

at once to assure them that not only was this the case, but that all who would be His followers must also be prepared to suffer—"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it : and whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it."

Now we know that God cannot take delight in the suffering of any of His creatures : that He wills our happiness here, as well as hereafter : that He does not wish us to be deprived of anything which is for our real good : and that consequently there must be some wise purpose to be accomplished by this self-denial and cross-bearing.

Let us then consider a few of the more prominent reasons why the self-denial of the cross should be cheerfully undertaken by christians.

I. It is absolutely necessary to our own spiritual life and advancement.

This will be the more readily seen by taking into consideration the effect of its opposite—self-indulgence.

Self-indulgence is always injurious under any circumstances. And a person who is guilty of it is never expected to be of much service either to himself or any body else ; as it produces indolence, peevishness and often disease. It unfits a man for undertaking, with any prospect of success, any important business. And particularly, does it render him incapable of successfully competing with others. And if this is the case—as all will admit it is—in matters of the world ; it is equally so in religious matters. The christian life is essentially one of warfare. Not only has the christian to contend with foes without ; but also those that are within. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit," says St. Paul. And if the lusts of the flesh are indulged there can be no spiritual growth : for those appetites and propensities when not checked must of necessity clog in their action, and weaken in their force the higher powers of the soul. And by fleshly lusts is not meant merely the grosser animal appetites ; but all that constitutes the desires and tendencies of the lower nature. Take avarice for example. Let that be indulged, and the result will be such a complete absorption of all the powers of the mind by the over-powering love of wealth and the entire devotion of all the time and talents of the individual to the acquisition of this world's goods, that the soul will be entirely neglected, its powers weakened, and it become an easy prey to the enemy.