

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SHAVEN AND SHORN, BUT NOT BEYOND HOPE.

A Sermon

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“Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.”—Judges xvi. 22.

LET me introduce the text to you. Samson was set apart from his birth to be the champion of Israel, to break the power of the Philistines who lorded over God's people. Everything in his bringing up had reference to his peculiar calling as the hero of Israel, the hammer of Philistia. He was to be a Nazarite from his birth. Amongst other things which concerned the Nazarite he never touched wine, nay, nor grapes, nor husks of grapes, nor anything that came of the vine: which goes to show that the greatest physical strength is attainable without the use of wine or strong drink. Whatever else overcame Samson, he was never overcome with drunkenness; and yet he greatly sinned, which goes to show that total abstinence is not of itself enough to form a character. A Nazarite, in addition to abstinence from wine, also abstained from wearing the common appearance of men. He was not to have his hair at any time shaven, or cut away: so that when Samson was grown up to manhood, he was covered with a shaggy mass of hair. He must have looked like the lion that he was. Those locks of his were the token of his consecration to God, the outward marks of his being set apart to be the servant of the God of Israel. Can you not see him with the terrible glory of his hair upon him?

Poor Samson was as weak morally as he was strong physically, and he fell a prey first to one evil woman, and then to another. Perhaps the extraordinary strength of his physical frame placed him under stronger temptation than is common to man: at any rate, he was peculiarly constituted, and seemed more like a wanton boy than a judge in Israel. Through this peculiar sin of his, the Philistines found opportunity to assail him. They tempted Delilah, whom he loved, to extract from him the secret of his great strength. He was so strong that he rent a lion as though it had been a kid; so strong that he carried away the gates of the city in which they had shut him up; so strong that he

smote an army of Philistines, "hip and thigh, with a great slaughter." The mercenary woman, upon whom he foolishly doted, by degrees extracted from him the secret of his strength; and while he lay asleep upon her lap, the Philistine lords caused a barber to cut away the locks of his head. He awoke from his sleep shaven. Then he went out, and thought to fight the Philistines as before: but to his surprise he found that his strength was gone. The locks of his dedication had been shorn; he was no longer the acknowledged servant of the Lord, and he was weak as other men. Then the Philistine lords took him captive, bored out his eyes—for such is the expression in the margin of our old Bibles—gouged out his eyes, bound him to the mill, and made him work like a slave or an ass. In that pitiable plight our text finds him: but it comes with a key of deliverance to set free the captive.

My text runs thus—it is in the twenty-second verse of the sixteenth chapter of Judges—"*Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.*"

Poor Samson! I roughly sketched his story as with a crayon just now. I cannot stay to attempt a more accurate portrait. Poor Samson, the champion of Israel, now the scoff of his enemies! Poor Samson, the hero of so many fights, now at last conquered by his own foolishness! They have taken him, they have bound him, they have gouged out his eyes, and there he stands, sightless, in the midst of his adversaries, who bind him to the mill, and lash him as he grinds for them. To humiliate him they put him to woman's work, made hard so as to be the work of beasts. See what sin will do. See how the man who had fought God's battles suffers great loss, great pain, great disfigurement, great dishonour, and comes into a cruel and abhorred bondage through his sin. That shaven man made a slave is the picture of very many who once were the avowed servants of God, and were valiant for the truth. They have given up their secret, they have told the world that which none should know but themselves, they have lost the locks of their dedication, and they are led captive by the devil at his will. They cannot see as they used to see, darkness shuts out all joy: they do not work for God as they used to work, for they are slaving for men, for poor, passing, earthborn objects. They have come into an awful bondage, and they have, at the same time, brought great dishonour and weakness upon the church to which they belong. How are the mighty fallen! Children of God, whatever God may do for you, take heed that you always remember that you can never gain anything by sin! It is loss, and utter loss, in every sense, to yield ourselves servants to sin. Again I cry: How are the mighty fallen! How is the champion become a slave at the mill! In the midst of our churches how often are those who were excellent and useful brought to nought and made to be a derision! How often do our boldest warriors bring the cross of Christ into contempt by their sin! The Lord keep us from thus falling! May we rather die than dishonour our Lord!

I begin thus upon the mournful key, because I want to speak of God's great goodness to backsliders, and of how he restores them; but I want to warn them, at the very outset, that sin does not pay, that whatever may come of it through God's mercy, yet it is an evil thing and a bitter thing to wander from the Lord. Though Samson's hair

grew again, and his strength came back, and he died gloriously fighting against the Philistines, yet he never recovered his eyes, or his liberty, or his living power in Israel! Short and effective was his last stroke against the adversary, but it cost him his life. He could not again rise to be the man he had been before; and though God did give him a great victory over the Philistine people, yet it was but as the flicker of an expiring candle, he was never again a lamp of hope to Israel. His usefulness was abated, and even brought to an end, through his folly. Whatever the grace of God may do for us, it cannot make sin a right thing, or a safe thing, or a permissible thing. It is evil, only evil, and that continually. O children of God, be not enslaved by fleshly lusts! O Nazarites unto God, guard your locks, lest they be cut away by sin while you are sleeping in the lap of pleasure! O servants of Jehovah, serve the Lord with heart and soul by his grace even to the end, and keep yourselves unshorn by the world!

With that as a preface we come again to the text: "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven."

First, let us see *what this growing of the hair pictures*; secondly, *what it specifically symbolizes*; and thirdly, *what it prophesies*.

I. First, WHAT THIS GROWING OF THE HAIR PICTURES. I think that this pictures the gradual restoration of certain among us who have backslidden from God. The hair was there upon Samson's head, though it had been cut short. Though the hair was shaved off, yet the adversary could not take the roots away. It was a living thing, and it would grow again. So is it with those who are the people of God. The devil can shave them very closely, and clip off their beauty, their strength, and their consecration; but a living something is still there that will grow again. If there has been a real regenerating work of God the Holy Ghost upon their hearts, it will show itself again. Though the fruit and holy outcome of this living principle may for a while be removed—sadly removed to their bitter loss and damage—yet I say the living roots of grace are still in the soul, and ere long we shall have to say, "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again." Wells may for a while be stopped, but the living water will break out, and come to the surface again. The tree may lose every leaf which once adorned it, but its substance is in it; and when the spring smiles again, it will once more begin to bud. Eternal life may sleep, may faint; but it cannot utterly die; else how were it eternal life? The hair, though closely shaved, will grow again.

I will show you this hair in the process of growing. A man was once a member of a Christian church, godly and gracious. Satan has shaved him of all that was distinctive and religious. He has gone into the world; he has been put away by his brethren. His conduct was too inconsistent to allow of a continuance of his profession. But there had really been a change of heart, there had been a radical work of grace in his soul; and, therefore, after a while, he begins to be very miserable and uneasy. It is impossible for him to be happy among the Philistines, who have captured him. His gay comrades, who flattered themselves that they had got him fast this time, cannot make him out. He has fits of melancholy. Occasionally he falls into a deep despondency, and he utters strange words which they do not like to hear, partly

denunciations of himself, and partly prophecies of evil to those around him. He is evidently terribly uneasy in the ways of sin. Now he gets alone, and sighs—

“Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?”

There is a something in his heart which troubles him both by night and by day. His soul is saying, “I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.” Howbeit his hair begins to grow again. It has been shaved very cleverly, but the roots have not been extracted, and you can see that he will soon be a hairy man again. He cannot rest in his sin: no true-born child of God ever can. Giant Slay-good may pick up a pilgrim on the road when he is faint and weary, but he can never pick the bones of a true believer. He will come out of the den of the giant somehow or other. What a pity that he should ever go into it!

Well, now notice that the man begins to drop in to hear a sermon. It is a long time since he was familiar with the house of prayer; but he finds himself here to-night after a long absence. He remembers when he used to be always here, and he almost waters the floor with his tears as he thinks of the happy days which he used to enjoy in the midst of God’s people, when he welcomed the light of the Sabbath morning, and the way was never too long for him to come up to the place of his love. In those days the word of the Lord was sweet to him. He has not been for some time, but somehow he felt to-day that he must come again. How welcome he is! How glad I am to see him, though he looks so rough and grisly, and half-shaved!

I have heard—I am not sure of it, but I think that it is very likely—that he has been reading his Bible again. That poor Book has been left to be covered with dust, but he has had it down, and he has looked at a psalm that once used to charm his heart, and he has wept over the passage which once revealed Christ to him. He even groaned to think that he should have forgotten the voice of the living God which used to speak to him through that holy Book. He read a sermon to-day, too. He has not often done *that*. He took a tract from some one in the street, and he looked at it with eagerness: this also was a hopeful sign.

A little while ago, when he first forsook his Lord, he could blaspheme: he could say hard things against Christ and his word; but he does not do so now. It would be impossible for him now to ridicule religion; he is too tender for that. He has a strong desire to hear again the message of free grace and dying love; he longs to listen once more to the ringing of those silver bells that once were music to his ears. I think it must be true that the Lord is bringing him back. Surely my text is being fulfilled—“Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again.” The devil could shave away those flowing locks which once adorned him, but he could not cut out the roots, which are deeper than he can reach. Do you not think that our shorn Samson may yet be himself again? Surely his hair has begun to grow anew, and to-night I trust that it will grow very quickly while he is in this house of prayer hearing the glad tidings of free forgiveness.

I am most of all encouraged with the fact that he begins to feel in his

soul an anguish, and a bitterness, and an aching, and a craving, and a longing. I have great hopes of him now that his old feelings are returning. Methinks I hear him say, "I cannot live like this." He sighs: "I have tried the way of transgressors, and it is hard. I have tested the life of sinful pleasure, and there is nothing in it. The cups of the world are all froth. The devil's bread is all bran. It chokes me; it poisons me. I cannot endure it any longer. Oh, that I could get back to God! Oh, that I could be truly converted, if I never was converted! If I am indeed a child of God, oh, that he would once more manifest his pardoning love to me, and show my sins forgiven, for I cannot rest as I am!" O my dear brother, I was so sorry when you went astray: your backsliding has caused me many a pang of heart; but I begin to rejoice now as I hear you talk in that way, for I think that the text is coming true: "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again"!

And now, stop till our uneasy friend gets home to-night. Nay, perhaps it will come to pass before he quits this assembly. He begins to pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He does not say that aloud, for he would be afraid that somebody would hear him. He almost wonders now that he is not put out of the place of worship, considering what kind of sinner he has been. He has sneaked in to-night, but he is in, and he trembles to find it is so: he scarcely dares to lift his eye upward. He hardly dares to hope. His desire is to get back to God, and to be forgiven; and so, with trembling hope and quivering fear, he has begun to pray. You notice that Samson began to pray when his hair began to grow; and when they took him into that temple, where they wanted him to make sport for them, he breathed an earnest prayer to God that he might be strengthened but that once to do service to his people and his God. How earnestly do I invite you that have gone back from God and his ways to pray to-night that the Lord will return to you in mercy, fill you to the full once more with his Holy Spirit, and make the bones which he has broken to rejoice! If you begin to pray I shall begin to praise: when you plead with tears, I begin to bless the Lord with exultation. For you it is coming true—"Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven."

And if that prayer should go farther still, and you should say, "I will break off every connection that holds me to the paths of sin," this would be better still. If you were to cry, "I know what drew me aside, I will have no more to do with the evil which destroyed me," it would be a hopeful sign indeed. Oh, if to-night there shall be a severance of yourself from the swine, and from all the husks that they do eat, because you are determined to go to your Father, it shall be well with you. From our church-fellowship we sometimes find one drawn aside by one motive, and another by another: alas, the ways downward are as plenteous as the gates of death! How many are tempted with unholy loves! How many are seduced by the fatal cup! Ah! how many go aside through false doctrine, heresy, and the delusions of the day! How many are foolishly tempted by their own prosperity! They grow rich, and cannot afford to worship where once they did. On the other hand, how many are led aside by their poverty! They do not think that their clothes are good enough to come in—a piece of pride from which I

pray that we may be delivered. Or, because they have come down in the world, and cannot spend as once they did, they forsake their brethren, and their Lord. For different reasons men go aside from truth and holiness; but it is a happy circumstance when they cry, "If I have been led away from Christ by anything sinful, I will give it up. I will part with my eye, or my arm, or my foot, so that I may enter into the kingdom; for it were better for me to enter into life blind, or halt, or maimed, than that, keeping these dear things, I should be cast into hell fire." When the Lord of grace leads men to this resolve we see the text fulfilled again—"Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again."

When the backslider comes to that pass, you will soon see other signs. The man who went so far astray now seeks the Lord afresh, and begins again to run in his ways. When a Nazarite lost his consecration, all the years of his consecration before did not count: he had to begin again. So some of you must begin again. Beginning again is sweet! Beginning again is safe! Even though I trust that I have not wandered from God, either in act or in heart, yet I often begin again. I delight to renew the love of my espousals, and rehearse the vows of my youth before the Lord my God. If the devil says to me, "Your religion is a pretence; your experience is a mistake;" I do not attempt to argue with him upon those lines, but I reply, "I will not cavil about the past, but I will begin again." I am a sinner; I know that, and the devil himself has not the impudence to tell me that I am not. Then, Jesus Christ died for sinners, and therefore I return to the sinners' Saviour, and trust him even as if I had never trusted him before. This I find to be the direct road to peace. To breathe again one's native air is a prescription most helpful to those who would regain their health and strength. Can you not return again to the starting-point, you that have wandered? If so, we shall all thank God for you, and look upon you as a Samson whose hair begins to grow again after he has been shaven.

If the matter goes on rightly, I know what will happen:—the forlorn backslider will begin to entertain a feeble hope. "Oh," he says, "I trust that I may be restored! I shall be a miracle of divine grace if I am; but I think that I shall be." Further on he even cries, "I hope that I am restored, and once more put among the children." He gets a bit of bread from the children's table, and though he feels that he is not much better than a dog, yet he makes bold to enjoy it. "The dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table;" and this poor man is aware of that gracious fact, and dares to take full advantage of it. Sometimes, while he is eating a crumb of promise, it tastes so sweet that he whispers to himself, "I do not think that I can be a dog after all. I think that I must be a child, for I have the taste that a child has. This is children's meat, and I do so enjoy it that, mayhap, I am, after all, a child of God."

Ah! and let me tell you that sometimes, when it is sunshiny weather, this poor seeker feels greatly encouraged and cheered. Though he will go limping to heaven by reason of his past sin, yet, on bright days, he half forgets his lameness. He has played the prodigal, and almost doubted his sonship, but with his face towards the Father's house he now cries, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed

upon me, that I should be called a child of God!" In his happiest times he feels ready to burst out with rapture, because he enjoys a sense of divine love. He even makes bold to declare—"Yes, I am forgiven. Jesus smiles, and loves me still." When he is quite alone, and nobody can hear it, he even ventures to speak of himself as, after all, one of those that the Father has loved with an everlasting love, that Christ has redeemed with precious blood, that the Spirit has renewed, and that the Lord will never cast away. What a pleasure to see his faith thus coming back to him! "Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again." We shall have him back again, and we shall see him and know him again to be the same Samson that once we knew in his first days, before he had played the fool, and brought himself into bondage. Soon we shall say, "Come in, and welcome, dear brother; for the Lord has recovered you from the disfigurement which your sin brought upon you! You are again a Nazarite, and your head and beard are covered with the tokens of your dedication. Come and take your place among those who are consecrated to the Lord." How much I desire that it may be so with all who formerly turned away from the right path, but are now casting a longing glance towards it!

I think that is the picture which our text paints for us.

II. Now I am going to turn a little way round, still keeping the shorn champion well before us. In the second place, we have to see in our text WHAT IT SPECIFICALLY SYMBOLIZES, that is to say, this text is a distinct type of some one thing. You see that Samson's strength lay in his consecration. His hair was the token of his dedication to God. When he lost his locks, he did, as it were, lose his consecration; and when he lost his consecration, he lost his strength. On the other hand, the only way by which he could regain his strength was to re-establish his consecration; and of this the growing again of his hair was the type and token.

Well, now, I know some *churches* which performed a great work a hundred years ago, or fifty years ago, or less. Their former days were heroic. Their palmy times were beautified with great prosperity. These churches knew how to suffer and to serve, they were faithful to the truth, and earnest in holy labour, and the Lord made them to be exceedingly useful; but now they have grown respectable, and useless. They do nothing outrageous now: the question is—Are they doing anything? Their minister is an extremely learned man, and as polished as a looking-glass. Of course he never addresses himself to the vulgar, neither does he oppose the views of his cultured hearers. The church itself is highly respectable; no one ever questions its high respectability, or speaks of it without due deference to its prominent position. Yet it has ceased to be a power for good: it has no influence over the mass of sinners around it. Of course its usefulness is a secondary consideration, for it must not be forgotten that it has a superior ministry, and a superior reputation: its deacons are superior, and so are most of the members! Besides, they have a celebrated choir, and a most delightful organ! A great deal of money has been spent over that organ; and if that will not save souls, and glorify God, what will? What are we to do with our respectability if we do not proclaim it by buying the most expensive organ in the market? But do not

forget the choir. I think they wear surplices; but whether they do or not, the singing is fine, the building is architectural, the pulpit is unique, and the whole thing is done in a model manner. It is true that nobody is saved; there are no additions to the church; they have not used the baptistery for a long time, but then they are wonderfully respectable! What would you have more?

In the opinion of some persons Samson looked much improved when his matted hair was gone. He was more presentable; more fit for good society. And so in the case of churches, the notion is that they are all the better for getting rid of their peculiarities. You who are in the secret know better, and you will follow me while I sorrowfully seek a remedy for the unhappy weakness which has fallen upon many communities which once were strong in the Lord. How is this church, all shaven and shorn, this poor, enslaved, and miserable concern, to be brought back to its old state? How is this Samson, that once was strong, to get its strength back again? Why, only by letting its hair grow again. It must be consecrated to God again. This church must go back to the old gospel; it must say once more, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." It must again become insatiable for the conversion of men. Prayer must again become the delight of the whole church, and its trust must be in the Spirit of the Lord. The glory of God must take possession of the church instead of its desire to be fashionable and respectable; and when its locks grow again, its strength will come back. When it is consecrated to God, it will resume its former force, bear its testimony as in better days, and once again shake the world with its power.

Now the same truth applies to every *preacher*. There are some preachers who are splendid men, and yet they are practical failures. You see in them wide knowledge, eloquent language, and yet nothing. They can speak so properly that a senate might sit with admiration at their feet; but when they have done, nobody is pricked in the heart, nobody is convinced of sin, nobody is led to behold the beauties of Christ. Yet in their youth these men were soul-winners, and were looked upon as champions for Christ. O Samson, how are we to make thee strong again? That preacher must begin again to serve God with all his heart. He must give up the idea of being a great man, or a learned man, or an eloquent man. He must give up the idea of charming the *élite*, and bringing together the fashionable, and must give himself up to glorify God by the winning of souls. When his hair grows again in that respect, we shall see what Samson can do. He will yet lay hold on the pillars of the Philistine temple, and bring them down about the heads of the lords. Give me a man perfectly consecrated, and I do not care much what he is. He may be rough, unpolished, and even illiterate; but if he be consecrated, the people will feel his power. He may be educated so that he may understand all knowledge, and he may speak as eloquently as Cicero; but if he is a consecrated man, his power will be none the less, but perhaps all the greater, because of his education. But this one thing is essential—there must be consecration to God, and downright earnestness in consequence, or else he will be a shaven Samson. May God give full consecration to each one of us who stand before the people to speak in his name, for in that consecration lies the power of

the Holy Spirit to bless us! He cannot and will not bless unconsecrated men. If we do not live to God's glory, God will not use us.

The same is true of every Christian *worker*. I have seen this demonstrated over and over again in daily life. I have seen a Christian woman most useful in a class, bringing to the Saviour many of the girls whom she has taught; but on a sudden a change has come, there have been no conversions, and for years the class has dwindled away, and nothing has come of it. If enquiry were to be made, it would be found that the consecration of the teacher had declined. She no longer spoke with tearful eye and earnest heart, seeking to love those girls to Christ; and because her consecration was gone, her strength was gone. It is just the same whether you preach in the street, or distribute tracts, or whatever you do: if you are wholly consecrated to God, you will be strong. I do not say that you will by sincere devotion alone gain all the talents, and all the mental forces you might desire; but, believe me, force does not lie in these: these are like sword and spear, but the strength with which they are to be wielded lies elsewhere. You do not absolutely require great abilities; but you must have perfect consecration. Be thankful if you have javelin and shield, but go on without them if you have not been armed with them; for, to a devoted man, even a castaway bone will be sufficient weapon. Samson did not wait till he found a falchion worthy of his heroic hand; but he used such instruments as he found on the spot. It is in consecration that your strength will lie. Let but the arrow be winged by a mighty pull of the bow, and it will go straight forward in proportion to the force that has impelled it. Let but God fit you to his bow, and send you forward with divine energy: what need you more? The impulse that comes from on high is your strength, and that impulse is found in your consecration to your Lord.

Perhaps I am addressing some Christian person who is not altogether a worker, but partly a *sufferer*. He is only a private Christian, bearing up as he may under the trials of life. You have grown rather dull of late, dear friend. You do not enjoy things as you once did. You have not the vivacity and the enjoyment which you once had in the things of God. See to it. Has there not been a razor at work upon you somewhere? Oh, yes, I knew a brother who, when he had a little money, rejoiced to have it because he gave to the cause of God abundantly! I believe that he is worth a hundred times as much as he was then, and he gives a hundredth part of what he used to do when he was poorer. In proportion as his pocket has grown golden his heart has grown bronzy. He has gone down in himself in proportion as he has gone up in his property, and now he does not enjoy things as he used to do. He is a poor creature to what he once was; even in his own esteem he is not the happy man he once was! How much I wish that this good man's hair would grow so that he would again be living for his Lord, whom I trust he still loves!

I know Christian people who used to spend an hour a day in prayer. The hour has dwindled into five minutes. They used to be constant at week-night services. They very seldom gladden us with their presence now; and they are not as happy as they once were. I can read this riddle. If a man were to reduce his meals to eating once a week, we

could not warrant his health. I would not guarantee that, if a man never ate except on Sundays, he would grow strong. So I do not think that people who neglect the means of grace, and give up their consecration, can expect to be lively, happy, or vigorous. When the razor gets to work, and the hair of conscious, resolute devotion to God begins to fall on the floor, lock after lock, the strength is departing; and only as that hair begins to grow again, and spiritual consecration returns, can these people expect to be useful, influential, and strong in the Lord.

I must say no more on this point; but it is most important, and I pray the Holy Spirit to stir up your pure minds concerning it.

III. I will close with this further consideration. We are now to remember WHAT IT PROPHESED when Samson's hair began to grow again. I wonder why these Philistines did not take care to keep his hair from growing to any length. If cutting his hair once had proved so effectual, I wonder that they did not send in the barber every morning, to make sure that not a hair grew upon his scalp or chin. But wicked men are not in all matters wise men: indeed, they so conspicuously fail in one point or another that Scripture calls them fools. The devil himself is a fool after all. He thinks that he is wonderfully cunning, but there is always a place where he breaks down. These servants of Satan, these boastful Philistines, said confidently, "We have done for him now, once for all. We have put out his eyes, and what can a blind man do?" They do not go on cutting off his hair because they fancy that, once lost, the good man's strength is lost for ever. Perhaps they said, "Now we have lashed him to the mill: the stronger he gets the more he can grind; therefore let his hair grow, and so he will be the more useful to us." Great was the foolishness of their wisdom: they were fostering their own destruction. Satan, also, is very cunning in getting hold of backsliders, but he generally manages to let them slip by his over-confidence in their wilfulness. Many a man have I seen come back to the dear Saviour on account of the oppression which he has endured from his old master, the prince of darkness! If he had been treated well, he might never have returned to Christ any more; but it is not possible for the citizens of the far country to treat prodigals well; sooner or later they starve them, and oppress them, so that they run away home.

When Samson's hair began to grow, what did it prophesy? Well, first, it prophesied *hope for Samson*. I will be bound to say that he put his hand to his head, and felt that it was getting bristly, and then he put his hand to his beard, and found it rough. Yes, yes, yes, it was coming, and he thought within himself, "It will be all right soon. I shall not get my eyes back. *They* will not grow again. I am an awful loser by my sin, but I shall get my strength back again, for my hair is growing. I shall be able to strike a blow for my people and for my God yet." So round the mill he went, grinding away, grinding away, but every now and then putting his hand to his head, and thinking, "My hair is growing; oh, it is growing again! My strength is returning to me." The mill went round merrily to the tune of hope, for he felt that he would get his old strength back again. When they loaded it, and tightened it to make the work heavier, yet his hair was growing; and

so he found the burden lighter than it had been before, and his heart began to dance within him, in prospect of being his former self again. Now, if any of you have signs of restoring grace in your hearts, and you are coming back to your God and Saviour, be glad, be thankful. Do not hesitate to let your renewed devotion to God be seen by those round about you. Come along, brother, come along; your brethren wait to receive you! Come along, my wandering sister, come along; all the people of God will welcome you! If the grace of God is moving you at all, be hopeful and quicken your steps, and come to Jesus. Come to him just now even as you came at first. Yea, and if you never did come before, come now, and throw yourselves at the cross-foot, and look up to those five precious wounds. Look and live; for there is life in a look at the Crucified One. There is life at this moment even for the chief of sinners.

What did this prophesy? Joy for Samson, but, also, *hope for Israel*. Oh, if any of the Israelites did get in to see him in prison, how they must have been cheered by the sight of his returning hair! Some ancient Israelite would say to his brother, "I have been to see poor Samson. You remember him. We had to put him out of the church, you know. Sad case. I have been to see him." "How did he look?" "Well," he would say, "there was much to grieve me, but somewhat also to comfort me. He does not look as he did on the day when the Philistines shaved him. He looks quite hairy again." "Oh!" the other would say, "then he will get strong again, and when he is strong, he will use his mighty arms against the oppressors of his people. I know he will fight for his country again. When he gets strong again, he will lift that brawny arm of his that smote the Philistines, and he will let them know that he is an Israelite yet. I know he will; for his heart will return to the love of God and his chosen. Philistia shall not always triumph over us. There is hope for us." So, my dear brothers and sisters, when we see in you some little signs of grace, and you are coming back, you do not know how cheerily we talk to one another. Why, at the elders' meeting, one of them said, "Our poor brother Jones was at the Tabernacle the other night. You remember him." "Yes, we do remember him, indeed." "Well he was listening to our pastor; I was so pleased to see him." Another brother also said, "I am glad to tell you that Mrs. So-and-so, the sister that went so sadly astray, was outside the chapel; and when I pressed her to come in, she wept, and said she wished she had never gone away. There is a good work going on there." We rejoice together, and we say, "Thank God, they are coming back again!" Oh, you do not know the joy that you backsliders will give to the hearts of God's people if you do but return! There is joy not only with the Great Shepherd, but with his friends and his neighbours when the lost sheep is restored to the fold. Do you not know that the Chief Shepherd calls his brethren together, and says, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost?"

Lastly, what did it prophesy? Well, it prophesied *mischiefs for the Philistines*. They did not know it, but if they could have read the writing in Samson's heart, they would have understood that he meant to shave their nation quite as closely as they had shaven him. There was a storm brewing for Philistia. He that rent the lion as though it

had been a kid was getting back his strength. He that seized the jaw-bone of an ass, and said, "Heaps upon heaps, with the jaw-bone of an ass have I slain a thousand men," will soon be scattering death among the oppressors of his people. Woe to you, lords of Philistia! Woe to you, princes of Gaza!

When a sinner who has gone astray is restored again, it means mischief to the kingdom of Satan. Oh, how he will serve his God! How he will try to bring back his fellow-sinners! Having had much forgiven, this man will love much, and will serve Jesus much. He will be one of your earnest Christian men, depend upon it. He will be much in prayer; he will be careful in his walk; he will be holy in his speech; he will contend earnestly for the doctrines of grace; he will be a leader amongst the host of God, even as he has been a ringleader in sin. He will invade the dark places, and lead the chief of sinners captive to the cross. Woe to thee, Philistia, when Samson's hair grows again! Woe to the hosts of evil, when the backslider is restored!

There, I have put it all before you. I have tried to put the matter interestingly; but all the while my heart has been yearning over you that have gone aside, I am pining for the restoration of those who have turned like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. I long for your restoration, or your true conversion. I want to see a different nature in you, that you may neither be dogs nor swine, but may become the real children of our God and Father; and then you will not return to your former ways. If you have defiled yourselves, may you at once be washed! If you have wandered, may you at once be restored to Jesus and his church, to the praise and the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hosea xi. and xiv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—605, 620, 607.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELOVED FRIENDS,—*A Happy New Year to you all*, in the best possible sense.

In answer to many prayers I am raised up, and I am looking forward hopefully to a happy return to my pulpit. True, I am not strong, and may never be long free from my infirmity; but yet I hope to do good service, and at least to "hold the fort." For this I again beg the prayers of many friends, and once more I would say—if these sermons are of any service to you, please spread them by introducing them to fresh friends. Pardon me for repeating this, for I am anxious that I may do all the good I can while I am spared to publish these discourses.

To my affectionate and sympathetic congregation I desire my hearty love in Christ Jesus. I hope to see them all on Sunday, January 23rd.

Yours to serve, for Christ's sake,

Mentone, New Year's Day, 1887.

C. H. SPURGEON.