Good addresses by Geo. P. Cuttriss. It was decided on May 2 to invite Mr. Chandler to preach. Another of our pioneers, a man of sterling character, a lover of the Bible and the church, a brother true to conviction, has been taken from us. In our next issue we hope to give a more extended notice.

Very many friends will learn with deep regret of the death of Bro. Henry Lyall, an old and esteemed member of Swanston-st. church. He passed away on Sunday last, at the age of 87 years. He was a colonist of 63 years' standing. Another of our pioneers, a man of sterling character, a lover of the Bible and the church, a brother true to conviction, has been taken from us. In our next issue we hope to give a more extended notice.

May 6, 1920.

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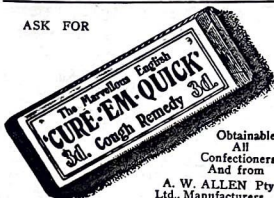
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