**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ISAIAH-068. THE AWAKENING OF ZION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old."*

*Isaiah 51:9*

*"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion."*

*Isaiah 52:1*

Both these verses are, I think, to be regarded as spoken by one voice, that of the Servant of the Lord. His majestic figure, wrapped in a light veil of obscurity, fills the eye in all these later prophecies of Isaiah. It is sometimes clothed with divine power, sometimes girded with the towel of human weakness, sometimes appearing like the collective Israel, sometimes plainly a single person.

We have no difficulty in solving the riddle of the prophecy by the light of history. Our faith knows One who unites these diverse characteristics, being God and man, being the Saviour of the body, which is part of Himself and instinct with His life. If we may suppose that He speaks in both verses of the text, then, in the one, as priest and intercessor, He lifts the prayers of earth to heaven in His own holy hands--and in the other, as messenger and Word of God, He brings the answer and command of heaven to earth on His own authoritative lips--thus setting forth the deep mystery of His person and double office as mediator between man and God. But even if we put aside that thought, the correspondence and relation of the two passages remain the same. In any case they are intentionally parallel in form and connected in substance. The latter is the answer to the former. The cry of Zion is responded to by the call of God. The awaking of the arm of the Lord is followed by the awaking of the Church. He puts on strength in clothing us with His might, which becomes ours.

The mere juxtaposition of these verses suggests the point of view from which I wish to treat them on this occasion. I hope that the thoughts to which they lead may help to further that quickened earnestness and expectancy of blessing, without which Christian work is a toil and a failure.

We have here a common principle underlying both the clauses of our text, to which I must first briefly ask attention, namely--

**I. The occurrence in the Church's history of successive periods of energy and of languor.**

It is freely admitted that such alternation is not the highest ideal of growth, either in the individual or in the community. Our Lord's own parables set forth a more excellent way--the way of uninterrupted increase, whereof the type is the springing corn, which puts forth first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, and passes through all the stages from the tender green spikelets that gleam over the fields in the spring-tide to the yellow abundance of autumn, in one unbroken season of genial months. So would our growth be best, healthiest, happiest. So might our growth be, if the mysterious life in the seed met no checks. But, as a matter of fact, the Church has not thus grown. Rather at the best, its emblem is to be looked for, not in corn, but in the forest tree--the very rings in whose trunk tell of recurring seasons when the sap has risen at the call of spring, and sunk again before the frowns of winter. I have not to do now with the causes of this. These will fall to be considered presently. Nor am I saying that such a manner of growth is inevitable. I am only pointing out a fact, capable of easy verification and familiar to us all. Our years have had summer and winter. The evening and the morning have completed all the days since the first.

We all know it only too well. In our own hearts we have known such times, when some cold clinging mist wrapped us round and hid all the heaven of God's love and the starry lights of His truth; when the visible was the only real, and He seemed far away and shadowy; when there was neither confidence in our belief, nor heat in our love, nor enthusiasm in our service; when the shackles of conventionalism bound our souls, and the fetters of the frost imprisoned all their springs. And we have seen a like palsy smite whole regions and ages of the Church of God, so that even the sensation of impotence was dead like all the rest, and the very tradition of spiritual power had faded away. I need not point to the signal historical examples of such times in the past. Remember England a hundred years ago--but what need to travel so far? May I venture to draw my example from nearer home, and ask, have we not been living in such an epoch? I beseech you, think whether the power which the Gospel preached by us wields on ourselves, on our churches, on the world, is what Christ meant it and fitted to exercise. Why, if we hold our own in respect to the material growth of our population, it is as much as we do. Where is the joyful buoyancy and expansive power with which the Gospel burst into the world? It looks like some stream that leaps from the hills, and at first hurries from cliff to cliff full of light and music, but flows slower and more sluggish as it advances, and at last almost stagnates in its flat marshes. Here we are with all our machinery, our culture, money, organisations--and the net result of it all at the year's end is but a poor handful of ears. Ye sow much and bring home little. Well may we take up the wail of the old Psalm, We see not our signs. There is no more any prophet; neither is there any among us that knoweth how long--arise, O Lord, plead Thine own cause.

If, then, there are such recurring seasons of languor, they must either go on deepening till sleep becomes death, or they must be broken by a new outburst of vigorous life. It would be better if we did not need the latter. The uninterrupted growth would be best; but if that has not been attained, then the ending of winter by spring, and the suppling of the dry branches, and the resumption of the arrested growth, is the next best, and the only alternative to rotting away.

And it is by such times that the Kingdom of Christ always has grown. Its history has been one of successive impulses gradually exhausted, as by friction and gravity, and mercifully repeated just at the moment when it was ceasing to advance and had begun to slide backwards. And in such a manner of progress, the Church's history has been in full analogy with that of all other forms of human association and activity. It is not in religion alone that there are revivals, to use the word of which some people have such a dread. You see analogous phenomena in the field of literature, arts, social and political life. In them all, there come times of awakened interest in long-neglected principles. Truths which for many years had been left to burn unheeded, save by a faithful few watchers of the beacon, flame up all at once as the guiding pillars of a nation's march, and a whole people strike their tents and follow where they lead. A mysterious quickening thrills through society. A contagion of enthusiasm spreads like fire, fusing all hearts in one. The air is electric with change. Some great advance is secured at a stride; and before and after that supreme effort are years of comparative quiescence; those before being times of preparation, those after being times of fruition and exhaustion--but slow and languid compared with the joyous energy of that moment. One day may be as a thousand years in the history of a people, and a nation may be born in a day.

So also is the history of the Church. And thank God it is so, for if it had not been for the dawning of these times of refreshing, the steady operation of the Church's worldliness would have killed it long ago.

Surely, dear brethren, we ought to desire such a merciful interruption of the sad continuity of our languor and decay. The surest sign of its coming would be a widespread desire and expectation of its coming, joined with a penitent consciousness of our heavy and sinful slumber. For we believe in a God who never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them, and in whose merciful providence every desire is a prophecy of its own fruition. This attitude of quickened anticipation, diffusing itself silently through many hearts, is like the light air that springs up before sunrise, or like the solemn hush that holds all nature listening before the voice of the Lord in the thunder.

And another sign of its approach is the extremity of the need. If winter come, can spring be far behind? For He who is always with Zion strikes in with His help when the want is at its sorest. His right early is often the latest moment before destruction. And though we are all apt to exaggerate the urgency of the hour and the severity of our conflict, it certainly does seem that, whether we regard the languor of the Church or the strength of our adversaries, succour delayed a little longer would be succour too late. The tumult of those that rise up against Thee increaseth continually. It is time for Thee to work.

The juxtaposition of these passages suggests for us--

**II. The twofold explanation of these variations.**

That bold metaphor of God's sleeping and waking is often found in Scripture, and generally expresses the contrast between the long years of patient forbearance, during which evil things and evil men go on their rebellious road unchecked but by Love, and the dread moment when some throne of iniquity, some Babylon cemented by blood, is smitten to the dust. Such is the original application of the expression here. But the contrast may fairly be widened beyond that specific form of it, and taken to express any apparent variations in the forth-putting of His power. The prophet carefully avoids seeming to suggest that there are changes in God Himself. It is not He but His arm, that is to say. His active energy, that is invoked to awake. The captive Church prays that the dormant might which could so easily shiver her prison-house would flame forth into action.

We may, then, see here implied the cause of these alternations, of which we have been speaking, on its divine side, and then, in the corresponding verse addressed to the Church, the cause on the human side.

As to the former, it is true that God's arm sometimes slumbers, and is not clothed with power. There are, as a fact, apparent variations in the energy with which He works in the Church and in the world. And they are real variations, not merely apparent. But we have to distinguish between the power, and what Paul calls the might of the power. The one is final, constant, unchangeable. It does not necessarily follow that the other is. The rate of operation, so to speak, and the amount of energy actually brought into play may vary, though the force remains the same.

It is clear from experience that there are these variations; and the only question with which we are concerned is, are they mere arbitrary jets and spurts of a divine power, sometimes gushing out in full flood, sometimes trickling in painful drops, at the unknown will of the unseen hand which controls the flow? Is the law of the Spirit of life at all revealed to us; or are the reasons occult, if there be any reasons at all other than a mere will that it shall be so? Surely, whilst we never can know all the depths of His counsels and all the solemn concourse of reasons which, to speak in man's language, determine the energy of His manifested power, He has left us in no doubt that this is the weightiest part of the law which it follows--the might with which God works on the world through His Church varies according to the Church's receptiveness and faithfulness.

Our second text tells us that if God's arm seems to slumber and really does so, it is because Zion sleeps. In itself that immortal energy knows no variableness. He fainteth not, neither is weary. The Lord's arm is not shortened that He cannot save. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. But He works through us; and we have the solemn and awful power of checking the might which would flow through us; of restraining and limiting the Holy One of Israel. It avails nothing that the ocean stretches shoreless to the horizon; a jar can hold only a jarful. The receiver's capacity determines the amount received, and the receiver's desire determines his capacity. The law has ever been, according to your faith be it unto you. God gives as much as we will, as much as we can hold, as much as we use, and far more than we deserve. As long as we will bring our vessels the golden oil will flow, and after the last is filled, there yet remains more that we might have had, if we could have held it, and might have held if we would. Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves.

So, dear brethren, if we have to lament times of torpor and small success, let us be honest with ourselves, and recognise that all the blame lies with us. If God's arm seems to slumber, it is because we are asleep. His power is invariable, and the Gospel which is committed to our trust has lost none of its ancient power, whatsoever men may say. If there be variations, they cannot be traced to the divine element in the Church, which in itself is constant, but altogether to the human, which shifts and fluctuates, as we only too sadly know. The light in the beacon-tower is steady, and the same; but the beam it throws across the waters sometimes fades to a speck, and sometimes flames out clear and far across the heaving waves, according to the position of the glasses and shades around it. The sun pours out heat as profusely and as long at midwinter as on midsummer-day, and all the difference between the frost and darkness and glowing brightness and flowering life, is simply owing to the earth's place in its orbit and the angle at which the unalterable rays fall upon it. The changes are in the terrestrial sphere; the heavenly is fixed for ever the same.

May I not venture to point an earnest and solemn appeal with these truths? Has there not been poured over us the spirit of slumber? Does it not seem as if an opium sky had been raining soporifics on our heads? We have had but little experience of the might of God amongst us of late years, and we need not wonder at it. There is no occasion to look far for the reason. We have only to regard the low ebb to which religious life has been reduced amongst us to have it all and more than all accounted for. I fully admit that there has been plenty of activity, perhaps more than the amount of real life warrants, not a little liberality, and many virtues. But how languid and torpid the true Christian life has been! how little enthusiasm! how little depth of communion with God! how little unworldly elevation of soul! how little glow of love! An improvement in social position and circumstances, a freer blending with the national life, a full share of civic and political honours, a higher culture in our pulpits, fine chapels, and applauding congregations--are but poor substitutes for what many of us have lost in racing after them. We have the departed prophets mantle, the outward resemblance to the fathers who have gone, but their fiery zeal has passed to heaven with them; and softer, weaker men, we stand timidly on the river's brink, invoking the Lord God of Elijah, and too often the flood that obeyed them has no ear for our feebler voice.

I speak to many who are in some sort representatives of the churches throughout the land, and they can tell whether my words are on the whole true or overstrained. We who labour in our great cities, what say we? If one of the number may speak for the rest, we have to acknowledge that commercial prosperity and business cares, the eagerness after pleasure and the exigencies of political strife, diffused doubt and widespread artistic and literary culture, are eating the very life out of thousands in our churches, and lowering their fervour till, like molten iron cooling in the air, what was once all glowing with ruddy heat is crusted over with foul black scoriae ever encroaching on the tiny central warmth. You from rural churches, what say you? Have you not to speak of deepening torpor settling down on quiet corners, of the passing away of grey heads which leave no successors, of growing difficulties and lessened power to meet them, that make you sometimes all but despair?

I am not flinging indiscriminate censures. I know that there are lights as well as shades in the picture. I am not flinging censures at all. But I am giving voice to the confessions of many hearts, that our consciousness of our blame may be deepened, and we may hasten back to that dear Lord whom we have left to serve alone, as His first disciples left Him once to agonise alone under the gnarled olives in Gethsemane, while they lay sleeping in the moonlight. Listen to His gentle rebuke, full of pain and surprised love, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Listen to His warning call, loving as the kiss with which a mother wakes her child, Arise, let us be going--and let us shake the spirit of slumber from our limbs, and serve Him as those unsleeping spirits do, who rest not day nor night from vision and work and praise.

**III. The beginning of all awaking is the Church's earnest cry to God.**

It is with us as with infants, the first sign of whose awaking is a cry. The mother's quick ear hears it through all the household noises, and the poor little troubled life that woke to a scared consciousness of loneliness and darkness, is taken up into tender arms, and comforted and calmed. So, when we dimly perceive how torpid we have been, and start to find that we have lost our Father's hand, the first instinct of that waking, which must needs be partly painful, is to call to Him, whose ear hears our feeble cry amid the sound of praise like the voice of many waters, that billows round His throne, and whose folding arms keep us as one whom his mother comforteth. The beginning of all true awaking must needs be prayer.

For every such stirring of quickened religious life must needs have in it bitter penitence and pain at the discovery flashed upon us of the wretched deadness of our past--and, as we gaze like some wakened sleepwalker into the abyss where another step might have smashed us to atoms, a shuddering terror seizes us that must cry, Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe. And every such stirring of quickened life will have in it, too, desire for more of His grace, and confidence in His sure bestowal of it, which cannot but breathe itself in prayer.

Nor is Zion's cry to God only the beginning and sign of all true awaking: it is also the condition and indispensable precursor of all perfecting of recovery from spiritual languor.

I have already pointed out the relation between the waking of God and the waking of His Church, from which that necessarily follows. God's power flows into our weakness in the measure and on condition of our desires. We are sometimes told that we err in praying for the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, because ever since Pentecost His Church has had the gift. The objection alleges an unquestioned fact, but the conclusion drawn from it rests on an altogether false conception of the manner of that abiding gift. The Spirit of God, and the power which comes from Him, are not given as a purse of money might be put into a man's hand once and for all, but they are given in a continuous impartation and communication and are received and retained moment by moment, according to the energy of our desires and the faithfulness of our use. As well might we say, Why should I ask for natural life, I received it half a century ago? Yes, and at every moment of that half-century I have continued to live, not because of a past gift, but because at each moment God is breathing into my nostrils the breath of life. So is it with the life which comes from His Spirit. It is maintained by constant efflux from the fountain of Life, by constant impartation of His quickening breath. And as He must continually impart, so must we continually receive, else we perish. Therefore, brethren, the first step towards awaking, and the condition of all true revival in our own souls and in our churches, is this earnest cry, Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.

Thank God for the outpouring of a long unwonted spirit of prayer in many places. It is like the melting of the snows in the high Alps, at once the sign of spring and the cause of filling the stony river beds with flashing waters, that bring verdure and growth wherever they come. The winter has been long and hard. We have all to confess that we have been restraining prayer before God. Our work has been done with but little sense of our need of His blessing, with but little ardour of desire for His power. We have prayed lazily, scarcely believing that answers would come; we have not watched for the reply, but have been like some heartless marksman who draws his bow and does not care to look whether his arrow strikes the target. These mechanical words, these conventional petitions, these syllables winged by no real desire, inspired by no faith, these expressions of devotion, far too wide for their real contents, which rattle in them like a dried kernel in a nut, are these prayers? Is there any wonder that they have been dispersed in empty air, and that we have been put to shame before our enemies? Brethren in the ministry, do we need to be surprised at our fruitless work, when we think of our prayerless studies and of our faithless prayers? Let us remember that solemn word, The pastors have become brutish, and have not sought the Lord, therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. And let us all, brethren, betake ourselves, with penitence and lowly consciousness of our sore need, to prayer, earnest and importunate, believing and persistent, like this heaven-piercing cry which captive Israel sent up from her weary bondage.

Look at the passionate earnestness of it--expressed in the short, sharp cry, thrice repeated, as from one in mortal need; and see to it that our drowsy prayers be like it. Look at the grand confidence with which it founds itself on the past, recounting the mighty deeds of ancient days, and looking back, not for despair but for joyful confidence, to the generations of old; and let our faint-hearted faith be quickened by the example, to expect great things of God. The age of miracles is not gone. The mightiest manifestations of God's power in the spread of the Gospel in the past remain as patterns for His future. We have not to look back as from low-lying plains to the blue peaks on the horizon, across which the Church's path once lay, and sigh over the changed conditions of the journey. The highest watermark that the river in flood has ever reached will be reached and overpassed again, though to-day the waters may seem to have hopelessly subsided. Greater triumphs and deliverances shall crown the future than have signalised the past. Let our faithful prayer base itself on the prophecies of history and on the unchangeableness of God.

Think, brethren, of the prayers of Christ. Even He, whose spirit needed not to be purged from stains or calmed from excitement, who was ever in His Father's house whilst He was about His Father's business, blending in one, action and contemplation, had need to pray. The moments of His life thus marked are very significant. When He began His ministry, the close of the first day of toil and wonders saw Him, far from gratitude and from want, in a desert place in prayer. When He would send forth His apostles, that great step in advance, in which lay the germ of so much, was preceded by solitary prayer. When the fickle crowd desired to make Him the centre of political revolution, He passed from their hands and beat back that earliest attempt to secularise His work, by prayer. When the seventy brought the first tidings of mighty works done in His name, He showed us how to repel the dangers of success, in that He thanked the Lord of heaven and earth who had revealed these things to babes. When He stood by the grave of Lazarus, the voice that waked the dead was preceded by the voice of prayer, as it ever must be. When He had said all that He could say to His disciples, He crowned all with His wonderful prayer for Himself, for them, and for us all. When the horror of great darkness fell upon His soul, the growing agony is marked by His more fervent prayer, so wondrously compact of shrinking fear and filial submission. When the cross was hid in the darkness of eclipse, the only words from the gloom were words of prayer. When, Godlike, He dismissed His spirit, manlike He commended it to His Father, and sent the prayer from His dying lips before Him to herald His coming into the unseen world. One instance remains, even more to our present purpose than all these--It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him. Mighty mystery! In Him, too, the Son's desire is connected with the Father's gift, and the unmeasured possession of the Spirit was an answer to His prayer.

Then, brethren, let us lift our voices and our hearts. That which ascends as prayer descends as blessing, like the vapour that is drawn up by the kiss of the sun to fall in freshening rain. Call upon Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and hidden things which thou knowest not.

**IV. The answering call from God to Zion.**

Our truest prayers are but the echo of God's promises. God's best answers are the echo of our prayers. As in two mirrors set opposite to each other, the same image is repeated over and over again, the reflection of a reflection, so here, within the prayer, gleams an earlier promise, within the answer is mirrored the prayer.

And in that reverberation, and giving back to us our petition transformed into a command, we are not to see a dismissal of it as if we had misapprehended our true want. It is not tantamount to, Do not ask me to put on my strength, but array yourselves in your own. The very opposite interpretation is the true one. The prayer of Zion is heard and answered. God awakes, and clothes Himself with might. Then, as some warrior king, himself roused from sleep and girded with flashing steel, bids the clarion sound through the grey twilight to summon the prostrate ranks that lie round his tent, so the sign of God's awaking and the first act of His conquering might is this trumpet call--The night is far spent, the day is at hand, let us put off the works of darkness,--the night gear that was fit for slumber--and put on the armour of light, the mail of purity that gleams and glitters even in the dim dawn. God's awaking is our awaking. He puts on strength by making us strong; for His arm works through us, clothing itself, as it were, with our arm of flesh, and perfecting itself even in our weakness.

Nor is it to be forgotten that this, like all God's commands, carries in its heart a promise. That earliest word of God's is the type of all His latter behests: Let there be light, and the mighty syllables were creative and self-fulfilling. So ever, with Him, to enjoin and to bestow are one and the same, and His command is His conveyance of power. He rouses us by His summons, He clothes us with power in the very act of bidding us put it on. So He answers the Church's cry by stimulating us to quickened zeal, and making us more conscious of, and confident in, the strength which, in answer to our cry, He pours into our limbs.

But the main point which I would insist on in what remains of this sermon, is the practical discipline which this divine summons requires from us.

And first, let us remember that the chief means of quickened life and strength is deepened communion with Christ.

As we have been saying, our strength is ours by continual derivation from Him. It has no independent existence, any more than a sunbeam could have, severed from the sun. It is ours only in the sense that it flows through us, as a river through the land which it enriches. It is His whilst it is ours, it is ours when we know it to be His. Then, clearly, the first thing to do must be to keep the channels free by which it flows into our souls, and to maintain the connection with the great Fountainhead unimpaired. Put a dam across the stream, and the effect will be like the drying up of Jordan before Israel: the waters that were above rose up upon an heap, and the waters that were beneath failed and were cut off, and the foul oozy bed was disclosed to the light of day. It is only by constant contact with Christ that we have any strength to put on.

That communion with Him is no mere idle or passive attitude, but the active employment of our whole nature with His truth, and with Him whom the truth reveals. The understanding must be brought into contact with the principles of His word, the heart must touch and beat against His heart, the will meekly lay its hand in His, the conscience draw at once its anodyne and its stimulus from His sacrifice, the passions know His finger on the reins, and follow, led in the silken leash of love. Then, if I may so say, Elisha's miracle will be repeated in nobler form, and from Himself, the Life thus touching all our being, life will flow into our deadness. He put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm. So, dear brethren, all our practical duty is summed up in that one word, the measure of our obedience to which is the measure of all our strength--Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.

Again, this summons calls us to the faithful use of the power which, on condition of that communion, we have.

There is no doubt a temptation, in all times like the present, to look for some new and extraordinary forms of blessing, and to substitute such expectation for present work with our present strength. There is nothing new to look for. There is no need to wait for anything more than we possess. Remember the homely old proverb, You never know what you can do till you try, and though we are conscious of much unfitness, and would sometimes gladly wait till our limbs are stronger, let us brace ourselves for the work, assured that in it strength will be given to us that equals our desire. There is a wonderful power in honest work to develop latent energies and reveal a man to himself. I suppose, in most cases, no one is half so much surprised at a great man's greatest deeds as he is himself. They say that there is dormant electric energy enough in a few raindrops to make a thunderstorm, and there is dormant spiritual force enough in the weakest of us to flash into beneficent light, and peal notes of awaking into many a deaf ear. The effort to serve your Lord will reveal to you strength that you know not. And it will increase the strength which it brings into play, as the used muscles grow like whipcord, and the practised fingers become deft at their task, and every faculty employed is increased, and every gift wrapped in a napkin melts like ice folded in a cloth, according to that solemn law, To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

Then be sure that to its last particle you are using the strength you have, ere you complain of not having enough for your tasks. Take heed of the vagrant expectations that wait for they know not what, and the apparent prayers that are really substitutes for possible service. Why liest thou on thy face? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.

The Church's resources are sufficient for the Church's work, if the resources are used. We are tempted to doubt it, by reason of our experience of failure and our consciousness of weakness. We are more than ever tempted to doubt it to-day, when so many wise men are telling us that our Christ is a phantom, our God a stream of tendency, our Gospel a decaying error, our hope for the world a dream, and our work in the world done. We stand before our Master with doubtful hearts, and, as we look along the ranks sitting there on the green grass, and then at the poor provisions which make all our store, we are sometimes tempted almost to think that He errs when He says with that strange calmness of His, They need not depart, give ye them to eat. But go out among the crowds and give confidently what you have, and you will find that you have enough and to spare. If ever our stores seem inadequate, it is because they are reckoned up by sense, which takes cognizance of the visible, instead of by faith which beholds the real. Certainly five loaves and two small fishes are not enough, but are not five loaves and two small fishes and a miracle-working hand behind them, enough? It is poor calculation that leaves out Christ from the estimate of our forces. The weakest man and Jesus to back him are more than all antagonism, more than sufficient for all duty. Be not seduced into doubt of your power, or of your success, by others sneers, or by your own faint-heartedness. The confidence of ability is ability. Screw your courage to the sticking place, and you will not fail--and see to it that you use the resources you have, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Put on thy strength, O Zion.

So, dear brethren, to gather all up in a sentence, let us confidently look for times of blessing, penitently acknowledge that our own faithlessness has hindered the arm of the Lord, earnestly beseech Him to come in His rejoicing strength, and, drawing ever fresh power from constant communion with our dear Lord, use it to its last drop for Him. Then, like the mortal leader of Israel, as he pondered doubtingly with sunken eyes on the hard task before his untrained host, we shall look up and be aware of the presence of the sworded angel, the immortal Captain of the host of the Lord, standing ready to save, putting on righteousness as a breastplate, an helmet of salvation on His head, and clad with zeal as a cloak. From His lips, which give what they command, comes the call, Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Hearkening to His voice, the city of the strong ones shall be made an heap before our wondering ranks, and the land shall lie open to our conquering march.

Wheresoever we lift up the cry, Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, there follows, swift as the thunderclap on the lightning flash, the rousing summons, Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem! Wheresoever it is obeyed there will follow in due time the joyful chorus, as in this context, Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem; the Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.