

# BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

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## THE TEMPTATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS

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THE Temptations in the wilderness are an inseparable part of the Christian record. Not only do they find a place in the ancient texts and versions, but it is psychologically natural that they should have occurred just when they did and in the very order in which one of the evangelists has related them. Assuming that it was not until his baptism that Jesus became aware that he was himself that Coming One for whose advent the Jewish people had so long been yearning,—an assumption which seems to fit into the various details of the Gospel narrative better than any other—the story of the forty days in the desert is indispensable to a right understanding of that steadiness of purpose and unwavering confidence with which he pursued his chosen course afterwards. It describes in few but luminous words the process by which a great soul adjusted itself to a great and unexpected mission. Had it been omitted there would have been a gap in the history of Jesus which would have suggested a mystery and even an incongruity in his moral development.

In considering this vital topic it is necessary to bear in mind, first of all, that the narrative of the Temptations, if it is conceded to be an authentic portion of the record, could have emanated only from Jesus himself. There were no witnesses of this momentous spiritual encounter who could have reported the incidents afterwards. The experiences of those forty eventful days, so far as they have been made known, may well have been the subject of some special communication made by him to his disciples that they might realize how profound was his knowledge of

those instincts within them which he would have them overcome.

It would seem to follow, then, that the account would be likely to exhibit some traces of his peculiar rhetorical and didactic style. What this was we can be in no manner of doubt. It was pictorial and figurative to such an extent that his meaning often was not easily grasped. Not only his parables but many, if not most, of his other utterances betray the same characteristic. And it is specially to be noted that the sign of likeness or comparison is frequently not expressed. "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven," is not history, although historical in form, but a symbolic mental picture of the evangelistic success which his disciples had begun to win. The disastrous effect on the human soul of a reformation which is not followed up by an active consecration to the highest moral ideals he describes as a return of an unclean spirit to its former domicile with seven others worse than itself, though many, no doubt, fail to realize that the description is only a parable. He emphasizes his interest in the religious welfare of children in such a way as to suggest that they are under the protection of angelic guardians who are specially privileged to appear in their behalf at the throne of God, which is evidently only an illustration, a figure borrowed from the usages of monarchical courts. In other words, he does not always inform his hearers that he is not to be taken literally. So in the narrative of the Temptations, the statements that the devil leads him up into a mountain or sets him on the pinnacle of the temple are not to be construed in strict subservience to the letter. They are more likely to be only stylistic peculiarities, outcroppings of the tendency already noted to describe a mental image as an objective reality, to express a product of the imagination in the language of concrete fact.

It goes without saying that the Tempter is not a visible presence. The Temptations are to be coordinated with those which all men encounter. They no more imply ex-

ceptional demoniac influence than the statement later on that the devil departed from him *for a season* implies a future return of the Tempter in visible shape. The Satanic origin of evil was a familiar idea, and the story of the Temptations was simply couched in the theological vernacular of the times. The colloquy between Jesus and his adversary was merely a conflict between suggestions which framed themselves in his own mind.

That he had at his command, or believed that he possessed, extraordinary powers, is indubitably taught in the narrative. There could have been no temptations otherwise,—or, at least, not more than one of the three recorded would deserve the name. No one is tempted to do what he is fully aware cannot be done. We need not stop to inquire what the powers were which he was conscious of possessing, or whether they were necessarily supernatural. That is a question which does not belong exclusively to this part of the Gospel narrative. Suffice it to say that certain objects of desire seemed to him within his reach which could be attained only by methods which were not permissible. Therein lay the temptation.

We cannot fill up to our entire satisfaction the forty days over which his experiences at this time extended unless we consider how much he had to unlearn and discard on the threshold of his public work. Like all religious reformers, he must have made a thorough test of the faith in which he had been brought up. It was only after weighing it in the balances of a perfect obedience that he was constrained to pronounce it wanting. The orthodoxy of his day was but a lifeless parasite which hid with its tangle of dead leaves the once vigorous trunk of the Mosaic law. And yet at first it was the only religion within his reach. It was taught in the synagogue; it was talked about in his home; he had heard it extolled, no doubt, by the doctors whom he questioned in the temple; he had been in contact with it ever since. He must have grown up with an inherited reverence for it, even as Saul of Tarsus, his contemporary, was doing for most of the same period,

even as Martin Luther had learned to love and venerate the church from which afterwards he broke away. That Jesus would so use the faith in which he had been born and bred as to extract spiritual nutriment from it may be taken for granted. An earnest religious nature can glorify the most barren forms and breathe into the emptiest ritual a living soul. But the broadening mind of the future reformer must have found it increasingly difficult to keep the rites and ceremonies of the current Jewish worship on a level with the weightier matters of the law. Gradually the former must have lost in his estimation their relative importance. It would be in perfect accordance with the normal workings of the human mind if they had ceased to influence his conduct to any great extent long before he had come to a realizing sense of the fact.

His visit to the scene of John's labors may have hastened decisively the revolutionary process which was slowly culminating within him. The great preacher, nurtured in the wilderness, could have had little practical acquaintance with the tiresome details of rabbinical worship. He laid his axe at the root of the tree, and set Duty before the people stripped of all traditional disguises. And the tremendous effect that followed could not but have emphasized, by contrast, in the mind of Jesus, the utter absence of results which characterized the current religious teaching. It could not but have accentuated the difference between the religion which he had been taught and that which he was thinking out for himself. But to replace the one by the other, to adjust his mind to a purely spiritual conception of the Jewish religion, to divest it wholly in thought of the forms, which, as a matter of course, he had always associated with it, was not the work of an instant; and we may well believe that it was not till the forty days had well-nigh passed that the momentous transition had been fully made. That it was made his scanty regard for the minutiae of the Pharisaic teachings was soon to show. Because it was made the "favor with God and men" in which he had been advancing for thirty years or more was

ere long to suffer a notable diminution, so far as men were concerned, by the withdrawal from him of the regard and support of the more influential of his countrymen.

The temptations in which his experiences in the wilderness reached their climax were a natural product of the situation. They were but so many collisions between his previous ideals of duty and others which were seeking to replace them. In the providence of God he had been elevated in an instant from a private walk in life to a public position of extraordinary importance, and his controlling motives must undergo a corresponding change. The momentum of moral habits which had been gathering for thirty years must be turned into wider channels. The bearing which his new conception of his responsibilities might have on the various details of his future official conduct must be determined by much careful study and reflection. Until he should have made up his mind what new course of self-denial and self-sacrifice had been made obligatory upon him by the stupendous change which had been wrought in his circumstances and prospective career his mind must have been in a state of unstable equilibrium, swaying hither and thither as the path of duty seemed to him alternately obscure and clear. It is this intermediate mental state, inseparable as it is from every inward moral struggle, that makes temptation possible. The irreconcilable desires, impulses, and aspirations which spring up in the soul afford opportunities for selection, without which there can be no praiseworthy moral choices. They are not to be regarded in themselves as necessarily either immoral or weak, but as so many details of an inevitable natural process to which no moral quality can properly be assigned. They are simply so many spontaneous tendencies which are battling before the judgment-seat of conscience for the crown of moral recognition and approval.

It is in harmony with these facts that the journeys from place to place which Jesus is represented as making—from the desert to the mountain, from the mountain to the temple—are attributed in the account to Satanic in-

stigation. It would have the appearance of deliberately toying with temptation for him to make a companion of a visible demon whose sole purpose in associating with him, as he himself well knew, was to lure him into sin. But if that feature of the narrative is only part of the parabolic drapery with which Jesus was wont to clothe his thoughts it is psychologically reconcilable with a belief in his sinlessness. An inward debate between two opposing conceptions of duty may be carried on in perfect innocence until one of them is finally accepted as the right one. But then, and by that very fact, the other ceases to be right, and all the considerations which have previously been adduced in its favor take on at once the complexion of solicitations to evil; for it is now seen that they were favoring an unwise course and, therefore, one that was against the highest interests of the soul. As the Spirit which is said to have driven Jesus into the desert is doubtless to be understood as manifesting itself in an overpowering eagerness to begin the mighty work which had been so abruptly thrust upon him, so the Satan of the wilderness may be interpreted as only so many discoveries of the true moral bearing of various impulses and inclinations which made themselves felt successively within him.

In his experiences at this time the first of these impulses to show itself was in the domain of appetite, in the mental province to which the Book of Genesis had long before assigned the first evil promptings of a rudimentary moral nature. The days of meditation and self-absorption had drawn to an end and his physical nature began again to assert itself. He hungered. He was famished. And there was nothing to eat. It was the most natural thing in the world that it should occur to him, under such circumstances, that he had resources to draw upon which would speedily lift him above all such vulgar wants. Why not use them in supplying his present imperious needs? Why not turn the very stones of the desert into loaves? The suggestion last named may well be another of those utterances or modes of thought which have already been re-

ferred to as characteristic of the style of Jesus. "You have such resources at your command that you can get food even in a desert," may be all that is implied in the expression. It would be absurd, however, to imagine that there could be any moral peril, any real temptation, to Jesus in an inward solicitation to procure food for himself if there were no conceivable way for him to do so.

The question may be asked very pertinently, "Why not use his powers, whatever they were? What harm in availing himself of his resources to the uttermost in meeting a pressing need encountered in the path of duty?" But if it is correct to assume that an indispensable part of the mission of Jesus was to illustrate an ideal human life lived under normal conditions, or that he himself so believed, the answer is obvious. Such an act would take him out of the class to which his fellow men belonged. A military commander has been known to dismount from his horse and trudge along on foot in order to encourage his soldiers on a toilsome march. He could make them feel that he was not asking too much of them only by putting himself on a level with them. It was only by foregoing all advantages which would make it easier for him than it was for others to bear the hardships of life that Jesus could furnish the example which the world needed. He became a model leader by marching over the toilsome route on foot, although his steed, saddled and bridled, was at his side all the way.

The text with which he brushed aside this temptation seems to recognize the relativity of moral obligation. It is easy to think that the dangerous thought occurred to him in connection with some quotation from Deuteronomy which he did not express in words, for that book furnished most of the texts used by him at this time. There were promises of abundant food scattered along its pages to which his thoughts might naturally have reverted as justifying the act which he was solicited to perform. When "thou shalt say, I will eat flesh, because thy soul desireth to eat flesh; thou mayest eat flesh, after all the desire of

thy soul" (Deut. xii. 20). But the thought need not be pressed. Hunger itself is really a command of God. It is a notice served by Him that it is time to replenish the vital forces. It is a direction what to do no less truly than the glance of the eye by which the engineer warns the fireman that the steam is falling off. Under normal circumstances it would have been an act of disobedience for Jesus to neglect this signal. It would have been tantamount to a refusal to observe the laws of health, and, therefore, to fulfill the conditions of a perfect service.

But the circumstances were not normal. A higher duty had superseded a lower one. It was not a matter of life and death with him, but simply the question whether he would face difficulty with the same equipment as other men. The purposes of his mission made it necessary that he should endure bodily wants experienced in the discharge of his duty with the same reliance on divine Providence that he would recommend to others similarly situated. And so a conflict of duties had arisen. The full purport of his appeal to the written law may be best understood by emphasizing the "every." "It is true that my desire for bread is, in some real sense, a divine voice; but it is written that a man can order his life aright only by regarding *every* word of God, and not the promptings of appetite alone." So his answer might be paraphrased. There is a right of way in the path of duty. The lesser obligation must turn out for the greater when they meet. The virtue of self-denial is often simply the recognition of God's right to countermand His own orders. Circumstances may change a previously innocent act into a sin.

We cannot escape the conclusion that the attitude here assumed by Jesus amounted to a tacit recognition of the wisdom of the existing order of things, — something which needs to be emphasized and authoritatively advertised more than almost any other theological fact. The obstacles in the way of an ideal life are not insuperable. Hard as it is to overcome them they do not warrant an abandonment of the attempt. It is possible to develop the



moral nature until it becomes equal to a victorious grapple with them; and they are themselves the gymnastic appliances by which the requisite strength is to be gained. Every teacher of music, to be successful, must be able to show a pupil that the exercise assigned him can be played. An impossible task, if known to be such, inspires no enthusiasm. That the natural trials of life cannot be successfully encountered without abnormal help would be a disastrous belief. It would imply an error in the providence which made it necessary to obey God under such discouraging circumstances. That a thoroughly good man would be equal to the task, and that the failure of anyone to accomplish it only measures the distance between him and an ideal manhood, is a truth which needs to be established in order to justify the ways of God with men. The claim of Jesus to have overcome the world was really a claim that God had made no mistake in assigning moral duties to men. They are not impossible to perfect men. To demonstrate this fact a stupendous trust had been committed to him. He must not shrink from it. He must not help himself out with it in ways which did not lie open to his fellow men. This seems to be the underlying principle which was to receive a triumphant illustration in the First Temptation.

If such is the fact, how inappropriate and utterly vapid seem the miraculous legends of his youth with which some of the early Christian writers have tried to piece out the canonical records! How far below any adequate conception of the meaning of his mission is that story that when a board which he was using in his work proved too short he simply pulled it out to the proper length! That was virtually to encounter the First Temptation in his childhood, — and, worse, to yield to it!

The First Temptation occurred on the lowest plane of human nature. It is typical of all the evil promptings which have their origin in the sensuous and physical stratum of human motives. It is the source of about all the sins of childhood. It underlies the vices and evil con-

duct of the barbarous races. It is never wholly absent from the moral experiences of the most cultivated people; for the animal part of man is always the foundation on which even the highest moral development rests. And it is always to be met in the same way. The text quoted by Jesus is still the divine antidote for all the poisonous suggestions which are ever sprouting out of the tropical soil of human nature. It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." It is written not only in the original Hebrew, and in all the thousand tongues into which it has been translated, but in the constitution of nature itself, in the very necessities of human existence, in the irremovable conditions of social progress. The lower self must defer to the higher. The natural wants of the individual must recognize a limitation to their indulgence in the exigencies of the general welfare. The cravings of a private desire must speak in whispers when the needs of society are voicing themselves in thunder. It is right for a hungry man to eat bread, but not if he must steal it from the baker's counter. It is well for a teller to enlarge his income, but not if he sees no other way than to borrow clandestinely from the funds of the bank. It is proper to sleep when tired, but not if one is a sentinel at his post or a lookout on board a ship. The broad principle laid down in the text just quoted is that personal liberty is bounded by the terms of a necessary compromise between the individual and his fellow men. The obligation to heed *every* word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God may be regarded as the beginning of unselfishness. Disobedience to it is the first immorality of social manhood.

The Second Temptation according to Luke is the Third in Matthew's arrangement. The order followed by the former must be correct. It represents the temptations as advancing from the less to the more insidious, which is psychologically probable. The First Gospel seems to relate them partly with a view to dramatic effect.

We read that "the devil taketh him unto an exceeding

high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ["in a moment of time," Luke adds], and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." It has already been intimated that the mountain had only a subjective existence. It was inward, not outward. It was a necessary concomitant of the thought that was in the mind of Jesus. Let anyone try to picture to himself all the nations of the world, and all at once, and he will inevitably imagine himself as standing on the summit of a mountain, or on a cloud, or, it may be, sitting in an airship. It is impossible for the mind to create within itself such a vision without the aid of some such mental device. The narrative contains no more than a graphic description, in Jesus' own style, of the mental imagery by which the new temptation shaped itself in his soul.

There may have been a psychological connection between it and the one preceding. The victory already achieved illustrated a remarkable self-command. This might well suggest that it is by the exercise of such a quality that conquests are made and kingdoms gained. "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." It is not unlikely that the victory just won called his attention, perhaps for the first time in his life, to his own extraordinary strength of character. Quite possibly it may have occurred to him that by controlling himself as he had done he had exhibited the self-denial which is indispensable to every successful ambition, and which is generally a conspicuous trait in those who gain dominion over others. A natural association of ideas might then have brought into his mind the thought how vast was the sway over mankind which it was possible for him to attain.

Be this as it may, however, it seems to be assumed here, too, that he had at his command exceptional powers. It is perhaps true that a promise of a dynastic rather than a personal dominion might be expressed to a Hebrew in the language used in this temptation; but if Jesus possessed only normal sources of influence it is not easy to see how

he could have found any plausibility in such a promise. In that case it could only mean that by catering to the universal desire of his countrymen for a political deliverer he would be able to found a kingdom which his successors would gradually render world-wide. But if he was only an humble carpenter, with none of the traditional characteristics of the Coming One, and nothing with which to win men to his side but an exalted idea of righteousness, how could such a prospect have any reality for him,—especially, as it involved the abandonment of the very righteousness which constituted his only vantage ground? It would have been but another so-called temptation to do what he well knew could not be done.

If, however, he had, or believed he had, gifts which would overawe opponents and win him devoted proselytes in unlimited numbers, the hope of securing universal empire even in his own lifetime would not have been extravagant. Alexander illustrated many years earlier, as did Napoleon many centuries afterwards, how easily the world is conquered even by men of only unusual natural endowments. If Jesus were to employ in the field of politics the same superhuman powers which he is declared to have exhibited in the humble sphere of missionary work, it is impossible to exaggerate the successes he might have achieved.

We are here in a different atmosphere from that of the First Temptation. It is no longer the excitement of a mere physical appetite that Jesus must guard against. He was now assailed in the region of high mental operations. Mere hunger, the automatic cravings of an animal organism, he had demonstrated his ability to resist. But how would it be with those needs of the intellectual nature which would result from the discovery of vast aptitudes in his soul, from his measurement of his capacities in relation to the most promising opportunities of an earthly life, from his inevitable discernment of the fact that he was infinitely larger than the lowly station in which he was born? Would he still exhibit that sovereign self-

mastery which had already unveiled itself in the colossal outlines of his nature? Ambition is the beneficent force which impels the greatest men to the loftiest summits of achievement, but too often only to lose its beneficent quality almost at the apex of endeavor and topple down its victim into the abyss of moral ruin. Would Jesus, who had proved himself too large for the seductions which wreck the average man, show himself equally invulnerable to the fascinations of worldly prospects which appealed to abilities in him of a more than heroic order, and promised him the almost irresistible rewards of rank and power? Was he who could spurn the bribe of a coveted physical relief so finely balanced that he could repel with equal success the promptings of a commanding impulse which addressed itself forcibly to the inborn tendency of the soul to enlarge itself, and, at the same time, seemed to clothe a selfish aspiration with the habiliments of grandeur?

It may have been one of Matthew's reasons for placing this temptation last that he deemed it the most dangerous. There is certainly a sternness in the answer of Jesus which would seem to indicate that he felt himself in the presence of an attraction which impressed him far more seriously than that which he had just swept aside. The command, "Get thee hence, Satan," addressed to an inward suggestion which had been rolled up to the surface of consciousness by the fermentation of thought, had in it a suddenness, an abruptness, which may well have betokened a sense of peril. And such a feeling would have been natural under the circumstances. Perhaps no man has ever yet found himself in possession of powers and influence which were sure to win him the support and devotion of large masses of people who did not, at the same time, catch a glimpse of the vast personal advantage which would accrue to him if he should use his splendid opportunity for private advantage. It is this perception of both the selfish and the unselfish side of a possible action that gives significance to temptation, and value to moral choices. There is such a thing as polarity in conduct, and without it there

can be no such thing as meritorious behavior. A sensitiveness to the allurements of two opposite courses of action, and a preference yielded to the higher rather than the lower, is what makes virtue admirable.

There is no self-deception in the Second Temptation, no instinctive attempt to becloud the nature of the choice proposed by quoting Scripture on the side of evil. Jesus saw clearly and measured accurately the full import of the alternative set before him. He was simply called upon to answer the question whether the most dazzling prizes the earth could offer, all its pomp and glory blended under a single absolute scepter,—in a word, temporal greatness, power, and honor beyond the scope of the wildest imagination—were not preferable to a life of poverty and self-denial lived at the behest of a mere sense of duty. It was the Prince of this world robed in official magnificence bidding for his allegiance against ideal virtue in its simplicity and unadorned beauty.

The condition expressed, "If thou wilt fall down and worship me," does not imply, of course, a literal obedience, an actual bodily prostration. As already explained, we have to do here solely with subjective experiences. It was a condition that could be fulfilled without a change of posture, without the movement even of a muscle of the countenance. It was the change of the ruling motive of a life that was contemplated, the substitution of a natural personal ambition for a devoted loyalty to an unselfish principle. The reply of Jesus, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," recognizes the will of a perfectly benevolent and all-wise Being as that alone to which he would acknowledge fealty. Whatever motives and courses of conduct would tend to promote the aims and purposes of such a Being he would adopt. There was no legitimate alternative. To seek to devise one would be both a descent and a revolt. It would be to fall down and worship the Tempter of the wilderness.

The Third Temptation—following Luke's order—has

been, as it seems to me, uniformly misunderstood. According to many, if not all the commentators, it consisted in an invitation to Jesus to prove or signalize his authority by leaping down from a great height without injury. This seems extremely crude, and is largely responsible for the disfavor with which some critics view the whole narrative. That such an exploit would have for such a man fascination enough to constitute a temptation is hardly believable. I am convinced that it has a much deeper meaning, and one, moreover, that will account for its position at the climax of Luke's series.

The First Temptation emphasizes the fact that no physical need can excuse a man for evading moral obligations; the Second, that personal ambition cannot justify disloyalty to one's highest religious and ethical standards. Most of the more conspicuous sins of humanity are anticipated in these two temptations. The one is especially that of the poor and ignorant; the other, that of the intelligent and forceful. But there is a third — more subtle, more dangerous, perhaps, than either — the temptation to doubt the moral obligation of a high ethical ideal; and that seems to be illustrated in the portion of the narrative we have now reached. It may be called the temptation of the conscientious and the upright. It is one that was so certain to occur under the circumstances, and lends itself so readily to all the details of the narrative, that a large measure of confidence in the correctness of the interpretation would seem, on that account alone, to be justified.

The three are thus given by Luke in the natural order, — in the order, that is, in which they would be likely to make themselves felt if they should all be encountered by the same individual. First, the impulse to indulge an animal appetite against the protests of the better nature; next, the tendency to trample under foot the finer moral instincts in the eager pursuit of a coveted temporal success; and, last of all, the temptation to elude the interference of the moral sense by impeaching its authority in the premises; — these are the outlines of the history of a typical

human soul in its upward progress; and it is an epitome of that history that we find in Christ's experiences in the wilderness.

The pinnacle of the temple mentioned in the narrative was a formidable place, if it has been correctly identified. To make room for the building, a retaining wall was erected from the valley to the level of the hilltop, and on the space thus added to the summit a part of the temple rested. From the roof to the bottom of the valley the distance is said to have been some four hundred and fifty feet,—a dizzy height, not much less than that of the Washington Monument, more than twice that of the shaft on Bunker Hill, very trying to the nerves of one who should stand near the edge and venture to gaze down into the abyss. It is here that the Third Temptation is commonly supposed to have taken place.

We can have no doubt that Jesus was familiar with the spot. It is quite credible that in one or more of his visits to the temple he had found his way to this appalling precipice and cast his eyes downward into the void at his feet. It was a scene that would impress itself on his memory and reappear perhaps afterwards in his dreams. It may be, even, that he had felt a touch of that strange vertigo which, like a species of mental gravitation, often prompts men to leap into such an abyss.

"The very place puts toys of desperation,  
Without more motive, into every brain  
That looks so many fathoms."

We may be sure that such an experience would abide with him and weave itself, as occasion offered, into his similes and comparisons. And the time had now come when it would lend itself most appropriately in aid of his mental operations.

The two victories just won had left him in a state of complete moral isolation. No man could sympathize with such an extreme consecration to ideal duty as he had just evinced. To endure the pangs of famine—and, by implication, of every physical want—rather than swerve one



jot from what would be commonly regarded as an exaggerated fidelity, to magnify the sense of duty until it completely shut out the dazzling prospect of a world-wide temporal dominion, — to put in practice such standards of moral obligation, and to obtrude them on the attention and the consciences of his fellow men, was to make it impossible for him ever to have in this world a friend in the largest sense of the term. "Be virtuous, and you will be lonesome," wrote a noted American humorist. But there is more of truth than of humor in the words, more of pathos than of laughter. The truth that was in them had been most painfully revealed to Jesus nearly nineteen centuries before they were penned. He alone of all men has been able to realize fully how complete is the moral solitude in which he must live who conforms his conduct perfectly to the standard of an absolute righteousness.

As he reflected on the unique position he must occupy henceforward among his fellow men a reminiscence of his experience on that aërial porch seems to have occurred to him as a most expressive analogy, and to have furnished him the figure in which his thought clothed itself. It seemed to him as if he were standing on a like giddy eminence in the moral world, in all the loneliness inherent in the earthly locality. Above him were the silent heavens, the vacant dome of the omnipresent sky, with all its suggestions of aloofness and depressive distance. No one was near him with whom he could hold communion. He was alone with the invisible Father. His fellow men were far beneath him, living on an immeasurably lower plane, sinning, suffering, pursuing phantoms, struggling after unattainable prizes or things which perish with the using. No sympathetic voice, no friendly salutation, not a word of appreciation and encouragement, found its way up to him from that valley of selfishness. Devotion to a divine ideal had taken him out of the ranks of our common humanity. He must live infinitely above its highest level, shunned by all who dreaded the self-reproach sure to be generated by contact with such a life, by all to whom his

moral aims were but the dreams of an impracticable visionary, by all whose expectations of a political Messiah would make it impossible for them to content themselves with a merely spiritual deliverer. Such seems to be the meaning of the words, "He led him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple." They simply describe the mental imagery by which he depicted to himself his own elevation into a state of moral isolation.

It would not be strange under such circumstances if the question should have shaped itself in his mind, "Is it altogether certain that my standard of duty is not too high? Am I not thrusting moral ideals on men which are unreasonable? Is anything to be gained by an extreme interpretation of the divine law which is likely to alienate my disciples from me? May I not abate somewhat from the strictness of its requirements in order to gain a more friendly hearing for myself and for my teachings?"

Such questions were not without a certain plausibility. Even the sacred books seemed to hint at impracticable moral standards. "Be not righteous over much: . . . For why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Moreover, was he not in the hands of Providence? Had he not a right to appropriate to himself the promise of angelic guardianship? If, in order to ensure the success of his mission, he should show himself somewhat less austere in his condemnation of wrongdoing, would not God see to it that no harm resulted? In a word, when so much was at stake might not a little wrong be done in order that a great good might be accomplished? Or, rather, would not what should be done for such an end cease to deserve the name of wrong?

This is a temptation from which the best of men are not exempt,—especially when it offers itself in the form indicated in the last question. Here, too, it was the wisdom of the existing order of things that was on trial. Could not a situation occur in which some wrongdoing would be justifiable, and, therefore, cease to be wrongdoing?

Is it ever commendable to lower a high standard of duty in an effort to increase one's moral influence over others? These are the queries which may have suggested themselves to Jesus, only to receive, in turn, a negative answer.

The appeal to Scripture with which he met the last of the temptations, "Thou shalt not make trial of thy God," is very significant. The idea seems to be that a man must not experiment with his conscience. His highest conceptions of righteousness must be put in practice, not pared down in the hope of making duty easier. That his moral sense may sometimes impose on him obligations which a more enlightened conscience would denounce as wrong, is undeniable; but he has no resource save to follow out his own idea of right. When, after due deliberation, he has made up his mind what he ought to do, he has no alternative but to do it, and to trust to a later moral growth for the correction of possible errors in his conclusions. He has no right to substitute the deliverances of another conscience, — even though it be that of priest or minister — for those of his own, or to refuse to obey the voice within him merely because he hopes it may be mistaken in its utterances. The correctness of his moral convictions must be tested by the experiences of a life lived in conformity with them.

For thirty years the pathway of Jesus had been "along the cool, sequestered vale of life." In the narrow circle of home experiences and within the limited range of an humble vocation, he had been learning his moral obligations. His principles had been formed, his conceptions of duty matured. But it had suddenly dawned upon him that to put them in practice would leave him without allies among the influential classes, without appreciative companions among the poor and lowly. But to be generally recognized as the Messiah he would need both. The mission which heaven had thrust upon him threatened to prove a failure in the eyes of the world unless it should enlist the support of the Jewish people as a whole. In such a hopeless deadlock, as it seemed to be, between the

commands of conscience and the apparent conditions of success it was inevitable that human nature should ask the question, "Is it not allowable in such an emergency to soften somewhat the rigor of the moral law? May it not be true that, although the conscience must be obeyed, as a general rule, there are exceptional cases where its mandates should be toned down? In such a crisis as that which I am now facing, when perfect obedience to the divine commandments may prevent the establishment of that universal kingdom which the prophets have foretold and all Israel has longed for, is it not a part of wisdom to adapt means to ends, to interpret the law as the exigency demands, and to leave it to Providence to avert all unwelcome consequences?" It was Bassanio's suggestion anticipated by many hundred years:

"Wrest *once* the law to your authority.  
To do a great right, do a little wrong."

But the answer came welling up from the depths of a clarified moral nature, "That is a privilege which is never accorded to men or angels. Trust your conscience. Try no experiments with it. It is the vicegerent of God within the human soul. There is no way in which He can be worshiped and served in spirit and in truth save by installing it as the sole arbiter of all your conduct."

The commentators, therefore, who define the sin suggested in this temptation as that of presumption are not far out of the way; but they err in making that presumption to consist in an actual leap from the pinnacle of the temple in a childish feat of wanton bravado. They were misled, doubtless, by assuming that this temptation took place in Jerusalem instead of the wilderness as the narrative irresistibly implies, that Jesus, instead of remaining in the desert to which he had betaken himself, wandered about under a malign supernatural guidance, to be tempted differently in different localities. But it is safe to say that these journeys occurred only in his own mind, as he paced to and fro in the preoccupation of intense thought, or sat in the shade with head buried in his hands, a prey to the

profoundest introspection. It was the presumption of supposing that any man under any circumstances would be permitted to modify the supreme law of right that Jesus found it necessary to guard against, the presumption of imagining that he could cast himself down from the dizzy pinnacle of a perfect moral ideal, and count on divine protection to save him from too great a fall. It is not incredible that it was in this, the last and stealthiest of the Temptations, that he arrived at that confidence in the absolute immutability of the divine revelations of duty which he afterwards expressed so uncompromisingly in the declaration, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail,"—for in those words is summed up the lesson of that momentous spiritual struggle.

It is, therefore, a psychological truth which Luke has preserved by adding to his account the significant statement that the devil "departed from him for a season." It is psychologically true because it indicates in few words a distinguishing feature of every moral victory. It is won, not by a single battle which exterminates opposition, but by a lifelong campaign, which begins with a collision between two principles, and is continued indefinitely by the efforts of the conquering principle to extend its sway over each successive act of the will as it comes along. The Three Temptations were only the first battles in a series, which were fought over a choice of moral ideals. But to bring every detail of the subsequent conduct into harmony with the ideals adopted, was to carry the inward conflict—though with the prestige of an overwhelming initial success—into all the manifold vicissitudes and emergencies of his eventful public career.

His consciousness of an ability ever present to escape from dangerous or uncomfortable situations by drawing on a reserve fund of power—which is the First Temptation generalized—is ever cropping out in his acts and utterances, and suggests the constant temptation to make short cuts to desired results, to shake off, for the time being, the

burdensome yoke of slow human processes. He described it, in his well-known style, as an ability to summon to his aid "more than twelve legions of angels."

The Second Temptation also reappears again and again; for the wider his fame and the stronger his hold on the masses became, the more real must have seemed to him the possibility of political eminence and dominion. The volcanic fires which burst forth with such terrific violence in Hadrian's reign, were already rumbling beneath the surface. The people were only waiting for the leader whom their prophets had taught them to expect, in order to assert the independence which they fought for so fiercely a hundred years later. With his disciples confidently anticipating a division among themselves of the honors and emoluments of a temporal kingdom, with the people only needing a little more encouragement in order to seat him on a throne by violence, more than once during his short public career he must have stood again on the mountain from which he had already seen the glories of an earthly dominion unroll themselves before him as a prize which was within his reach. More than once must he have renewed the struggle in the wilderness in a successful endeavor to subordinate a natural ambition to the unselfish line of policy which he had marked out for himself.

And the Third Temptation, — how often must he have been called upon to resist it in his frequent encounters with the machinations of the ruling classes! Why stir up needless enmity against himself by denouncing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, when by showing a little indulgence towards their faults he might enlist their powerful support on his side? Why not humor somewhat the mistaken Messianic expectations of the rabble, and by so doing keep in his train of nominal disciples those whose zeal he was forever chilling by his blunt enunciation of the truth? Such questions he may have involuntarily framed within his mind again and again as he realized more and more clearly how little sympathy there was among his countrymen with his spiritual conceptions

of the Messianic office. But his answer was ever the same. He must not leap down from the supernal height of his own faultless moral ideals in the illusory hope of working to better advantage on the lower level of ordinary human conduct. He must not expect God to connive at any infraction of His own law, no matter how small it might be made to appear.

The ministration of the angels which, according to Matthew and Mark, followed these moral victories, is likely to be as figurative as the rest of the episode. It has its analogies in the experiences of every mind which has conquered its lower impulses. No Roman triumph is accorded to such victories. Generally they fail to win applause or even appreciation. But the consciousness of character strengthened, of manhood preserved, of a peace that passeth understanding, which follow them, may well be likened to the soft breath from the fluttering pinions of angel guardians who have been sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation.