

*THE PRAYER WITH REFERENCE TO SELF-
MADE TEMPTATIONS.*

(MATT. VI. 13; LUKE XI. 4.)

THE difficulty in this petition is evident to all thoughtful readers of the New Testament. Godet expresses it as clearly as any one in his commentary on St. Luke's Gospel. He refers to the two meanings of the word *tempt*, "to put a free being in the position of deciding for himself between good and evil," and "to impel inwardly to evil." He says: "What renders it difficult to understand this last petition is, that neither of the two senses of the word *tempt* appears suitable here. If we adopt the good sense, how are we to ask God to spare us experiences which may be necessary for the development of our moral being, and for the manifestation of His glorious power in us (Jas. i. 3)? If we accept the bad sense, is it not to calumniate God, to ask Him not to do towards us an act decidedly wicked, diabolical in itself?" This difficulty becomes still more apparent when we turn to the reference given by Godet in the passage quoted above, and read in the Epistle of St. James, *πάσαν χαρὰν ἠγήσασθε, ἀδελφοί μου, ὅταν πειρασμοῖς περιπέσητε ποικίλοις*, and again in the 13th verse, *μηδεὶς πειραζόμενος λεγέτω, ὅτι ἀπὸ Θεοῦ πειράζομαι*.

My own attention was first seriously directed to this difficulty by discovering that a gentleman who had been for many years actively engaged in mission work had found himself face to face with the dilemma mentioned above. He, like another Alexander, had loosed the knot of the problem in a fashion that would scarcely commend itself to more fastidious souls. His converts were taught to pray, "Leave us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil." On what particular exegesis he based this new rendering of the petition, I do not know. But this incident led me to examine carefully all the ordinary interpretations of the

passage in my effort to discover an enlightening exposition of the prayer as it is translated in the Revised Version, "Bring us not into temptation." I can scarcely say the examination was satisfactory. Not one of the attempted explanations appeared to touch the heart of the difficulty. One or two instances will be sufficient to serve as examples of the general style of exposition followed by commentators on this passage. Morison traces the prayer to a natural shrinking from the stress and pain of trial, a shrinking which every soul must feel. Taking this view we shall be obliged to confess that Jesus put into the mouths of His disciples a prayer which must be classed amongst those mistaken pleadings which arise from man's weakness and ignorance, and which God in His higher wisdom does not grant. J. B. Mayer, in his commentary on the Epistle of St. James, refers to this petition in his notes at the close of the volume and interprets it thus: "One who is conscious of his own weakness may, without inconsistency, pray that he may be kept out of temptation, and yet, when he is brought into it through no fault of his own, but by God's providential ordering, he may feel such trust in Divine support as to rejoice in an opportunity of proving his faithfulness." This may serve to remove the seeming inconsistency between the petition in the Lord's Prayer and the passage in St. James. But to say, as an exposition of the former, that it arises from a consciousness of human weakness does not go far enough. All true prayer is petition, and has a clear and definite object. What does Jesus Christ teach His disciples to ask for in this petition? Is it for exemption from temptation in the second sense of the term as given by Godet? Or is it for exemption from that temptation which is God's trial of the soul? Whether the prayer arises from a consciousness of human weakness or not we are still left face to face with the difficulty mentioned above. Christ teaches His disciples either a petition

that calumniates God or else one that it is better for God not to grant. Godet himself, in his commentary, treats the difficulty contained in this paragraph in a way that will scarcely seem satisfactory to any one. The word *εισφέρειν* is taken to mean "to deliver over to,"—on what grounds is not stated. The prayer is then paraphrased thus: "Let [me do nothing this day which would force Thee for a single moment to withdraw Thy hand, and to give me over to one of the snares which the Evil One will plant in my way. Keep me in the sphere where Thy holy will reigns, and where the Evil One has no access." When we read this paraphrase and compare it with the petition itself, we feel that some further exegesis to connect the sermon with its text would not be out of place.

In carefully considering the passage ourselves, we have come to the conclusion that the word to which attention must first be directed is not *πειρασμός* but *εισφέρειν*. If the petition read "Tempt us not" or "Try us not," the difficulties urged at the commencement of this paper would be insuperable. It seems to us that most commentators, in trying to explain this passage, have treated it as if there were little difference between "Tempt us not" and "Bring us not into temptation," or between "Try us not" and "Bring us not into temptation." The objections urged by Godet are objections to prayers of the form "Tempt us not," "Try us not." Of course if there is no difference between such petitions and the one we are considering, then his objections hold good with respect to the petition in our Lord's Prayer. But we maintain that there is a difference. We cannot think that the use of *εισφέρειν* is a mere circumlocution. Surely the form and style of the petition is modelled on some great underlying religious belief in the mind of the Master. And an examination of the word *εισφέρειν* shows us we are correct in this view of the matter. We find that it is not often used in the New Testament.

In fact, excluding the passage under consideration, there are only four texts in which the verb is found. In only one of the four has it a personal object. When we compare these passages, we see how erroneous is the rendering in the Authorised Version, "Lead us not into temptation." The term "lead" introduces a foreign idea at once and destroys the essential force of the original Greek word. Translate the only other passage in the New Testament in which *εἰσφέρειν* is used with a personal object in the same way as the Authorised Version translates this passage, and we see how the meaning is hopelessly debased. In Luke v. 18 we read, *ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν εἰσενεγκεῖν*. Translate this "they sought to lead him in," instead of "they sought to bring him in," and what an erroneous idea of the Evangelist's meaning we get! It seems as if *εἰσφέρειν* had been translated "to lead into," because it was felt that in the ordinary meaning of the word it could not apply to personal objects except in a strictly physical sense.

But surely the essential force of the original word depends on this fact, that we have a term generally used only in reference to inanimate things applied in this passage to personal objects. "Bring us not,"—the expression is a very strong one. The idea is that of a mighty force bearing us bodily onwards. In the Iliad we find *εἰσφέρειν* used in the Middle Voice in the sense of "to sweep along," as a man may be borne along, a helpless unit in a moving crowd of thousands, or caught up and carried onward, a mere straw, as it were, on a great wave of enthusiasm. So that we may say, laying proper stress upon the true meaning of *εἰσφέρειν*, that underlying this prayer we have the conception of God as a God of mighty providence. It is not the thought of God *leading* men on. The term "lead" is nothing like strong enough. It is the conception of God as the God of history, individual and national history. The God who mingles in every experience of each human life ;

the God who is the directing force of each human life; the God against whose penalties it is useless for us to struggle rebelliously, when we have once chosen the wrong path, unless we repent, we are borne onward unto destruction; the God of whose blessing no one can deprive us if we have once chosen the right path, unless we fall away, we are borne on unto heavenly prosperity. The great God who thus orders the events of men's lives according to men's choice of good or of evil is He to whom the prayer is made, "Bring us not into temptation." In the first place, then, we observe that the petition is addressed to God as the God of Providence.

Next, to briefly state our exposition of the passage. God does not tempt us; for that we have the authority of Holy Scripture. And if God tries us, then it is for our good and it is not for us to pray that He will exempt us from such trials. But is there not a third class of temptation-experiences coming as it were between supposed temptations by God and real trials by Him, a third class of experiences which are neither temptations by the holy God nor trials whereby He strengthens us? I refer to circumstances naturally innocent and harmless which we have made into temptations for ourselves. What is the relation of God to these? When in the natural ordering of our lives we find ourselves in such circumstances, in themselves and perhaps to other people innocent enough, may it not be said of God that He has brought us into temptation without that saying casting a slur on the holiness of His dealings with men? And surely that would not be equivalent to saying, "God tempted me"?

Now to enlarge further on this interpretation. If we properly consider the condition into which our sins have brought us, we shall see the necessity for this petition. We shall see too, how, like the whole of the Lord's prayer, it gives us a higher conception of the very God of Providence

to whom we pray. Theology is always enriched by prayer. The man who knows how to pray always rises from his knees a better theologian. For the sincere soul this Prayer of prayers contains a Divine vision indeed. Consider the condition into which our sins have brought us. They have entirely altered the moral aspect of our lives. Circumstances which before possessed no moral significance for us have now become fraught with good or evil. The passing of a particular house, the meeting of a certain person, the sight of a piece of coloured pasteboard, these things may mean nothing to me, but to another man they mean perhaps a violent struggle, a battle at the very gates of hell, a falling away into old sins, the ruin of the soul. Our sins have filled life full of temptations for us—temptations which we have made for ourselves out of the morally harmless circumstances of life. There is a spot in the great city which a thousand men may pass, and it would mean no trial of the soul to them; but there is one poor wretch whose sin has made that place a place of overwhelming temptation to him. If the circumstances of his life, circumstances over which perhaps he has no control, bring him there, the old vice will have the mastery of his soul again. Is there a Providence watching over him, so ordering the steps of his goings among the million footfalls of that city, that he come not near that place? We believe there is. We have been taught to believe that there is a Providence watching over men as *God's children*, and supplying them with life's necessities as may be good for them. We have been taught to pray "Give us this day our daily bread." And this other petition teaches us that there is a special Providence watching over men as *sinner*s. Not that we believe that Providence adopts a "hot house" dispensation in either case. Men have to labour for their daily bread, though the petition in the Lord's Prayer may say nothing about such labouring; and men have to struggle

for their souls' salvation, though the petition we have been considering says nothing about the trials by which a man is perfected. But this will not prevent us from recognising the fact that in either case, if Providence left us alone, the result would be disastrous. By reason of a man's sin the merest chance, as it may seem, exposes him to temptation. Somebody asks him out for the evening, somebody lends him a book, somebody sends him on an errand. To nine hundred and ninety-nine other men it would mean nothing! To him, the one man in the thousand, it means much, perhaps everything. And so a man's life becomes disastrously fraught with the possibilities of temptations. A few he might resist, but the continuous onslaught of one after another would prove too much for him. If the man is to be saved, there must be a special ordering of Providence even in the apparently little things of his life. There must be a special Providence watching over him and keeping him again and again from the circumstances which might be harmless enough to most, but which to him would mean a much wounded soul, yea, a soul wounded to death. This is true of us all in so far as we have sinned and made temptations for ourselves out of the ordinary circumstances of life.

Of course it may be said that we have no right to expect all this. "If a man sins," it is said "he must not expect a special interference of Providence to save him from those temptations that result from his own wrongdoing." Our answer is twofold. First, that it is not a question of right at all. The very position of the petition in the Lord's Prayer shows this. Preceding it is the prayer for forgiveness, following it the prayer for deliverance from the Evil One. If man can talk about rights only, then *these* two prayers must remain for ever unuttered. So also this petition is a prayer offered unto that Divine Being who is the God of Grace as well as the God of Providence. And our second answer is, that it is the repeated testimony of many men

and women that this prayer is not offered in vain. Many a man has felt that God has interfered in the circumstances of his life so that he might not be brought into overwhelming temptation. It may be that a companion, by whose side he was wont to work and whose influence over him was for the worst, is removed to another shop. It may be that the business journey which he has had to make through certain towns is changed; henceforth his way is through a different part of the country, and thus many of his temptations are lopped off at a blow. It may be that the route of a man's van is altered and he has no longer to call at those houses where the temptation to former evil ways is strongest. Many such instances every one will recall out of his own experiences.

Thus we can easily conceive of God bringing us into temptation without doing towards us an act decidedly wicked, diabolical in itself. The ordinary ordering of Providence will bring us into temptation simply because we have made that temptation for ourselves by our own sin. And in this prayer we ask God to remember in His Providence not only the spiritual weakness which is the result of our sins, but also the way in which those sins have made the environment of life full of temptations for us. Does not every one feel the propriety and the need of such a prayer? And is not the position that the petition occupies in the Lord's Prayer a very fitting one? After asking for the forgiveness of the past we turn to the future avoiding of sin. At first, we are reminded that there are temptations that we have made for ourselves, that unless God be gracious, the future lies before us a dreary waste of hopeless sin, temptation after temptation to which our souls will succumb, that we need a special ordering of the events of life. So we pray, "Bring us not into temptation." Then there is the prayer for deliverance from that other form of temptation which comes to us from without, which can come to the

holiest man, the temptation which is as the whispering of the evil one in our ear, and as the terrible grip of his hand upon our throat. And thus in proper succession the petitions follow on one another. In fact, the teaching that underlies them, if fully expounded, would be found to correspond exactly with Butler's scientific analysis of temptation in his *Analogy of Religion*, and the Lord's Prayer is seen to be as true to the facts of the natural life of the human soul as is Butler's philosophical treatise itself.

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MINISTERING IN SACRIFICE.

As a description of the function of the Christian Ministry the phrase "ministering in sacrifice" is not familiar to the reader of the English Bible. But if he examines the margin of the Revised Version at Romans xv. 16, he will find it suggested there as giving more correctly the force of the word which in A.V. is rendered simply "ministering"—the gospel of God. And that being so, the verse, with its context, certainly invites a closer examination than it commonly receives from those who repudiate the sacrificial aspect of the Christian ministry, which is usually presented as the "Catholic" view. In his book entitled *The Conception of Priesthood*, Prof. Sanday has drawn special attention to this passage, making it the text of his lecture on "Sacerdotalism," and finding in it evidence of a conception of his ministry in the mind of the Apostle which provides Scriptural support for a certain theory of sacrificing priesthood. The theory in whose defence this passage is appealed to, is that most recently defended and expounded by Dr. Moberly in his *Ministerial Priesthood*. And in raising the question whether the language of this verse will really bear the construction