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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE III.

DISPENSATIONS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE TOWARD THE
APOSTLE PAUL.

AN EXPOSITORY DISSERTATION ON 2 COR. 12: 7—10.

By Edward Beecher, D. D., Boston, Mass.

AN intelligent sympathy with the Christian experience of a servant of God so eminent as the Apostle Paul, is one of the most important and effectual means of sanctification. In the passage selected for consideration, there are the elements of the highest form of such a Christian experience, and yet the spiritual advantage of it is to a great extent lost by the substitution of a stimulated but ungrateful curiosity in the place of intelligent Christian sympathy.

The question: What was Paul's thorn in the flesh, becomes an exciting subject of consideration; and, inasmuch as this has received as many and as unsatisfactory answers as the question: Who was Melchisedek, the inquirer, after wandering for a time in the mazes of conjecture, abandons the inquiry with a feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment.

Many eminent critics, indeed, avow the conviction that the question is insoluble for the want of the necessary elements of reasoning. Mr. Barnes, for example, says: "All conjecture here is vain; and the numerous strange and ridiculous opinions of commentators are a melancholy attestation of their inclination to fanciful conjecture where it is *impossible* from the nature of the case to ascertain the truth." Olshausen, after stating that it was something by which God deeply humbled Paul, to prevent self-exaltation, says: "Any more particular information relative to the thorn in the flesh, or wherein it consisted, is not to be inferred." Neander and other critics come to similar conclusions.

Nevertheless, most commentators, though abandoning the ground of certainty, undertake to state their views of the probabilities of the case. And here a large and decided majority agree on the supposition that it was some bodily affliction, although a great variety of opinions is disclosed in suggesting

definitely what it probably was. According to Barnes, Jerome fixes on the headache, and Tertullian suggests the same or the earache. Tellerus argues in favor of the head-gout, and Rosenmüller regards his argument as of weight. Baxter, who was tried by the stone or gravel, suggests his own trial as Paul's thorn. A paralytic and hypochondriac disorder, caused by the action of heavenly glories on his nervous system, giving rise, perhaps, to a stammering in his speech and distortions of his countenance, was suggested by Whitby; and has been adopted by Benson, Macknight, Hade, Bloomfield, Bull, Sherlock, and Lord Barrington. Neander regards it as a constant and oppressive pain. Conybeare and Howson regard it as some unknown disease which continually impeded his efforts and shackled his energy. Olshausen also favors this view.

Other interpreters take a wider range. Calvin regards Paul's flesh in this case as not his body, but his depraved nature; and his thorn in the flesh as all the temptations of every kind by which Satan aroused it to action. In this others coincide with him. Calvin also ascribes to Chrysostom the opinion that Hymeneus, Alexander, and other similar enemies of Paul, whom the devil stirred up to oppose him, were his thorn in the flesh. It is singular, however, how many inconsistent views are ascribed to Chrysostom. Besides the preceding view, which he is represented by Calvin as holding, Barnes and Rosenmüller impute to him the opinion that the thorn in question was the headache; Jaspis, on the other hand, says that he regarded it as denoting all the obstacles which he was called on to encounter. Which of these statements of the views of Chrysostom is true, we shall not venture to say. Jaspis himself regards the false teachers in general who gave exquisite pain to Paul, as the thorn in his flesh. Others understand severe remorse of conscience in remembrance of his persecutions of the church; others, some specific, powerful and corrupt bodily or mental lust; others, severe afflictions in general.

It is not our purpose, at present, to enter upon a direct consideration or refutation of any of these views. Still less is it our purpose to acquiesce in the opinion that all further discussion of the subject is unavailing and profitless. We are far from regarding an investigation of the import of this passage as a matter of mere idle curiosity; nor do we consider the general idea of a trial for the sake of humbling Paul as sufficient, if there

are disclosures in the word of God by means of which we may arrive at a more definite knowledge.

A premature despair of knowledge may lead us to neglect much important Scriptural evidence which really exists and only needs to be properly used. A deeply interesting and very important principle may underlie the whole case. The development of this may give us a deeper insight into the heart of Paul, and invest his whole life with a new and more sublime and attractive interest. It may also deliver us from many gross and unworthy conceptions and associations which have arisen from the most common modes of understanding the passage in question.

We shall not, however, employ speculation or conjecture in developing the principle upon which we propose to base an interpretation of this passage of Scripture, but shall rely on the disclosures of the passage itself, in connection with other parts of the writings of Paul.

We shall first present the passage to be considered. 7. *Καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος Σατᾶν, ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι.* 8. *Ἵπὲρ τούτου τρίς τὸν Κύριον παρεκάλεσα, ἵνα ἀποστῇ ἀπ' ἐμοῦ,* 9. *καὶ εἴρηκέ μοι· Ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις μου ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελειούται. Ἥδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ἵνα ἐπισκηρώσῃ ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.* 10. *Διὸ ἐνδοκῶ ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν ἔβρῃσις, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν διαγμοῖς, ἐν σιτοχωρίαις, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ· ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατὸς εἰμι.*

Of this passage our English version is as follows: 7. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

First of all, then, we would call attention to the prominent position which is given to the idea of **WEAKNESS** in the reply of Christ to the prayer of Paul, and in Paul's joyful acquiescence in the decision of his Lord.

Often had he entreated his Lord that the trial in question might cease. What was the reply? "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in WEAKNESS." In accordance with this reply was the joyful and submissive acquiescence of Paul: "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my WEAKNESSES, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in WEAKNESSES, for when I am WEAK, then am I strong." When we thus consider the reply of Christ and the joyful acquiescence of Paul, a natural and obvious presumption arises, that the point of the thorn which he had prayed to Christ to remove, lay in his *weakness*, and that Christ saw fit not to grant his request, but pledged to him, at all times, all needed exercises of his own power, in and for him, and that in view of this gracious assurance he determined even to exult in his *weakness*, because when he was *weak* then he was strong.

But what is the generic idea to be ascribed to the word "weakness," thus used? We regard the general failure rightly to apprehend the sense of this passage to be owing, in part, to the want of a careful and fundamental consideration of this question. To this we may add the want of an accurate and comprehensive consideration of the actual facts of Paul's experience which are developed in his own writings, as reflecting light upon the ideas and feelings here expressed.

There has been also a deficiency of care in developing the force of the expressions "thorn in the flesh" and "messenger of Satan," in connection with these ideas.

To all these points we therefore solicit a careful attention.

Let us first endeavor to develop the idea contained in the words *weak*, *weakness* and *weaknesses* as used in this passage, and make it our guide in our subsequent interpretation.

The circumstance that in our English version the word *infirmities* is twice used, instead of *weaknesses*, tends to hide the fact that in the original but one word and its derivatives are employed (*ἀσθενία, ἀσθενίας, ἀσθενῶ*).

The fact, moreover, that these words can be applied to bodily infirmities, together with the phrase "thorn in the flesh," has led the majority of commentators, as we have seen, to refer the passage to some form of corporeal suffering or disease.

There is, however, no necessity whatever for such an application. There is in all men a natural and powerful desire, the stated and systematic disappointment and mortification of which

would produce a pain as sharp and constant as that which any bodily disease would cause, and the result of this disappointment would be that very *weakness* in a broad and comprehensive sense, from which Paul prayed to be delivered. There is in all men a *natural desire of power*, the disappointment and mortification of which would produce all these results. Moreover, the words in question are so comprehensive in their sense as properly to include all forms of the disappointment and mortification of this desire, however effected.

Weakness may be viewed from two aspects. We may take an average standard for humanity of corporeal and mental power, and what falls below this we may call weak. We thus speak of weakness of body, weakness of intellect, weakness of principle, weakness as it respects discretion and common sense, weakness as it respects purpose and courage. In the word "weakness," as thus used, there is generally an idea of depreciation.

But there is another aspect. We may suppose a man strong in body, in intellect, in principle, in discretion, in common sense, in purpose, in courage, called on to contend with calamities and afflictions, many and great, brought on himself by the providence of God, and which he has no power to resist; evils so many and so great that they utterly overpower and crush him. Strong as he may be, compared with the average standard of men, he may be but an infant when thus overloaded and crushed down by the superior power of the providence of God. Of this kind of weakness we have a perfect description by Paul himself: "We would not have you ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, *above strength*, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1: 8).

And, as it is natural to all men to resist and avert such evils to the extent of their power, whenever evils and calamities actually come upon them and depress them, so far their energies and their wills are overruled and overcome, and their weakness is revealed. Hence it is that men, when under the influence of the things which thus overcome their power, are said to be weak; and depression by calamity, persecution, odium, and misfortune is called weakness.

The words denoting weakness in English, Latin, and classic Greek, are almost universally used to denote it as viewed from the first point of vision. But in the Septuagint, ἀσθενής, ἀσθένεια

ousa and *ἀσθενία* are used to denote weakness in the last-mentioned sense. *אָפּ*, in the sense of depressed by calamities, is rendered by them by *ἀσθενής*, and *אָפּ בֶּן*, son of affliction or calamity, i. e. a person oppressed by calamities, is also translated by the word *ἀσθενής*, as may be seen in the Hebrew Concordance of Fuerst. Of this usage Schleusner gives instances in his lexicon of the Septuagint; as, for example, in Prov. 22: 22 and Prov. 31: 5. In both cases in our English version we find the word "afflicted" where the Septuagint uses *ἀσθενής*, weak. A similar use of *ἀσθενέω* and *ἀσθένεια*, to denote exhaustion or depression by labor, calamity or grief, may there be found.

That this usage should pass to the New Testament is what was to be expected, and it did in fact. Accordingly it is distinctly recognized in the lexicons of Schleusner, Wahl and Greenfield.

Used in this sense, an idea of depreciation is not involved, but merely an overruling of the power and a depression of the energies of even the most vigorous bodies and minds, by the superior energy of the instrumentalities of the providence of God.

In accordance with this view of the import of the word "weakness," we shall, as an approximation to a result, assume the position that the penetrating and painful power of Paul's thorn in the flesh, was not the effect of any one thing either bodily or mental, but of that weakness which resulted from a uniform course of Divine providence, adapted and designed to disappoint and mortify in him that desire of power which is a natural principle in all men, but which, in view of his character, mission, gifts, and circumstances, tended in him to a special development, the gratification of which would have involved great moral and spiritual danger. Moreover, the thorn was that instrument of Divine providence, to be spoken of hereafter, which was employed as the means of carrying on this weakening process.

In order that we may understand the constancy, intensity and power of such a trial, let us consider the extensive range and the energetic action of the principle which was thus mortified, the peculiar tendencies to a singular development of this principle in Paul, originating from his natural constitution and temperament, from his providential mission and peculiar endowments, and from the natural and lofty conceptions and desires of a believing, enlarged, and benevolent mind, like his.

The desire of power is by no means a necessarily depraved principle of action in our nature. Like the desire of knowledge, of esteem, and of social intercourse, it is an original part of the constitution of man, and is designed to accomplish important and benevolent ends in the economy of human society.

In unfolding the nature of this principle, Stewart remarks that "Whenever we are led to consider ourselves as the authors of any effect, we feel a sensible pride or exultation in the consciousness of power, and the pleasure is in general proportioned to the greatness of the effect, compared with the smallness of our exertion." He resolves the pleasure of activity into the pleasure of power. "The infant, while still on the breast, delights in exerting its little strength on every object it meets with, and is mortified when any accident convinces it of its own *imbecility*. The pastimes of the boy are, almost without exception, such as suggest to him the idea of his power. When he throws a stone or shoots an arrow, he is pleased with being able to produce an effect at a distance from himself; and, while he measures with his eye the amplitude and range of his missile weapon, contemplates with satisfaction the extent to which his power has reached."

As our intellectual powers are developed, and we rise to manhood, higher forms of power are with no less eagerness desired and pursued. Elevated social position, eminence of station and political authority greatly enlarge our power, and are, therefore, generally and earnestly desired. But still more, in minds of the noblest order, intellectual energy, proceeding from natural powers, high cultivation, and great attainments, is an object of the highest esteem. It is, indeed, a lofty exercise of power to survey the intellectual convictions and to control the will of nations and of generations by the force of reasoning and by the fascinations of eloquence.

Systematizing minds, in particular, delight in the discovery of general principles, and in the disclosure of the great laws of nature, as furnishing new sources of power. The fact that knowledge, thus viewed, is power, is stated by Bacon as one of its chief recommendations to mankind.

Stewart, at least in part, resolves the love of property into the love of power. He also traces the pleasures of virtue in part to the consciousness of power over the inferior principles of our nature, and of energy of will to resist alike the seductions and the assaults of temptations.

From this brief view of the extended influence of the love of power, it is obvious that it is one of the most energetic stimulants to action which God has implanted in the constitution of man, and that it is one main source of social, intellectual, and moral progress.

Let us now consider the original constitution and temperament of the Apostle Paul, in order to understand the power with which this principle would be developed in him. He was, then, by his original constitution, a systematizing mind of the highest order; an imaginative mind able to invest the systems which he conceived with all forms of beauty and sublimity; an executive mind with burning energy and dauntless courage to carry into effect whatever he conceived and planned; and a mind with a keen sense of symmetry and proportion by which he could regulate the details of a system, so that it might not be distorted or marred in its progress toward completion.

No one of the inspired writers ever delighted as did Paul to take God, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things, as the great centre of unity for the universe, and from this point of vision to survey his plans and purposes in a past and a future eternity. No one ever adorned such a survey with more vivid colors of a glowing imagination. No man ever devoted himself to the execution of a vast plan with a larger amount of emotion and with greater energy of will. We see this before his conversion as well as after it. He embodied in himself the whole executive energy of Judaism as a system, before he was called by his Lord to be the great apostle of Christianity to the gentile world.

Of his power to adjust details in symmetry with a vast plan, we have an illustrious example in his Epistles, and especially in those to the Corinthians. The final condition of the universe in its perfected state under God and the church was ever before him. He saw the types of which the whole system was full. He regulated marriage on the assumption that the family was a little microcosm, or model of the universe. He decided questions as to law-suits in view of the fact that saints were to judge the world and even angels. He decided questions of Christian wisdom and expediency, with the full range of sacred history and precedents before his mind.

He was thus a metaphysician, a poet, a man of executive generalship, and of minute, harmonious, and symmetrical detail.

Such was Paul by constitution and by temperament. Let us now consider the magnitude and sublimity of the mission with which he was entrusted. There was in the ancient oracles of God a sublime conception of the church of God, not only in her relations to the coming ages of this world, but also in her relations to the endless cycles of eternity. He saw the church, not as a Jewish kingdom, nor as a Christian Jewish sect, but as the portion of God, the fulness of him who filleth all in all. In the incarnation and atonement he saw the means of her redemption. But on all sides, not merely among the unconverted Jews, but even among the original apostles and Jewish Christians, there were tendencies to depress Christianity from this high development. Even in those Jewish Christians who rejected the idea of a worldly empire, there was a constant propensity to develop Christianity as merely one of many Jewish sects.

High above all this, for the sake of the church in all ages, it pleased God to raise Paul. He disclosed to him his vast designs, in all their illimitable range and extent. He even took him out of the regular chain of earthly progress, and, by an elevation to the third heaven, exalted him not only above his own age, but above all ages. From the highest point of vision he exposed the whole system to his view, and then sent him back to earth to develop and execute his plans for all coming generations.

Such, then, were the commission and the endowments of Paul. Is it not now self-evident that every tendency of his nature as a man, and of his circumstances as a Christian, impelled him to seek power in its largest measure to execute a plan so vast, so glorious?

But, besides all this, no man had loftier conceptions than he of the unbounded energies of the Spirit of God, and of his illimitable power to repress and control the action of Satan, to direct providential developments, and to illuminate, regenerate, organize, and sway the minds of men. Left to his own benevolent desires, and to his own Christian judgment, how natural was it that he should desire to make, through Divine aid, at Athens, at Rome, and at other great gentile centres, such developments of intellectual and moral power as should electrify the world and organize around him a compact body of harmonious and believing minds, enlarged by God to rise to the sublimity of his own conceptions. How natural that he should think that an established and concentrated moral influence, and a stable position of

power from which to exert it, would be most for the glory of God, and for the general good. No doubt in many a prayer, not of ambition but of love, such conceptions passed before his mind as objects of earnest desire, if not even of assured faith. Not for himself, but for a cause vast, momentous, glorious beyond conception, as we may naturally suppose, did he earnestly seek them. Indeed, he might think it reasonable to ask: How could a work so vast, and against obstacles so great, be accomplished except by such developments of power?

If, now, we suppose a system of Divine providence adopted toward him, in which none of these elements of power were included, in which, on the one hand, God did not elevate the churches by his Spirit to the Apostle's point of conception or of love, so that they could properly appreciate and be influenced by his character, and in which he did not so repress, on the other hand, the power of Satan that their confidence in him was not often and easily shaken, in which, also, he gave Satan wide range in stirring up against him Jewish antagonists to assail and weaken his power, in his own churches, at every point, and to arouse against him in every form the hostility of the gentile world, so that often his influence over his dearest churches seemed to be on the verge of destruction, and that too, when they appeared to be on the very brink of ruin, while, at the same time, incessant storms of odium and persecution were beating on him from without, a homeless wanderer, unable to retreat to any centre of honor or power; if we suppose such a system adopted, and persevered in through life, then we can easily understand how deeply and constantly and sharply it would penetrate and agonize the most vital sensibilities of his nature. The severity of his trial would not lie in mere bodily or mental suffering as such. If by these he could but have gained the longed-for power and influence to organize and carry out his plans, gladly would he have endured them. But to be entrusted with such a mission, to be loaded with such responsibilities, and thus to find himself constantly weakened, depressed, and crushed by the providence of God, and to have it seem as if everything was passing out of his control, and as if he were utterly powerless to effect anything, this would be a trial, indeed, to such a man as Paul.

Thus have we endeavored to develop the principle which, as we suppose, underlies this passage. Let us now survey the actual facts of Paul's experience as delineated by himself, and

the language of the record, and consider what evidence can thence be derived.

And here we lay down the following positions :

1. The course of Divine providence which has been supposed was in fact pursued toward the Apostle Paul.
2. It did in fact affect his keenest sensibilities in the manner that has been described.
3. The language of the passage in question is exactly adapted to describe what was thus true as a matter of historical fact.
4. There are serious, if not insuperable, objections to the other and more common modes of interpretation.
5. This view invests with new interest, and a new power of instruction, the character and example of Paul.

Let us, then, look at the actual facts which developed themselves in the Apostle's experience, as indicating the course of Divine providence.

As a general fact, then, there was such a limitation of the influences of the Divine Spirit, that the churches were not raised either to the Apostle's point of conception, or to the enlargement of his love. His very elevation above them weakened him. He was so much above them and beyond them, that he was uncomprehended, unappreciated. He crucified the flesh, they remained carnal. He stood as a full-grown man, they remained as babes in need of milk and unable to digest strong meat. Of this we see most striking illustrations in the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Colossians, and the Hebrews.

Hence they were constantly open to the seductive and pernicious influences of Judaizing teachers, who assailed not only his doctrines but his apostolical character and authority. Nor was Satan restrained from powerfully using these enemies against him. And so far were their efforts from being powerless, that, in at least one case, no one was found able and willing to make in defence of Paul such statements as the case called for, and he was driven to the painful necessity of seeming to boast while he set forth his own authority and credentials; and, again and again, it seemed as if churches which he had founded and cherished with the most ardent love, were about utterly to escape from his influence and control, and to make shipwreck on the rocks of error.

In addition to all this, it pleased God to let loose on him, through Satan, during his whole public life, peculiar storms of

persecution and affliction. Others endured limited and transient persecutions, like the Apostle John, who suffered a brief exile, or as the Apostle James, who was cut off by a sudden martyrdom; but in the case of Paul it was the stated policy of Divine Providence that he should endure depressing persecutions during a long life. To the elders of Ephesus, in his parting address at Miletus, he declared that in every city the Holy Spirit witnessed that bonds and imprisonment awaited him (Acts 20: 23). His own statements of details, gathered from his various Epistles, present a picture which cannot be paralleled in the language of man. He represents himself as exposing his life every hour to imminent peril, and as daily at the point of death (1 Cor. 15: 30, 31). He declares that sufferings for Christ's sake came upon him to an excessive degree, and that in one instance he was pressed out of measure, and above strength, insomuch that he despaired even of life (2 Cor. 1: 5, 8). Again, he speaks of patient endurance, of afflictions, of necessities, of straitness, of distress, of stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleepless watchings, hunger, thirst, evil report (2 Cor. 6: 3—10). In the eleventh chapter of the same Epistle, he gives a most affecting detail of his sufferings, as being "in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft, five times scourged by the Jews, thrice beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice shipwrecked, a night and a day swimming for life in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11: 23—27). In connection with all these trials, we are to regard the moral element of public odium which they were adapted to express and inspire. From this point of vision, Paul speaks of himself as set forth as a criminal condemned to die, exposed to be gazed at in a theatre by the whole world, both men and angels; as bearing hunger, thirst, stripes, nakedness, as having no certain dwelling-place, as toiling with his own hands for bread, as cursed, persecuted, railed at, and as counted as the refuse of the earth and the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4: 10—14). In this last case, though he uses the plural, it is self-evident that he is drawing the picture of his own life alone.

If now we look upon these things merely as involving a great

amount of bodily and mental suffering, we shall overlook the point where they most keenly affected the Apostle. That which he most deeply felt was the constant tendency of that atmosphere of popular odium with which he was thus invested, to discourage and to alienate from him the churches over which he desired to exert an influence for their good, lest thus the tempter should tempt them, and his labor be vain (1 Thess. 3: 5).

It is not natural and easy for us fully to appreciate his circumstances and feelings in this respect. We have never known him except as the beatified and canonized Apostle Paul, invested with a hope of glory, and swaying by his authority the opinions of the Christian world.

But then he had a character and influence to form and to establish. Inspired though he was, he had no influence except as he was regarded with confidence, esteem, and affection. And he knew the power of sight and of the world. Even if his own faith could rise above all outward odium, he feared lest that of his converts should be shaken.

Hence, in his letter to the Ephesians, he reveals the secret workings of his heart, when he entreats them not *to faint* in view of his affliction in their behalf (Eph. 3: 13). And, as a counterpoise, he magnifies the greatness and glory of his commission, and invokes in their behalf the most powerful internal aids of faith and love (3: 1—12, 14—21).

Still more striking and affecting are his appeals to Timothy, *not to be ashamed* of him, the prisoner of the Lord (2 Tim. 1: 8). Was there, indeed, a need of so earnest an exhortation after all that Timothy had seen of Paul, and after he had fully known his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, and afflictions?

But Paul had already seen enough of the power of such alienating influences to justify his fear. On such grounds all they which were in Asia had already been turned away from him, including Phygellus and Hermogenes. Demas also, under the influence of this world, had abandoned him, and, at his first reply, among all the Christians of the church of Rome, no one stood by him, but all forsook him. Keenly did he feel this desertion, and earnestly did he pray the Lord that it might not be laid to their charge (2 Tim. 1: 15 and 4: 10, 16).

Why, then, should he not fear for Timothy also? He did. And one main end of his second epistle to him is to fortify him

against this dangerous influence. For this end he holds up the example of the heroic Onesiphorus, who *was not ashamed of his chain*, but when he was in Rome, sought him out very diligently and found him, and oft refreshed him by his courageous and affectionate ministrations (2 Tim. 1: 16, 17). How heartfelt and melting his prayer in his behalf in view of these deeds of love: "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy in the coming day of recompense" (1: 18). Earnestly, therefore, does he exhort Timothy not to yield to fear, but to stir up in himself God's gift of power, and of love and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 2: 1—3). He holds up before him, as examples, the death and resurrection of Christ, and his own fearless imitation of his Lord in the endurance of shame and afflictions (3: 10—13). And, to conclude, he adjures him before God, and the holy universe, not to shrink from the pressure of trials and sufferings, but to endure boldly to the end (4: 1—5).

When, to all-pervading temptations of such power, tending to shake his influence and authority in the churches, were added the assaults of his malignant Judaizing or Gnostic enemies on his apostolic authority, and his clear perception of the power and danger of their wiles, then did Paul with painful emotions which language cannot describe feel his weakness, and long for a countervailing power. Words cannot express the depth and ardor of his love for his converts. He was willing to give them his own life, because they were dear unto him. He lived, if they stood fast in the Lord (1 Thess. 2: 8 and 3: 8).

When, therefore, he saw any of his churches in danger of forsaking those elevated views in which were involved the destinies of ages, and of plunging into Gnostic error, or Jewish bigotry, no language can utter his emotions. Consider the state of mind in which he was when he wrote to the Corinthians the present first epistle, as he afterwards revealed it to them: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears" (2 Cor. 2: 4). Moreover, after he had written the letter, his anxiety was inexpressible till he ascertained the result. Though at Troas a door was opened to preach the Gospel, he had no rest in his spirit, but departed for Macedonia, because Titus, through whom he expected to hear from them, had not arrived (2 Cor. 2: 13). But there also, he had no rest; without were fightings, within were fears. At times he regretted that he had written to them a letter so pungent in its tone, for fear

that it would unfavorably react. But when at last Titus came and told him of their true conviction of sin, their godly sorrow, their mourning, their ardent love for him, their zealous purpose to do all their duty, then, at last, his joy rose to a correspondent height, and he exceedingly rejoiced in the comfort of God (2 Cor. 7: 6—13).

How keenly he felt the painful necessity of interposing to preserve his power and influence as an Apostle, by setting forth his peculiar prerogatives and gifts, because no one was found ready to do it in his behalf, of all those on whom it was an incumbent duty, his own pathetic words testify: "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended by you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (2 Cor. 12: 11).

If, now, we view the wide range of the course which God saw fit to pursue toward Paul, we shall not wonder that it had a strong tendency to depress his own spirits, as well as those of his converts, and to paralyze his energy in preaching the Gospel. All know how much a speaker is strengthened and emboldened by popularity, and how depressing is the influence of popular indifference or odium. When all forsook Paul at his first reply in Rome, it needed lofty faith and indomitable courage still to speak with boldness and eloquence. When the learned Athenians, after hearing him awhile, mocked or procrastinated, it tended of necessity to chill his spirits. To the Thessalonians he intimates that his buffeting and shameful treatment at Philippi, tended to depress his spirits, so as to make it noteworthy that, notwithstanding, he still spoke the word of God with earnest boldness among them (1 Thess. 2: 1, 2).

But in his letter to the Ephesians he pours out the fulness of his heart upon this point. After disclosing his vivid conceptions of the hostile spiritual powers who after all were the main agents in arousing against him so incessant a storm of war, he implores of that church their most earnest prayers, that these spiritual enemies might not be able so to paralyze and intimidate him that he should be unable boldly and worthily to deliver the messages of God. "Especially pray for me (he entreats), that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador *in bonds*: that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6: 19, 20).

How plainly does this intimate that the general course of God's providence toward him, in letting loose upon him the various assaults of Satan and his hosts, tended constantly to depress and weaken his spirits, and that he felt a constant need of Divine power to enable him to maintain that courage and energy which became him as an Apostle, and befitted the dignity and momentous importance of the Gospel.

Such, then, is a brief view of the course actually pursued by God toward the Apostle Paul, and of its actual influence on his feelings. It painfully crossed and mortified one of the strongest and most natural desires of his mind, both as a man and a Christian, and reduced him to a state of conscious weakness, which constantly wounded his deepest and most sensitive feelings. Nevertheless, its tendency was, on the whole, most salutary; for it removed all grounds of self-confidence, and constantly urged him to seek, in the Divine power, a full supplement for his own weakness.

And, in proportion to the magnitude of the depressing and weakening influences that surrounded him without, were his conceptions of the infinite and unfailing energies of that God who fainteth not and is not weary, and who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think by his power that worketh in us. His most glowing and heartfelt conceptions of the power and all-sufficiency of God, such as we find in Eph. 3: 16—21, were no doubt revealed to him in his hours of greatest outward depression and weakness. In such hours, and not in times of outward strength and prosperity, he needed to see the power and glory of God, and then were those glorious disclosures made which he left on record for all coming ages.

Let us now consider the language of the passage in question, and see if it is not exactly adapted to describe what was thus true as a matter of historical fact.

With respect to the expression "thorn in the flesh," *σκόλον τῆ σαρκί*, one thing is conceded by all, and that is, that the word *thorn* is used figuratively, and not literally. No one ever dreamed that Paul's trial proceeded from a literal thorn. And yet, by a strange illusion, most commentators have taken the words "in the flesh" in a literal sense, as if they denoted literally the corporeal system of Paul. But just as reasonable would it be when God speaks of the Canaanites as "pricks in the eyes and thorns in the sides" of his people (Num. 33: 55), to take "pricks"

and "thorns" figuratively, and "eyes" and "sides" literally. The Canaanites were not literally pricks or thorns, nor were they any more literally in their eyes or in their sides. The import of the figure is, that as a prick in the eye, or a thorn in the side, so were the Canaanites to the people of Israel. Accordingly, God, in predicting the deliverance of his people from the hostility of the surrounding nations, says: "there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them that despised them" (Ezek. 28: 24). Even so in this case, not merely the word "thorn," but the whole expression "thorn in the flesh" is a figure, and denotes that the enemy who caused great suffering to Paul, was as a thorn in his flesh; that is, he was a constant cause of sharp and pungent pain.

Who, then, was this enemy? We are distinctly told that he was no human being. Paul has elsewhere declared that his main conflict was not with flesh and blood. His enemy, on the other hand, was an angel of Satan, that is, he was one of those principalities and powers, who rule the darkness of this world, and from whose control it was Paul's commission to turn the gentile world. Who he was is not fully stated. All that Paul declares is, that he was an angel of Satan (*ἄγγελος Σατᾶν*) sent, in the providence of God, to buffet him lest he should be unduly exalted.

And now, just as absurd as it would be to infer diseases in the eyes or in the sides of the Israelites, because the Canaanites were said to be pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides, so absurd would it be to infer any bodily disease in Paul, because his Satanic adversary is, by the same striking figure, called "a thorn in the flesh." The commissioned general of the Satanic hosts, who led on the war of principalities and powers against Paul, is himself as expressly declared to be his thorn in the flesh as the Canaanites were ever declared to be thorns in the sides of the Israelites.

The mode of operation pursued by this Satanic antagonist is no less distinctly set forth. It was his constant effort to depress, dishearten, and weaken Paul by hostile, contemptuous and ignominious treatment. All this is implied in the word *κολακίζω*, translated *to buffet*. This word denotes literally to smite with the fist, as distinguished from *φασιζω*, to smite with the open palm of the hand. Both of these words are used in Matt. 26:

67, 68, to denote the insults offered to Christ: "Then did they spit in his face and smite him with their fists (*ἐκλόαφισαν*); and others smote him with the palms of their hands (*ἐξ ἑ' πινων*) saying, Prophecy unto us thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" See also Mark 14: 65. In both of these cases our English version renders *κολαφίζω*, to buffet.

From this sense it passes to denote hostile, contemptuous and ignominious treatment in general, as is agreed by Schleusner, Wahl, Robinson, and other lexicographers, and in this sense it implies the agency of a person who can express hatred, anger or contempt, and who can treat another with ignominy. So in 1 Pet. 2: 20, slaves are represented as buffeted (*κολαφιζόμενοι*) by their masters. And Paul, in 1 Cor. 4: 11, 12, represents himself as buffeted (*κολαφιζόμεθα*), reviled and persecuted, not by unintelligent diseases, but by intelligent and malignant enemies.

Clearly, therefore, in the present case we are to regard that malignant leader of the hosts of darkness, of whom Paul speaks, as treating him in various forms with hatred, ignominy and contempt, and as thus producing the weakness which he so keenly felt. Not, indeed, by any direct physical power, but by working in hostile Jews and Gentiles, and carnal and imperfect Christians, to effect his malignant purposes, just as, according to Christ, the devil cast some of the church of Smyrna into prison, that they might be tried (Rev. 2: 10).

We are aware that it is alleged, and not without reason, that Satan is represented in the Scripture as causing diseases, and hence it is inferred that a disease may be called a messenger or angel of Satan. To this we reply, that this inference is not sustained by any Scriptural usage. The angels of the devil, or of Satan, are always spoken of as persons, in all other cases, and the proper and obvious sense is the same here. Hence the lexicons of Schleusner, Wahl, and Robinson, expressly state, that *ἄγγελος Σατᾶν* in this place denotes one of the fallen spirits who are called the angels of the dead.

By this mode of speech, Paul, in accordance with his general usage, refers the systematic opposition, odium and persecution which he met to Satan, acting in and through one of his leading and powerful angels.

In the translation of the next verse, it is quite remarkable to what an extent the more remote idea of the thorn, which is but a figure, had overruled the nearer idea of a person, an angel,

who is the real agent. The natural and obvious translation is: "Concerning *him* (i. e. the hostile spiritual antagonist), I thrice besought the Lord that *he* might depart from me." Yet our English version, as well as Doddridge, Macknight, Conybeare, Howson, and others, refer the words *τούτου* and *ἀπεσθῆ* to an unintelligent thing rather than to an intelligent person; "for *this thing* I besought the Lord thrice that *it* might depart from me." Yet *τούτου* more naturally refers to *ἄγγελος Σατᾶν* than to *σκόλωψ*, and the word *ἀπεσθῆ* is more properly referred to an intelligent person than to an unintelligent thing. Including this instance, the word is used fifteen times in the New Testament, and in every case refers to intelligent persons; as, for example, when it is said of the devil (Luke 4: 13) that after the temptation he departed (*ἀπέσθη*) from Christ. It is only by a relatively infrequent figure that the word is ever used except with reference to a person.

It is plain, therefore, that the sharp point of the thorn lay in the buffeting, that is, in the hostile, contemptuous and insulting treatment of all kinds by which his spiritual antagonist was permitted to depress and weaken him, and that this antagonist is figuratively called "a thorn in the flesh," on account of his power to produce such results.

It was for the sake of escaping the painful weakness which this powerful enemy caused, and which was implied in the word *κολαφιζω*, that Paul prayed for the interposition of Christ to cause him to depart, and for this reason the reply of Christ had special reference to this weakness.

It is plain, therefore, that thus far the language of this passage easily and naturally develops its true and full force, when applied to a powerful spiritual antagonist, who, through all forms of hostility and contempt, exerted a constant and painful weakening influence on the Apostle Paul. It is no less obvious that it is a harsh and violent mode of expression, to speak of a bodily disease or pain as an angel, and as buffeting Paul, that is, as treating him with ignominy and contempt. To meet this difficulty, Olshausen suggests that the disease "may have exhibited itself in powerful paroxysms." But this, besides its insufficiency, is a mere imaginative conjecture; and it is the more wonderful that Olshausen should resort to it, when we consider his own frank admission "that we nowhere else discover a trace of the Apostle's having suffered from sickness of any kind; and even when

Paul recounts all his trials and sufferings, sickness is not enumerated with them."

It is true that Conybeare and Howson think that they find indications of disease in Gal. 4: 13, 14, which in our translation stands thus: "Ye know how that through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the Gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but, received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." But in this case the words *weakness* and *flesh* in the original, have no necessary reference to the body. For it is notorious to all scholars that the phrase $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$ $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}$, "in the flesh," may as well denote outward worldly circumstances, as the human body. This is a use of the word so well accredited, that there is no need of more than one example out of many. Paul, after dissuading from marriage in view of existing emergencies, says of those who yet choose to marry, that they do not sin, but that they shall have affliction in the flesh, $\theta\lambda\acute{\iota}\psi\iota\upsilon$ $\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$ $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}$, that is, most manifestly, trouble in their external and worldly circumstances, not disease in their bodies. They would be exposed to want, imprisonment, exile, flight. So the expressions, to judge according to the flesh (John 8: 15), to glory as to the flesh (2 Cor. 11: 18), to make a fair show in the flesh (Gal. 6: 12), all relate to outward and worldly circumstances, rather than to the aspect of the body.

The translation of this passage by Jaspis is in perfect accordance with this Greek idiom. His rendering is this: Probe autem nostis, me magnis externis calamitatibus afflictum vos primum docuistis; neque tamen me malis externis tentatum parvi fecistis, aut repudiastis, sed potius libentissime tanquam genium Dei, immo, ut ipsum Christum Jesum excepistis. "Ye know that when I first preached the Gospel among you, I was afflicted by great external calamities (i. e. persecutions and odium). Yet ye did not despise or reject me when thus tried by outward evils, but rather joyfully received me as an angel of God, nay, rather as Christ Jesus himself."

Let it now be remembered that the tendency of sickness in eminent men is not to repel, but to excite, sympathy. On the other hand, popular odium, persecution, and contempt did powerfully tend to produce shame and repulsion in the case of Paul, as has been already illustrated by his letters. He not only feared lest his persecutions and odium would repel from him the Ephesians, but even Timothy, as they had repelled many others.

Hence, when he came to the Galatians as he did to the Thessalonians, "shamefully entreated" and weighed down with contempt and hatred, he adverts with joy to the fact that "they did not despise or reject him on that account, but received him as an angel of God, yea, as Jesus Christ."

Schleusner, in his lexicon, takes the same view of this passage, and it is in perfect accordance not only with the usages of the language, but also with the whole current of Pauline thought and feeling.

The concession of Olshausen, therefore, must stand in full force, that we nowhere else discover a trace of the Apostle's having suffered from sickness of any kind, and that, when he recounts his trials, he never enumerates sickness among them.

In conclusion, the fact that the reply of Christ, as we have shown, fixes the mind on weakness as the painful point of the trial, and that the response of Paul recognized it as such, and that he referred to "reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake," as in opposition to weaknesses, and as exegetical of their nature and causes, renders the whole passage lucid, symmetrical, and consistent with itself, and makes it a vital and harmonious part of the whole recorded system of Pauline thought and emotion, instead of a strange and mysterious puzzle.

That Paul, in other parts of his writings uses the word *weakness* as we have alleged in the present case, will become plain from the parallel which he draws between his own weakness and that of Christ. The weakness of Christ was not the weakness of bodily disease. It was a weakness caused by a providential dispensation in accordance with which the exercise of Divine power was repressed, and restraints were removed from the action of Satan and wicked men. Divine power being thus withdrawn Christ was weak, and the hosts of hell were powerful, and his crucifixion was the result. Accordingly, in view of the result, he said: "This is your hour, and the *power* of darkness."

Now it is with this weakness that Paul explicitly compares his own: "For though he was crucified through *weakness*, yet he liveth by the power of God. We also are weak in him, i. e. as united to him and his representative on earth, but we shall live with him by the power of God towards you" (2 Cor. 13: 4).

Moreover, it is in perfect accordance with this view that, after enumerating all those things which were involved in God's dispensation whereby power was taken away from him, and Satan and his enemies were rendered powerful, he calls them the things that pertain to, or that cause, his weakness, *τὰ τῆς ἀσθενείας μου*, and as such he glories in them (2 Cor. 11: 30). But it is self-evident that this general dispensation of providence made up of these things did not produce bodily disease, but rather a providential, divinely ordained weakness like that of Christ, in consequence of which he was crucified.

Let us now consider some positive objections to the view which limits the trial to bodily suffering, or, in fact, to any one unknown thing.

1. It gives undue and disproportioned magnitude to an unknown cause of weakness, and throws into the shade a great and obvious system of causes, centralized by Satanic agency and adapted to produce that very weakness, the painful power of which we know was keenly felt by Paul. Great as this was, it is implied, by the view which we oppose, that the unknown thorn was something greater, for it would seem that God relied especially on this as the means of humbling Paul. And is it so, that some unknown bodily disease, some headache, or ear-ache, or nervous affection, or corporeal pain, is to be exalted above such a peculiar and powerful providential system as a means of grace? It is unnatural and improbable in the highest degree.

2. But if this unknown something was to be thus magnified and exalted, then surely it ought to retain its place in the reply of Christ, and in the response of Paul. Christ should have pledged his grace against that particular trial, and Paul should have said, therefore I will glory, even in a trial so great and peculiar, through his grace. But not such is the case. On the supposition which we are opposing, after giving this unknown trial such undue magnitude, it is altogether rejected when it ought to have been most prominent. Christ assures him of his grace, not against the unknown thorn but the general trial of *weakness* caused by ignominious treatment; and Paul resolves to rejoice, not in the unknown thorn but in this *weakness*; and, strangely enough, he does not even allude to the weakness caused by the unknown thorn, but only to that caused by reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses for Christ's sake;

and it is in view of these that he exultingly declares: When I am weak, then am I strong.

3. The corporeal view of this passage introduces ideas that degrade and belittle the whole subject. There is something sublime in the conception of the operation of the desire of power in such a man as Paul, situated as he was, and in a Divine dispensation, employing alike the agencies of the invisible world, and of men, to prevent the gratification of that desire, and to reduce him to a state of painful weakness. But the theory of the headache, earache, stone, nervous paralysis, or any kind of bodily pain or disease, cannot be so stated as not to degrade and belittle our conceptions, in addition to the fact that there is no evidence of the existence of any such corporeal affection.

4. The view which we oppose also takes away that broad common ground of sympathy between Paul and the Christians of other ages, which ought to exist, and which our view preserves and presents. The love of power is common to all men, and it is naturally strongest in elevated, wide-reaching minds, called to undertake great works for God. Such have in themselves all the elements needed in order to a full understanding of the experience of Paul, as we have set it forth, and to the deepest feeling of the power of his example. Nor does this view exclude bodily trials. It only assigns to them their place in that general system of Divine providence by which God makes his children feel their weakness, when unduly tempted to aspire after the attainment of power. But the other view obscures the nature of the trial, limits its range, diminishes its magnitude and dignity, and excludes most Christians from practical sympathy with Paul, and from a full sense of the power of his example.

It is not, we concede, to be supposed that the course of God's providence toward Paul did not tend to affect his body. All powerful mental excitement, and especially sorrow and depression, acts upon the body. Moreover, persecution directs its main power against the body, in the form of imprisonment, scourging, torture, or death.

In this view of the case he speaks of himself as "always delivered unto death for Jesus's sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his body" (2 Cor. 4: 11). But that this is not the result of disease, he expressly asserts, but rather of troubles, perplexities, deep depressions, and persecutions (2 Cor. 4: 8, 9).

The following free translation will embody our results: "And, lest through the abundance of the revelations I should be unduly exalted, there was assigned to me a thorn in the flesh, that is, an angel of Satan, who, by hostile and ignominious treatment, should reduce me to a painful state of depression and weakness, lest I should be unduly exalted. Concerning him I besought the Lord thrice that he might depart from me. But he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is fully developed in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may abide upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, that is, in ignominious treatment, in calamities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong."

It is not to be expected that we should answer any objections which have been made to our view, inasmuch as in exactly its present form and relations it has not been before presented for consideration. Nevertheless, certain views have in some respects so far agreed with it, that objections to them deserve some consideration at this time. In particular we refer to the view of Fritzsche, as presented by Rosenmüller and Olshausen, that by the thorn in the flesh Paul meant all the sufferings connected with his apostolic labors in general. Schleusner also speaks of some, whom he does not name, as holding substantially this view. The opinion ascribed by Jaspis to Chrysostom, that all the obstacles which Paul had to encounter, were his thorn, is in substance the same.

So far as these views refuse to fix on any one definite thing, bodily or mental, as the point of the thorn, and so far as they refer its power to God's general course of providence, they accord with our view. We regard them as defective, however, in not presenting the Satanic antagonist of Paul, by whom he was buffeted and weakened in the providence of God, as his thorn in the flesh, and in not fully developing the nature, origin, and pungent power of that weakness in which the peculiar intensity of the trial consisted.

The mere idea of sufferings in general is not enough, for Paul might have suffered greatly, in many ways, and yet have gained the power which he desired; and, if it had been so, then the very essence of his trial would have been wanting, for the point of his trial was his weakness.

Against the general view of Fritzsche, Olshausen objects that

the thorn in the flesh must have had special reference to the revelation just related.

This objection has no force, if it can be shown that the peculiar Divine dispensation toward Paul was not developed before the revelation in question, and that it was developed not long after it. It would then have an obvious and a special relation to it, and to other similar disclosures.

For it is not to be assumed that the system of trial had reference to merely this one revelation. Paul we know did receive many revelations, and he says: "lest through the abundance of the revelation I should be exalted, there was given unto me a thorn." Clearly he mentions this rapture into the third heavens as one of the most remarkable of his revelations, but not as the only one. It is altogether probable that in Arabia and in Tarsus he was often instructed by revelations. But even supposing a special reference to the revelation particularly specified, still the objection is not valid, for that revelation preceded the proper and public opening of Paul's great missionary career, and the great and peculiar system of trials by which he was afterwards weakened and humbled.

At what time, then, did this peculiar revelation occur? Olshausen says that it "unquestionably occurred almost immediately subsequent to the conversion of Paul." This view of Olshausen implies that the statement of Paul concerning the fourteen years since his rapture, be translated as it is in our version, and by Robinson and others, "above fourteen years ago," *πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων* (2 Cor. 12: 2). Thus the vision could be carried back indefinitely, even to a point just after the conversion of Paul.

But if, according to the more correct judgment of Conybeare and Howson, as well as of other eminent critics, this translation is not correct, and Paul denoted a definite term of fourteen years, then the revelation immediately preceded the opening of his public mission, and the peculiar system of his trials. The fourteen years are to be reckoned, of course, from the date of the second epistle to the Corinthians. But as this epistle was written in the year 57, this carries us back to the year 43 for the time of the vision. But Paul was summoned from Tarsus to Antioch by Barnabas in the year 44, and of course his public mission began after the vision. Dr. Schaff speaks thus decidedly as to the opening of Paul's public career: "In the church

of Antioch, the mother church of the gentile mission, Paul found a centre for his activity, which, in its public character and on its grand scale, dates from this point its proper beginning" (p. 239). Milman says: "He was summoned from his *secure retreat* at Tarsus to Antioch." Concerning his previous life, he remarks: "His early course is lost in obscurity. He passes several years in exile as it were from both parties; he emerges by slow degrees into eminence, and hardly wins his way into the reluctant confidence of Christians" (p. 157). Of this time, about three years were spent in Arabia and Damascus, and the rest in Tarsus, after a visit of fifteen days to Jerusalem. No doubt he preached the Gospel to some extent around Tarsus, in Cilicia, but still it was in the main a period of retirement for prayer, study, and Divine preparatory communications. The opinion of Calmet is, therefore, very probable, that the revelation shortly preceded his first great and public development at Antioch; and this well accords with the fourteen years mentioned by Paul. If so, the general system of God, designed to weaken and humble Paul, did follow, and not precede, his revelation, and extended from that time through his life. Before that time, his escape from Damascus, and again, his retreat from Jerusalem to Tarsus, are all the events on record that have any aspect of persecution, or of affliction.

Olshausen, also, objects to the view of Fritzsche, that, as Paul in chap. xi. had fully detailed the sufferings connected with his apostolic labors, the thorn in the flesh must be something in addition to them. This objection does not reach us, for on our view there is in fact an additional idea, in the assertion that the centralizing and impelling power of the system of persecutions already detailed was a hostile angel, who, as the author and mainspring of the system, is called a thorn in the flesh. The thorn in the flesh is not the persecutions alone, nor the hostile angel alone, but the angel as operating through such a system of persecutions. The objection of Olshausen, therefore, is powerless as against us.

Neander, however, objects that we cannot suppose that "Paul would pray to be delivered from such sufferings as were essentially and indissolubly connected with his vocation." This is no doubt true. But the degree in which the exercise of Divine power was repressed, and the power of Satan let loose, and Paul thereby weakened, was not in the nature of things indisso-

lubly connected with his vocation as an apostle. Had it not been for his personal characteristics and dangers, God might, through the Holy Spirit, have made as powerful developments by Paul at Rome, and at Athens, and at other great gentile centres, as he did at Jerusalem by Peter on the day of Pentecost. He might have chained Satan and his angels far more closely than he did, and repressed the false teachers, and gathered around Paul, in large measure, the elements of popularity and power. He might have exalted the churches of the Gentiles to a higher point of intelligence and piety, and have centralized them with unwavering confidence and affection around Paul, and have given him a stable position of power, in some great centre. All this it was natural for Paul to conceive of and to desire, as adapted in the highest degree to promote the great ends of his apostolic office. And had the matter been left to human judgment, there are very few, if any, who would not have so decided. But God decided that Paul's highest good, and that of his own cause, demanded that outward weakness which was so painful to Paul, and therefore let loose an angel of Satan to effect it.

Neander also alleges that the "peculiar phraseology of Paul leads us to suppose that he meant to indicate something quite peculiar, something altogether personal, which affected him, not as an apostle, but as Paul."

This objection, even if it were conclusive against Fritzsche, is of no force against us. We have seen that the peculiar dispensation pursued toward Paul had no necessary connection with the apostolic office as such, and that it grew out of the special danger which originated from his peculiar characteristics and tendencies taken in connection with the uncommon revelations which he received from God. The dispensation in question, therefore, was in fact peculiar and personal, affecting Paul not simply because he was an Apostle, but because he was Paul, that is, because he was such a man that his peculiar revelations would endanger him if he were not stately depressed by the painful dispensation which has been described.

Such being our results, let us endeavor to derive some spiritual benefit from this view. It teaches us most emphatically that the outward and worldly strength of position and organic influence which all are so prone to covet, is not the highest and most desirable strength, but always involves an element of temptation

and danger. Many a man, following his delusive conceptions as to power, has been weakened and paralyzed by an elevated position and a wealthy church, in a great centre. Judson, the missionary, became powerful by rejecting them for weakness and suffering. And when God desired to develop the highest form of power through Edwards, he sent upon him outward weakness and distress. He turned his people against him, and sent him, in advanced years, and with a large family, into the wilderness. In scenes of outward weakness like these, was his highest intellectual and moral power developed through the inward energy of Christ.

The great want of the ministers and churches of the present age is more of this inward power of God, and there is no greater problem than this: How can the church have outward prosperity, and yet permanently enjoy this inward power?

One thing is plain, that to sacrifice principle for the sake of retaining the favor of men of wealth and of political power, to which all American Christians are strongly tempted, is spiritual suicide. It is better to be despised and contemned by all the wealthy and powerful of this age, than to forfeit the inward strength which God alone confers. The great danger of the ministers of God and of his churches, in these days of worldly prosperity, is, that they will forget this fact, and be paralyzed and ruined in their aspirations after outward power. The great question of the age is: How shall this danger be averted, and the inward strength of God be obtained and secured, without afflictions and persecutions?

No question is so intimately concerned with the advent of the millennium as this. But, without going fully into its discussion, we will only say, that one of the most powerful means of securing the desired result is habitual sympathy with the life and experience of Paul. In him God wrought a work for the church in all ages. He was, by the dealings of God, eminently crucified to the world and the world to him; and, if we live in sympathy with him, we shall see and feel as he did the dangers of outward and worldly power, and seek that inward strength which God alone can give.

The case of Paul, thus understood, will no doubt touch a chord of sympathy in many a mind. For the necessity of weakening the children of God has not ceased, and God knows how to effect it still, in various and unlike ways. Every man knows how God

has weakened him, and may find in the Divine providence the same purposes of watchful love which were discovered by Paul. Happy is he who is conducted thereby to the same auspicious results, and who with Paul can glory in his weakness, because when he is weak then he is strong, being able to do or to endure all things through Christ, who giveth him strength.

This subject also teaches us how weak is the highest mind, and how easily depressed and paralyzed, if God sees fit to let loose upon him the agency of invisible powers, to act through the defects of Christians, and the depraved passions of the world. No man, whatever his natural powers or attainments, not even a Paul, can for a moment contend with the elements of odium, misunderstanding, unpopularity, and hatred which God can, through Satanic agencies, in a thousand ways let loose upon him. The power of a swimmer may be great, but of how little avail would it be against a steady and overpowering current. Eminent men, and successful ministers, of devoted piety, have been for years paralyzed and depressed by undermining suspicions and plots, or by open charges of heresy, and God can easily send on any man domestic trials, or spiritual sufferings too heavy to be endured.

If, then, any are strong, popular, influential, and happy, let them realize that these things are the gift of that God, whose restraining power dykes out, as it were, the ocean of Satanic hatred that rolls around them, and not be lifted up with a vain conceit of their own energies. It is by the favor of God that their mountain stands strong; if he hides his face they shall be troubled; if he frowns they shall faint and fail.