

2nd CORINTHIANS XII.

(Concluded from page 144.)

We find in Philippians this confidence in the flesh (not lusts of corruption) judged by the apostle. All that made Paul of undue importance to himself, or to others and so reflectively to himself, was rejected. It would have been confidence in self. Our part is to be in the presence of God, that all which is of self may be judged. But God, as I have said, helps us. Here God had, by the abundance of the revelations given to Paul, given an occasion which the flesh could use. In His mercy He meets the danger for Paul, which *he* might not, surely would not, have rightly met; for God does not afflict willingly. He lets loose this messenger of Satan at him, but to do His own work, as with Job. And Paul has some infirmity which tends to make him despicable in preaching. "My temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not," says he to the Galatians—a natural counterpoise to the abundance of revelations.

What can the flesh do with this then? Well, it would be spared what seemed a hindrance. To whom? Why, to Paul. Just right. Paul had to be kept down—terrible truth for us! Must we be made weak and inefficient in order to be blessed and used? Yes, if, wretched worms as we are, we are in danger of leaning as man on the flesh's efficiency and strength. The works that are done upon the earth, God doeth them Himself, and above all spiritual work. *He* gives the increase.

If He puts the poor vessel in a certain sense in danger, and in many a case where it puts itself, He meets the danger by striking at its root in self. He makes nothing of self, renders the incapacity of nature to anything not only apparent, but apparent to *ourselves*, and this is what we want.

That self should feel self nothing, or a hindrance, is a most divine work (though it be a shame to a man who has been in the third heaven to think *himself* something in respect of it : but flesh is incorrigible), but as to the instrumentality used, a mean and miserable process, such as becomes making nothing of flesh. If death is our deliverance from all sin, we must taste it for our deliverance practically. The bitter water of Marah must be tasted when the salt waters of the Red Sea have delivered us from Egypt for ever and ever. Put the wood of the tree, the cross of Christ, into our cross, and all will be sweet. "Crucified" is terrible work—crucified with Christ, joy and deliverance ; reproach is cruel—the reproach of Christ is greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. But there are cases where the will and natural reluctance of the flesh to suffer are in question ; there are also those which are characterized by the danger of positive evil working, as pride or vanity in the case of Paul. As to all, death must be tasted. The nothingness and incompetency of all flesh must be felt where it would be disposed to think itself competent. It must

find its pretensions arrested and set aside when it has, or would be disposed to have, such ; it must find itself consciously weak where it might hope to be strong or capable of something.

As to what self would lean on, it must find itself a hindering flesh where it would pretend to be a helping one. It is really nothing in the work and path of God ; but when it would be positively something, it must be made to feel itself a positive hindrance. This is not the end, but it is the way. We must be humbled when we are not humble, or even in danger of not being so. This work may come in preventively. But the flesh must be nothing if we are to have blessing ; and in order that the new man, which is content that God should be all, and knows its power is in Christ only, may be free and happy, and God, as it desires, may be glorified. The power of Satan and the power of death concur in ministering to our usefulness in Christ, because Satan wields this power to kill practically the flesh, and we have another life which lives in Christ, and lives for Him. This question is first settled as regards righteousness, as we have seen ; we are dead and risen again ; but it has to be practically settled as regards life and power of walk also. So that we may say, whatever our little measure may be, "To me to live is Christ."

But the fact that the flesh is thus practically mortified is not in itself power ; we must be positively dependent on another—glad to be so, if our

heart is in Christ's service, and that we find His help only can make us to serve Him. To have Him is joy in every way. This is what follows: "I will glory in my infirmities"—not sin, but what broke down the flesh in its will and hindered sin, "that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Here is positive power capable of everything, or rendering us capable of everything in the path of obedience, giving no power at all out of it, but fulfilling in power all the energy of love in obedience. For the Christian path is not mere legal obedience which submits to a will which arrests and stops our will, but an obedience which serves with delight in love, and in which love is positively and energetically active in doing good. This path is regulated by the Lord's will and fulfilled by the Lord's power, but that power can have no adventitious aid. It must be the strength in us of a dependent nature. In this is the right condition of the creature, obedience and conscious dependence (and both delighted in) on One who has title, and alone has title, to all the praise; who loves us, and on whose love we lean.

In the path of service, the energy of Christ's love impels us, Christ's power sustains and enables us: flesh, only a hindrance to that, must be put down, and practically annulled, that Christ may work freely in us according to the blessing of that love. We then say, the love of Christ constrains us. I can do all things through Him which strengtheneth me, the only true abiding

state of the Christian, be he babe or father in Christ; only the thing he may have to do may be different, and his temptations too. God in all cases is faithful not to suffer him to be tempted above what he is able. When a man is in Christ, then, redeemed, quickened, and united to the Head, accepted in the Beloved, the work of God in order to power is to break down and bring the flesh to conscious nothingness wherever it is needed; not by mending, using, ameliorating, but, if needed because of its will to be something, breaking it down, yea, making it for man's capabilities of acting a sensible hindrance. That is all that God makes of man as to his flesh and competency; but there is a deep lesson of blessing in it besides being the path of power in source. We are emptied of self, and Christ (that is, purity, and love, and blessing—God known to us in grace) becomes everything to us, the more unhindered joy of the soul, made practically like Him.

But we become now sensibly dependent, and Christ our power, I do not say sensibly power; for though there may be a consciousness of His strength, the service and work is done indeed, but done without any conscious strength. It may be done with joy, done in communion with Christ, and thus with joy in the service itself. It may be done with fear and trembling, and hence with no joy, though with confidence. That depends much upon how far we have to meet the sensible power of the enemy, always in weakness as to self, al-

ways in confidence as to Christ, that it is His work, and He the doer of it, though He may use us as instruments. And this operation is not merely an effect in us, though there be one ; it is the positive power of Christ, a real acting and working of His power, for which the sensible putting down of flesh is only preparatory, that it might be evidently not the power of flesh, and that there might be no mixture of the two in our minds. Hence the flesh is turned into positive, sensible weakness. But the power of Christ rests upon us, so that it is joy to the soul because He uses us—connects Himself, so to speak, with us—deigns to make us the instruments and servants, willing and rejoicing servants, of this power. It is His power, but it rests on us. This is not the man in Christ, but *Christ with the man*—His power resting on him, emptied of self.

The path of strength, then, is the being made sensible of our own weakness, so that divine strength, which will never be a supplement to flesh's strength, may come in. Thus there is entire dependence, and the positive coming in of Christ's power to work by us. If Paul's bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible, and there was something which tended to make him despised, by whose power was it that such wondrous blessing for the whole world flowed forth on all sides, from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum ?

One or two remarks more, and I will close my

imperfect suggestions on this chapter. First, remark, that the humbling process with Paul was no depriving of the abundance of the revelations, or weakening the consciousness that he was a man in Christ. This would have been positive loss. These were fully maintained and gloried in. The use the flesh would make of them when consciously down here in the body, in the world, was met by an accessory humbling process carried on in the flesh itself. Next, remark, that it is not merely power which is gained by this process. The discernment of good and evil, in its more subtle characters, is greatly increased; the judgment and knowledge of flesh is greatly strengthened and deepened. Hence the liberty of the new man with God, confidence in Him, the sense of the careful and gracious interest He takes in us, and intercourse founded on this confidence, are greatly increased.

Further, remark, that dealing with self, our own spiritual condition, is the secret of *power*, not the quantity of divine revelations we have to communicate, valuable as this may be in its place. For power Paul was dealt with in his own soul, its own dangers and state, and then Christ's power rested on him. Lastly, as to our glorying in our position in Christ; it is all right. "Of such an one will I glory; yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." When I think of my place in Christ, of the "man in Christ," of such a one we ought to glory. This is no presumption.

It cannot be otherwise, whenever we know ourselves in Christ. Do you think I can do anything but glory in being in Christ, and like Christ in glory? Of such a one I will. Let no pretended humility deprive us of this. It is legalism. Of myself, of that of which I have the living consciousness as a man down here, I cannot glory, unless it be in those sufferings for Christ and infirmities of whatever kind they may be, connected with them, which are used to put the flesh down, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

I would add to these, one collateral observation. The Lord can unite discipline with positive suffering for Christ, though the two things are quite distinct. When Paul was subjected to contempt in his preaching, it was for Christ's sake he suffered, yet the form of it was, we have seen, a discipline to prevent his being puffed up. This may be seen doctrinally stated in Hebrews xii. 2-11. In verses 2-4, we suffer with Christ, striving against sin, even to martyrdom and death. In verses 5-11, the same process is the discipline of the Lord, that we may be partakers of His holiness. How wise and most gracious of the Lord's ways to turn our needed discipline into the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake, so that we can glory in our infirmities! There is chastening which has not this character, being for positive evil. In this, doubtless, we have to thank God, but it is another thing.

In fine, before God we have the "man in Christ"

—blessed position—and which is perfection where we want it; and as to our place before men, besides Christ in us as life, the power of Christ (where we practically want it—in weakness and imperfection down here) resting on the man for walk and service before men. The first is the basis of all our walk, but it does not suffice for power. This is had in daily dependence in which we walk, as humbled in ourselves, that Christ may be glorified, and the flesh practically annulled.



A REMARKABLE STATEMENT OF AN OLD WRITER.

The following extract, on Rev. xi., which gives such a marked and striking picture of the spirit that is working at the present time, is worthy of a place in our pages. It was written over two hundred and fifty years ago, by one whose powers are above question, while those better instructed in the ways of God, could not accept to the full, the interpretation of the Scriptures treated of, celebrated though the writer was.

The direct interpretation of the book of Revelation (chaps. iv.-xxii) is strictly future, although affording, doubtless, certain large features in outline, of the protracted history of the events of the last eighteen centuries or more. Still, when details are examined, the futurist view alone will stand, *i. e.*, when the true state of the professing church seen in chaps. ii. and iii. is past, the saints

are seen in heaven from chap. iv. and onwards, during the short period of judgment which ushers in the millennial kingdom. All that part of the book is strictly future in direct application :

“The church of God on earth will be greatly reduced, as we may well imagine, in its apparent numbers in the times of Antichrist, by the open desertion of the powers of the world. The desertion will begin in a professed indifference to any particular form of Christianity, under pretence of universal toleration ; which toleration will proceed from no true spirit of Christian charity and forbearance, but from a desire to undermine Christianity by multiplying and encouraging sectaries. The intended toleration will go far beyond a just toleration, even as it regards the different sects of Christianity ; for governments will pretend an indifference to all, and will give protection in preference to none. All establishments will be laid aside. From the toleration of the most pestilent heresies, they will proceed to Mohammedanism, Atheism, and at last to a positive persecution of the truths of Christianity.

“In these times the temple of God will be reduced to the holy place, viz., to the small number of real Christians who worship the Father in Spirit and in truth, and who regulate their doctrine and worship, and their whole conduct by the word of God alone.

“The mere nominal professors will all desert their profession of the truth when the powers of the world forsake them ; and this tragical event I take to be typified by the order of St. John to measure the temple and the altar, and to leave the outer court (National Church) to be trodden under foot of the Gentiles ! The property of the clergy

will be pillaged ; the public worship insulted and vilified by the deserters of the faith they once professed, who are not called apostate, because they were never earnest in their profession ; there was nothing more than a compliance with fashion and public authority ; in principle they were always what they now appear to be—Gentiles.

“ When this general desertion of the faith takes place, there will commence the sackcloth ministry of the witnesses. There will be nothing of splendour in the external support from government, no honours, no emoluments, no immunities, no authority but such as no earthly power can take away, which they desire from Him who commissioned them to be His witnesses.”



BABYLON.—On her forehead her name was written. A drunken world does not see it ; but a saint ought not to mistake it. We should judge from the *outside* of it ; and if we are in our place, in the Spirit in the wilderness, we shall not mistake. But if we tamper with it, we have lost the sense of it : we have drunk some of the wine, if we do not discern it.



GOD IS GOD.

Yes, be the world ever so godless—GOD is GOD still ;
 Be the professing church ever so ungodly, GOD is GOD still ;
 Be the people of GOD ever so little godly, still GOD is GOD.

This *mere* truism, then, that “ GOD is GOD,”

Is a very practical truth for us where we are.

And it has a whole volume of truth in it,

Not only as to man's walk in the wilderness,

But as being at the very root, and forming the very core,

Of the *Gospel* itself.

GODLY SENSIBILITIES, WITHOUT GODLY ENERGY.

GENESIS XXVII.

What moral illustrations that beautiful book of Genesis does afford us ; what a variety of character is exhibited for our warning and instruction ! Isaac takes his place in the midst of these characters thus produced and presented—and for a saint we get in him but a poor sample. He had godly *sensibilities*, as well as human, amiable, virtues ; but he had not godly *energy*. He reminds us of Jehoshaphat in other days. Jehoshaphat had godly *sensibilities*, but he failed in godly *energy*. Through vanity he failed : he joined affinity with Ahab, and had not strength to refuse to go to the battle with him. But still he had *sensibilities* in his soul that were spiritual and of divine workmanship—for in the midst of the prophets of Baal he was not satisfied. He had a witness within that this would not do, and he asked, “Were there not beside a prophet of the Lord?” But, strange and humbling to tell it, he would still go to the battle in company with the very Ahab who had thus wounded the spiritual *sensibilities* that stirred in his soul, and who had thus, in infidel revolt from the God of Israel, consulted the prophets of Baal (2 Chron. xviii). This was terrible ; but this was that king Jehoshaphat.

Isaac, so, on this occasion, had his *sensibilities*, but not his corresponding *energies*. It was not

through vanity, as did Jehoshaphat, that he failed : it was rather through a general relaxed moral tone of soul, that sought ease and indulgence ; but while Isaac, with a godly mind, could grieve over Esau's marriage with a daughter of Heth, one of the people of the land, yet, that very Esau is Isaac's object, and keeps and holds the dearest affections of his heart, so that Isaac cannot give himself back for God. He is answered by an earlier Ahab, though the witness within tells him that it is an-Ahab that is doing it. He would fain help the profane Esau to a blessing, as Jehoshaphat would help the idolatrous Ahab to the victory.

What sights are these, and what lessons and warnings to our souls !

It is practically important to remark that worldliness or any allowance of what is not of God, by a godly man, gives the weight of his godliness to the evil he allows.

GOD'S OBJECT IN OUR TRIALS.

Ah ! has Christ ever touched the quick of your soul in solitude ? Do you know the exquisite tenderness of His touch ? He does not tear and lacerate. The necessities and trials of saints down here are created by God in order to show them what Christ is for them. If I have taken Him as Lord, I do not expect an easy way. God

never meant us to have it as disciples. He takes us into a rough path to show what Christ is, and that in it His grace may be able to vent itself. There is a yearning in His heart up there to let this grace be displayed in the poor, needy people down here—a longing that His strength should be made perfect in their weakness. Do you know for yourself the grace of that living Christ? Do you know what Christ has to do with you, and you with him? Do you know yourself as one of a flock that belongs to Him, that He is tending and guarding through the wilderness, and carrying on to glory to be for ever with Himself?

“But the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, when ye have suffered for a little while, Himself shall make perfect, stablish, strengthen, ground; to Him be the glory and the might for the ages of the ages, Amen.” 1 Pet. v. 10, 11. (New Trans.)

WALKING WORTHY.

My attention has been drawn to the use of “Walking worthy.” In Ephesians we see clearly its connection with the noticed force and character of the Epistle. This treats of the Christian and then of the Church’s privileges, and the saint is to “walk worthy of his vocation” here, especially in Church place, and the worthiness to be of that.

In Colossians, where the glory of the Person of Christ is brought out, as they were slipping away from the Head—I do not say His headship, but the glory of Him who is Head—they are to “walk worthy of the Lord.” It is in this part that God and Father, the Lord and the Spirit are brought out.

In the Thessalonians, who, from being heathens, had been brought to know the one true God, the Father—“The Assembly of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father,” having not intermediate and indeed demon powers, but being in direct, immediate relationship with the one true God, they are called to “walk worthy of God who has called us to His own kingdom and glory”—so they were “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.”

Philippians, in which we have the experimental condition of the Christian, and the Gospel is spoken of as in conflict in the world (Paul being in the bonds of it), they were to walk worthy of the Gospel (ch. i. 27). So Paul was “set for the confirmation and defence of the Gospel”—he speaks of the “beginning of the Gospel”—Timothy had “served with him in the Gospel”—the women had “contended with him in the Gospel”—Paul was set “for the defence of the Gospel”—they had fellowship “in the furtherance of the Gospel.” So it will be seen that when they were called to walk worthy of it, conflict is spoken of, for which a right walk was needed, but they were not to be

terrified by their adversaries. The true Gospel was as a cause, as a person, in conflict in the world—they who stood by it as one they contended along with, were to walk worthy of it. They were “striving together with the faith of the Gospel,” contending along with the faith of the Gospel in the world—not “for” the faith, but “with” it, as an associate with it in its conflicts.

There is thus in the three “walkings worthy,” I think, a practical difference, though essentially the same. In Thessalonians it is the essential measure and its nature—“Walk worthy of God,” imitators of God as dear children, “Who has called us to His own kingdom and glory.” Then the manifestation of what this is in a Divinely perfect expression of it in Christ, “Worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” In Ephesians iv. we have more our own present place in it by the Holy Ghost—“the vocation wherewith we are called”—all our privileges and place being known to us through the Holy Ghost sent down when Christ was glorified—the place we are in in connection with Him glorified now.



THE lie of the serpent estranged man from God, and made him at home in the world. The work of the serpent's bruiser (Christ) makes the believer at home in the presence of God, but a stranger in the world.