

Then, as another illustration, take pride. The love of display. Indulge that, and you will soon find your time and mind so occupied with such frivolous matters as what you are to wear, how and when you are to wear it. Where you ought to go : and with whom associate. How best to attract attention to yourself, and by what means maintain your dignity : until your poor shrivelled up soul will be fitted for no better occupation than that of a butterfly.

Then again—take sloth : not an uncommon lust of the flesh. Yield to this and you will never make spiritual progress. It will either keep you in such ignorance of your spiritual condition and such sleepy indifference to all the requirements of the soul, as to deprive you of all concern about it : or else induce you to postpone all action necessary to the improvement of that condition, so that you will never be able to advance. And if such be the effect of these—so to speak—refined lusts of the flesh ; what must be the effect of such as gluttony, drunkenness and uncleanness ?

It will therefore be seen at a glance why a man, for his own sake, should deny himself. And why St. Peter should so emphatically warn us against the indulgence of the flesh.—“ Dearly beloved ” says St. Peter, “ I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

But not only have we to resist the flesh : but we have to contend with other and mightier enemies : “ We wrestle not against flesh and blood,” says St. Paul—that is, not merely against flesh and blood—“ but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” And while self-indulgence unfits us to contend with those forces, self-denial braces and strengthens us for the fight ; and enables us by God’s grace to cope *successfully* with them.

Self-denial merely as a mode of discipline, even if there were no other advantage accruing from it, would well repay all who practised it : for it is impossible to use self-restraint, and by so doing gain a victory over self, without feeling all the better for it. And those who never won such a victory have no idea of the luxury they have missed. But when our eternal destiny depends largely upon the result of these encounters with our spiritual foes, the importance of self-denial becomes immense. St. Paul fully understood this, and hence he says :—“ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly ; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air ; but I keep under my body, and bring it