

garden, the mockings and scourgings, the cross and the crown of thorns.

The scene which lay there outspread before the eyes of the youthful Jesus was indeed a central spot in the world which He came to save. It was in the heart of the Land of Israel, and yet—separated from it only by a narrow boundary of hills and streams—Phœnicia, Syria, Arabia, Babylonia, and Egypt lay close at hand. The Isles of the Gentiles, and all the glorious regions of Europe, were almost visible over the shining waters of that Western sea. The standards of Rome were planted on the plain before Him; the language of Greece was spoken in the towns below. And however peaceful it then might look, green as a pavement of emeralds, rich with its gleams of vivid sunlight, and the purpling shadows which floated over it from the clouds of the latter rain, it had been for centuries a battle-field of nations. Pharaohs and Ptolemies, Emirs and Arsacids, Judges and Consuls, had all contended for the mastery of that smiling tract. It had glittered with the lances of the Amalekites; it had trembled under the chariot-wheels of Sesostris; it had echoed the twanging bow-strings of Sennacherib; it had been trodden by the phalanxes of Macedonia; it had clashed with the broadswords of Rome; it was destined hereafter to ring with the battle-cry of the Crusaders, and thunder with the artillery of England and of France. In that Plain of Jezreel, Europe and Asia, Judaism and Heathenism, Barbarism and Civilisation, the Old and the New Covenant, the history of the past and the hopes of the present, seemed all to meet. No scene of deeper significance for the destinies of humanity could possibly have arrested the youthful Saviour's gaze.

LESSON FIVE

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN.

THUS then His boyhood, and youth, and early manhood had passed away in humble submission and holy silence, and Jesus was now thirty years old. That deep lesson for all classes of men in every age, which was involved in the long toil and obscurity of those thirty

years, had been taught more powerfully than mere words could teach it, and the hour for His ministry and for the great work of His redemption had now arrived. He was to be the Saviour not only by example, but also by revelation, and by death.

And already there had begun to ring that Voice in the Wilderness which was stirring the inmost heart of the nation with its cry, "Repent ye, for Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

It was an age of transition, of uncertainty, of doubt. In the growth of general corruption, in the wreck of sacred institutions, in those dense clouds which were gathering more and more darkly on the political horizon, it must have seemed to many a pious Jew as if the fountains of the great deep were again being broken up. Already the sceptre had departed from his race; already its high-priesthood was contemptuously tampered with by Idumæan tetrarchs or Roman procurators; already the chief influence over his degraded Sanhedrin was in the hands of supple Herodians or wily Sadducees. It seemed as if nothing were left for his consolation but an increased fidelity to Mosaic institutions, and a deepening intensity of Messianic hopes. At an epoch so troubled, and so restless—when old things were rapidly passing away, and the new continued unrevealed—it might almost seem excusable for a Pharisee to watch for every opportunity of revolution; and still more excusable for an Essene to embrace a life of celibacy, and retire from the society of man. There was a general expectation of that "wrath to come," which was to be the birth-throe of the coming kingdom—the darkness deepest before the dawn. The world had grown old, and the dotage of its paganism was marked by hideous excesses. Atheism in belief was followed, as among nations it has always been, by degradation of morals. Iniquity seemed to have run its course to the very farthest goal. Philosophy had abrogated its boasted functions except for the favoured few. Crime was universal, and there was no known remedy for the horror and ruin which it was causing in a thousand hearts. Remorse itself seemed to be exhausted, so that men were "past feeling." There was a callosity of heart, a petrifying of the moral sense, which even those who suffered from it felt to be abnormal and portentous. Even the heathen world felt that "the fulness of the time" had come.

At such periods the impulse to an ascetic seclusion becomes very strong. Solitary communion with God amid the wildest scenes of nature seems preferable to the harassing speculations of a dispirited society. Self-dependence, and subsistence upon the very scantiest

resources which can supply the merest necessities of life, are more attractive than the fretting anxieties and corroding misery of a crushed and struggling poverty. The wildness and silence of indifferent Nature appear at such times to offer a delightful refuge from the noise, the meanness, and the malignity of men. Banus, the Pharisee, who retired into the wilderness, and lived much as the hermits of the Thebaid lived in after years, was only one of many who were actuated by these convictions. Josephus, who for three years had studied with him in his mountain-caves, describes his stern self-mortifications and hardy life, his clothing of woven leaves, his food of the chance roots which he could gather from the soil, and his daily and nightly plunge in the cold water, that his body might be clean and his heart pure.

But asceticism may spring from very different motives. It may result from the arrogance of the cynic who wishes to stand apart from all men; or from the disgusted satiety of the epicurean who would fain find a refuge even from himself; or from the selfish terror of the fanatic, intent only on his own salvation. Far different and far nobler was the hard simplicity and noble self-denial of the Baptist. It is by no idle fancy that the mediæval painters represent him, even in boyhood, as emaciated by asceticism. The tendency to the life of a recluse had shown itself in the youthful Nazarite from his earliest years; but in him it resulted from the consciousness of a glorious mission—it was from the desire to fulfil a destiny inspired by burning hopes. St. John was a dweller in the wilderness, only that he might thereby become the prophet of the Highest. The light which was within him should be kindled, if need be, into a self-consuming flame, not for his own glory, but that it might illuminate the pathway of the coming King.

The nature of St. John the Baptist was full of impetuosity and fire. The long struggle which had given him so powerful a mastery over himself—which had made him content with self-obliteration before the presence of his Lord—which had inspired him with fearlessness in the face of danger, and humility in the midst of applause—had left its traces in the stern character, and aspect, and teaching of the man. If he had won peace in the long prayer and penitence of his life in the wilderness, it was not the spontaneous peace of a placid and holy soul. The victory he had won was still encumbered with traces of the battle; the calm he had attained still echoed with the distant mutter of the storm. His very teaching reflected the imagery of the wilderness—the rock, the serpent, the

barren tree. "In his manifestation and agency," it has been said, "he was like a burning torch; his public life was quite an earthquake—the whole man was a sermon; he might well call himself a voice—the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

While he was musing the fire burned, and at the last he spake with his tongue. Almost from boyhood he had been a voluntary eremite. In solitude he had learnt things unspeakable; there the unseen world had become to him a reality; there his spirit had caught "a touch of phantasy and flame." Communing with his own great lonely heart—communing with the high thoughts of that long line of prophets, his predecessors to a rebellious people—communing with the utterances that came to him from the voices of the mountain and the sea—he had learnt a deeper lore than he could have ever learnt at Hillel's or Shammai's feet. In the tropic noonday of that deep Jordan valley, where the air seems to be full of a subtle and quivering flame—in listening to the howl of the wild beasts in the long night, under the lustre of stars "that seemed to hang like balls of fire in a purple sky"—in wandering by the sluggish cobalt-coloured waters of that dead and accursed lake, until before his eyes, dazzled by the saline efflorescence of the shore strewn with its wrecks of death, the ghosts of the guilty seemed to start out of the sulphurous ashes under which they were submerged—he had learnt a language, he had received a revelation, not vouchsafed to ordinary men—attained, not in the schools of the Rabbis, but in the school of solitude, in the school of God.

Such teachers are suited for such times. There was enough and to spare of those respectable, conventional teachers, who spake smooth things and prophesied deceits. The ordinary Scribe or Pharisee, sleek with good living and supercilious with general respect, might get up in the synagogue, with his broad phylacteries and luxurious robes, and might, perhaps, minister to some sleepy edification with his hair-splitting puerilities, and threadbare precedents; but the very aspect of John the Baptist would have shown that there was another style of teacher here. Even before the first vibrating tone of a voice that rang with scorn and indignation, the bronzed countenance, the unshorn locks, the close-pressed lips, the leathern girdle, the mantle of camel's hair, would at once betoken that here at last was a man who was a man indeed in all his natural grandeur and dauntless force, and who, like the rough Bedawy prophet who was his antitype, would stand unquailing before purple Ahabs and adulterous Jezebels. And then his life was known. It was known that his drink was water

of the river, and that he lived on locusts and wild honey. Men felt in him that power of mastery which is always granted to perfect self-denial. He who is superior to the common ambitions of man is superior also to their common timidities. If he have little to hope from the favour of his fellows he has little to fear from their dislike; with nothing to gain from the administration of servile flattery, he has nothing to lose by the expression of just rebuke. He sits as it were above his brethren, on a sunlit eminence of peace and purity, unblinded by the petty mists that dim their vision, untroubled by the petty influences that disturb their life.

No wonder that such a man at once made himself felt as a power in the midst of his people. It became widely rumoured that, in the wilderness of Judæa, lived one whose burning words it was worth while to hear; one who recalled Isaiah by his expressions, Elijah by his life. A Tiberius was polluting by his infamies the throne of the Empire; a Pontius Pilate, with his insolences, cruelties, extortions, massacres, was maddening a fanatic people; Herod Antipas was exhibiting to facile learners the example of calculated apostacy and reckless lust; Caiaphas and Annas were dividing the functions of a priesthood which they disgraced. Yet the talk of the new Prophet was not of political circumstances such as these: the lessons he had to teach were deeper and more universal in their moral and social significance. Whatever might be the class who flocked to his stern solitude, his teaching was intensely practical, painfully heart-searching, fearlessly downright. And so Pharisee and Sadducee, scribe and soldier, priest and publican, all thronged to listen to his words. The place where he preached was that wild range of uncultivated and untenanted wilderness, which stretches southward from Jericho and the fords of Jordan to the shores of the Dead Sea. The cliffs that overhung the narrow defile which led from Jerusalem to Jericho were the haunt of dangerous robbers; the wild beasts and the crocodiles were not yet extinct in the reed-beds that marked the swellings of Jordan; yet from every quarter of the country—from priestly Hebron, from holy Jerusalem, from smiling Galilee—they came streaming forth, to catch the accents of this strange voice. And the words of that voice were like a hammer to dash in pieces the flintiest heart, like a flame to pierce into the most hidden thoughts. Without a shadow of euphemism, without an accent of subservience, without a tremor of hesitation, he rebuked the tax-gatherers for their extortionateness; the soldiers for their violence, unfairness, and discontent:

the wealthy Sadducees, and stately Pharisees, for a formalism and falsity which made them vipers of a viperous brood. The whole people he warned that their cherished privileges were worse than valueless if, without repentance, they regarded them as a protection against the wrath to come. They prided themselves upon their high descent; but God, as He had created Adam out of the earth, so even out of those flints upon the strand of Jordan was able to raise up children unto Abraham. They listened with accusing consciences and stricken hearts; and since he had chosen baptism as his symbol of their penitence and purification, “they were baptised of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” Even those who did not submit to his baptism were yet “willing for a season to rejoice in his light.”

But he had another and stranger message—a message sterner, yet more hopeful—to deliver; for himself he would claim no authority, save as the forerunner of another; for his own baptism no value, save as an initiation into the kingdom that was at hand. When the deputation from the Sanhedrin asked him who he was—when all the people were musing in their hearts whether he were the Christ or no—he never for a moment hesitated to say that he was not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet. He was “a voice in the wilderness,” and nothing more; but after him—and this was the announcement that stirred most powerfully the hearts of men—after him was coming One who was preferred before him, for He was before him—One whose shoe’s latchet he was unworthy to unloose—One who should baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Ghost, and with fire—One whose fan was in His hand, and who should thoroughly purge His floor—who should gather His wheat into the garner, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. The hour for the sudden coming of their long-promised, long-expected Messiah was at hand. His awful presence was near them, was among them, but they knew Him not.

Thus repentance and the kingdom of heaven were the two cardinal points of his preaching, and though he did not claim the credentials of a single miracle, yet while he threatened detention to the hypocrite and destruction to the hardened, he promised also pardon to the penitent and admission into the kingdom of heaven to the pure and clean. “The two great utterances,” it has been said, “which he brings from the desert, contain the two capital revelations to which all the preparation of the Gospel has been tending. Law and prophecy; denunciation of sin and promise of pardon; the flame which consumes and the light which consoles—is not this the whole of the covenant?”

To this preaching, to this baptism, in the thirtieth year of His age, came Jesus from Galilee. John was his kinsman by birth, but the circumstances of their life had entirely separated them. John, as a child in the house of the blameless priest his father, had lived at Juttah, in the far south of the tribe of Judah, and not far from Hebron; Jesus had lived in the deep seclusion of the carpenter's shop in the valley of Galilee. When He first came to the banks of the Jordan, the great forerunner, according to his own emphatic and twice-repeated testimony, "knew Him not." And yet, though Jesus was not yet revealed as the Messiah to His great herald-prophet, there was something in His look, something in the sinless beauty of his ways, something in the solemn majesty of His aspect, which at once overawed and captivated the soul of John. To others he was the uncompromising prophet; kings he could confront with rebuke; Pharisees he could unmask with indignation; but before this Presence all his lofty bearing falls. As when some unknown dread checks the flight of the eagle, and makes him settle with hushed scream and drooping plumage on the ground, so before "the royalty of inward happiness," before the purity of sinless life, the wild prophet of the desert becomes like a submissive and timid child. The battle-brunt which legionaries could not daunt—the lofty manhood before which hierarchs trembled and princes grew pale—resigns itself, submits, adores before a moral force which is weak in every external attribute and armed only in an invisible mail. John bowed to the simple stainless manhood before he had been inspired to recognise the Divine commission. He earnestly tried to forbid the purpose of Jesus. He who had received the confessions of all others, now reverently and humbly makes his own. "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"

The answer contains the second recorded utterance of Jesus, and the first word of His public ministry—"Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

* "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean"—such seems to have been the burden of John's message to the sinners who had become sincerely penitent.

But, if so, why did our Lord receive baptism at His servant's hands? His own words tell us; it was to fulfil every requirement to which God's will might seem to point (Ps. xl. 7, 8). He did not accept it as subsequent to a confession, for He was sinless; and in this respect, even before he recognised Him as the Christ, the Baptist

* See note on next page.

Editor's Note:

This section appears to teach that sprinkling is Baptism and also seems to teach baptismal regeneration. Both of those are unscriptural teachings. These are two more errors that the Protestants brought out of Catholicism at the Reformation.

Dr. VBK

clearly implied that the rite would be in His case exceptional. But He received it as ratifying the mission of His great forerunner—the last and greatest child of the Old Dispensation, the earliest herald of the New; and He also received it as the beautiful symbol of moral purification, and the humble inauguration of a ministry which came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil. His own words obviate all possibility of misconception. He does not say, “I must,” but “Thus it becometh us.” He does not say, “I *have* need to be baptised;” nor does He say, “*Thou* hast *no* need to be baptised of me,” but He says “Suffer it to be so now.” * ~~This is, indeed, but the baptism of repentance; yet it may serve to prefigure the “laver of regeneration.”~~

So Jesus descended into the waters of Jordan, and there the awful sign was given that this was indeed “He that should come.” From the cloven heaven streamed the Spirit of God in a dovelike radiance that seemed to hover over His head in lambent flame, and the *Bath Kôl*, which to the dull unpurged ear was but an inarticulate thunder, spake in the voice of God to the ears of John—“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

* See note on previous page.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEMPTATION.

His human spirit filled with overpowering emotions, Jesus sought for retirement, to be alone with God, and once more to think over His mighty work. From the waters of the Jordan He was led—according to the more intense and picturesque expression of St. Mark, He was “driven”—by the Spirit into the wilderness.

A tradition, said to be no older than the time of the Crusades, fixes the scene of the temptation at a mountain to the west of Jericho, which from this circumstance has received the name of Quarantania. Naked and arid like a mountain of malediction, rising precipitously from a scorched and desert plain, and looking over the sluggish, bituminous waters of the Sodomitic sea—thus offering a sharp contrast to the smiling softness of the Mountain of Beatitudes and the limpid crystal of the Lake of Gennesareth—imagination has seen in it a fit place to be the haunt of evil influences—a place where, in the language of the prophets, the owls dwell and the satyrs dance.

And here Jesus, according to that graphic and pathetic touch of

the second Evangelist, "was with the wild beasts." They did not harm Him. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." So had the voice of olden promise spoken; and in Christ, as in so many of His children, the promise was fulfilled. Those whose timid faith shrinks from all semblance of the miraculous, need find nothing to alarm them here. It is not a natural thing that the wild creatures should attack with ferocity, or fly in terror from, their master, man. A poet has sung of a tropical isle that—

"Nor save for pity was it hard to take
The helpless life, so wild that it was tame."

The terror or the fury of animals, though continued by hereditary instinct, was begun by cruel and wanton aggression; and historical instances are not wanting in which both have been overcome by the sweetness, the majesty, the gentleness of man. There seems to be no adequate reason for rejecting the unanimous belief of the early centuries that the wild beasts of the Thebaid moved freely and harmlessly among the saintly eremites, and that even the wildest living creatures were tame and gentle to St. Francis of Assisi. Who has not known people whose presence does not scare the birds, and who can approach, without danger, the most savage dog? We may well believe that the mere human spell of a living and sinless personality would go far to keep the Saviour from danger. In the catacombs and on other ancient monuments of early Christians, He is sometimes represented as Orpheus charming the animals with His song. All that was true and beautiful in the old legends found its fulfilment in Him, and was but a symbol of His life and work.

And He was in the wilderness forty days. The number occurs again and again in Scripture, and always in connection with the facts of temptation or retribution. It is clearly a sacred and representative number, and independently of other associations, it was for forty days that Moses had stayed on Sinai, and Elijah in the wilderness. In moments of intense excitement and overwhelming thought the ordinary needs of the body seem to be modified, or even for a time superseded; and unless we are to understand St. Luke's words,* "He did eat nothing," as being absolutely literal, ~~we might suppose that Jesus found all that was necessary for His bare sustenance in such scant fruits as the desert might afford; but however that may be—and it is a question of little importance—at the end of the time He hungered.~~ And this was the tempter's moment. The whole period had been one of moral and

* Again, there is no reason to question the plain statement of the Scriptures.

spiritual tension. During such high hours of excitement men will sustain, without succumbing, an almost incredible amount of labour, and soldiers will fight through a long day's battle unconscious or oblivious of their wounds. But when the enthusiasm is spent, when the exaltation dies away, when the fire burns low, when Nature, weary and overstrained, reasserts her rights—in a word, when a mighty reaction has begun, which leaves the man suffering, spiritless, exhausted—then is the hour of extreme danger, and that has been, in many a fatal instance, the moment in which a man has fallen a victim to insidious allurements or bold assault. It was at such a moment that the great battle of our Lord against the powers of evil was fought and won.

The struggle was, as is evident, no mere allegory. Into the exact external nature of the temptation it seems at once superfluous and irreverent to enter—superfluous, because it is a question in which any absolute decision is for us impossible; irreverent, because the Evangelists could only have heard it from the lips of Jesus, or of those to whom He communicated it, and our Lord could only have narrated it in the form which conveys at once the truest impression and the most instructive lessons. Almost every different expositor has had a different view as to the agency employed, and the objective or subjective reality of the entire event. From Origen down to Schleiermacher some have regarded it as a vision or allegory—the symbolic description of a purely inward struggle; and even so literal and orthodox a commentator as Calvin has embraced this view. On this point, which is a matter of mere exegesis, each must hold the opinion which seems to him most in accordance with the truth; but the one essential point is that the struggle was powerful, personal, intensely real—that Christ, for our sakes, met and conquered the tempter's utmost strength.

The question as to whether Christ was or was not *capable* of sin—to express it in the language of that scholastic and theological region in which it originated, the question as to the peccability or impeccability of His human nature—is one which would never occur to a simple and reverent mind. We believe and know that our blessed Lord was sinless—the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot. What can be the possible edification or advantage in the discussion as to whether this sinlessness sprang from a *posse non peccare* or a *non posse peccare*? Some, in a zeal at once intemperate and ignorant, have claimed for Him not only an actual sinlessness, but a nature to which sin was divinely and miraculously impossible. What then? If His great

conflict were a mere deceptive phantasmagoria, how can the narrative of it profit us? If *we* have to fight the battle clad in that armour of human free-will which has been hacked and riven about the bosom of our fathers by so many a cruel blow, what comfort is it to us if our great Captain fought not only victoriously, but without real danger; not only uninjured, but without even a possibility of wound? Where is the warrior's courage, if he knows that for him there is but the *semblance* of a battle against the *simulacrum* of a foe? Are we not thus, under an appearance of devotion, robbed of One who, "though He were a son, yet *learned obedience* by the things which He suffered?" Are we not thus, under the guise of orthodoxy, mocked in our belief that we have a High Priest who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, "being *tempted in all points like as we are*, yet without sin?" They who would *thus* honour Him rob us of our living Christ, who was very man no less than very God, and substitute for Him a perilous Apollinarian phantom enshrined "in the cold empyrean of theology," and alike incapable of kindling devotion or of inspiring love.

Whether, then, it comes under the form of a pseudo-orthodoxy, false and pharisaical, and eager only to detect or condemn the supposed heresy of others; or whether it comes from the excess of a dishonouring reverence which has degenerated into the spirit of fear and bondage—let us beware of contradicting the express teaching of the Scriptures, and, as regards this narrative, the express teaching of Christ Himself, by a supposition that He was not liable to real temptation. Nay, He was liable to temptation all the sorer, because it came like agony to a nature infinitely strong yet infinitely pure. In proportion as any one has striven all his life to be, like His great Ensample, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, in that proportion will he realise the intensity of the struggle, the anguish of the antipathy which pervades a nobler nature when, either by suggestions from within or from without, it has been dragged into even apparent proximity to the possibilities of evil. There are few passages in the *Pilgrim's Progress* more powerful, or more suggestive of profound acquaintance with the mysteries of the human heart, than that in which Christian, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, finds his mind filled with revolting images and blaspheming words, which have indeed been but whispered into his ear, beyond his own powers of rejection, by an evil spirit, but which, in his dire bewilderment, he cannot distinguish or disentangle from thoughts which are his own, and to which his will consents. In Christ, indeed, we suppose that

such special complications would be wholly impossible, not because of any transcendental endowments connected with "immanent divinity" or the "communication of idioms," but because He had lived without yielding to wickedness, whereas in men these illusions arise in general from their own past sins. They are, in fact, nothing else but the flitting spectres of iniquities forgotten or unforgotten—the mists that reek upward from the stagnant places in the deepest caverns of hearts not yet wholly cleansed. No, in Christ there could not be this terrible inability to discern that which comes from within us and that which is forced upon us from without—between that which the weak will has entertained, or to which, in that ever-shifting border-land which separates thought from action, it has half assented, and that with which it does indeed find itself in immediate contact, but which, nevertheless, it repudiates with every muscle and fibre of its moral being. It must be a weak or a perverted intellect which imagines that "man becomes acquainted with temptation only in proportion as he is defiled by it," or that is unable to discriminate between the severity of a powerful temptation and the stain of a guilty thought. It may sound like a truism, but it is a truism much needed alike for our warning and our comfort, when the poet who, better than any other, has traversed every winding in the labyrinth of the human heart, has told us with such solemnity,

" 'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall."

And Jesus was tempted. The "Captain of our salvation" was "made perfect through sufferings." "In that He Himself *hath suffered being tempted*, He is able to succour them that are tempted." The wilderness of Jericho and the Garden of Gethsemane—these witnessed His two most grievous struggles, and in these He triumphed wholly over the worst and most awful assaults of the enemy of souls; but during *no* part of the days of His flesh was He free from temptation, since otherwise His life had been no true human life at all, nor would He in the same measure have left us an ensample that we should follow His steps. "Many other were the occasions," says St. Bonaventura, "on which He endured temptations." "They," says St. Bernard, "who reckon only three temptations of our Lord, show their ignorance of Scripture." He refers to John vii. 1, and Heb. iv. 15; he might have referred still more appositely to the express statement of St. Luke, that when the temptation in the wilderness was over, the foiled tempter left Him indeed, but left Him only "*for a season*," or, as the

words may perhaps be rendered, "till a new opportunity occurred." Yet we may well believe that when He rose victorious out of the dark wiles in the wilderness, all subsequent temptations, until the last, floated as lightly over His sinless soul as the cloud-wreath of a summer day floats over the blue heaven which it cannot stain.

1. The exhaustion of a long fast would have acted more powerfully on the frame of Jesus from the circumstance that with Him it was not usual. It was with a gracious purpose that He lived, not as a secluded ascetic in hard and self-inflicted pangs, but as a man with men. Nor does He ever enjoin fasting as a positive obligation, although in two passages He more than sanctions it as a valuable aid (Matt. vi. 16—18; ix. 15). But, in general, we know from His own words that He came "eating and drinking;" practising, not *abstinence*, but *temperance* in all things, joining in the harmless feasts and innocent assemblages of friends, so that His enemies dared to say of Him, "Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber," as of John they said, "He hath a devil." After His fast, therefore, of forty days, however supported by solemn contemplation and supernatural aid, His hunger would be the more severe. And then it was that the tempter came; in what form—whether as a spirit of darkness or as an angel of light, whether under the disguise of a human aspect or an immaterial suggestion, we do not know and cannot pretend to say—content to follow simply the Gospel narrative, and to adopt its expressions, not with dry dogmatic assertion as to the impossibility of such expressions being in a greater or less degree allegorical, but with a view to learn those deep moral lessons which alone concern us, and which alone are capable of an indisputable interpretation.

*Mt 4:3 "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made loaves." So spake the Tempter first. Jesus was hungry, and "these stones" were perhaps those siliceous accretions, sometimes known under the name of *lapides judaici*, which assume the exact shape of little loaves of bread, and which were represented in legend as the petrified fruits of the Cities of the Plain. The pangs of hunger work all the more powerfully when they are stimulated by the added tortures of a quick imagination; and if the conjecture be correct, then the very shape and aspect and traditional origin of these stones would give to the temptation an added force.

There can be no stronger proof of the authenticity and divine origin of this narrative than the profound subtlety and typical universality of each temptation. Not only are they wholly unlike the far cruder and simpler stories of the temptation, in all ages, of those who have been

* Be sure to find and read this and all other Scriptures referenced in your KJV to find the correct translation instead of the translation given by the textbook author.

eminent saints, but there is in them a delicacy of insight, an originality of conception, that far transcend the range of the most powerful invention.

It was a temptation to the senses—an appeal to the appetites—an impulse given to that lower nature which man shares with all the animal creation. But so far from coming in any coarse or undisguisedly sensuous form, it came shrouded in a thousand subtle veils. Israel, too, had been humbled, and suffered to hunger in the wilderness, and there, in his extreme need, God had fed him with manna, which was as angels' food and bread from heaven. Why did not the Son of God thus provide Himself with a table in the wilderness? He *could* do so if He liked, and why should He hesitate? If an angel had revealed to the fainting Hagar the fountain of Beer-lahai-roi—if an angel had touched the famishing Elijah, and shown him food—why should *He* await even the ministry of angels to whom such ministry was needless, but whom, if He willed it, angels would have been so glad to serve?

How deep is the wisdom of the reply! Referring to the very lesson which the giving of the manna had been designed to teach, and quoting one of the grandest utterances of Old Testament inspiration, our Lord answered, "It standeth written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." And what a lesson lies herein for us—a lesson enforced by how great an example—that we are not to be guided by the wants of our lower nature; that we may not misuse that lower nature for the purposes of our own sustenance and enjoyment; that we are not our own, and may not do what we will with that which we imagine to be our own; that even those things which may seem lawful, are yet not all expedient; that man has higher principles of life than material sustenance, as he is a higher existence than his material frame. He who thinks that we live by bread alone, will make the securing of bread the chief object of his life—will determine to have it at whatever cost—will be at once miserable and rebellious if even for a time he be stinted or deprived of it, and because he seeks no diviner food, will inevitably starve with hunger in the midst of it. But he who knows that man doth *not* live by bread alone, will not thus, for the sake of living, lose all that makes life dear—will, when he has done his duty, trust God to preserve with all things needful the body He has made—will seek with more earnest endeavour the bread from heaven, and that living water whereof he who drinketh shall thirst no more.

And thus His first temptation was analogous in form to the last taunt addressed to Him on the cross—"If Thou be the Son of God,

come down from the cross." "If"—since faith and trust are the mainstay of all human holiness, the tempter is ever strongest in the suggestion of such doubts; strong, too, in his appeal to the free-will and the self-will of man. "You *may*, you *can*—why not do it?" On the cross our Saviour answers not; here He answers only to express a great eternal principle. He does not say, "I *am* the Son of God;" in the profundity of His humiliation, in the extreme of His self-sacrifice, He made not His equality with God a thing to be grasped at, "but made Himself of no reputation." He foils the tempter, not as very God, but as very man. The textbook author is flirting with an inferior translation.

2. The order of the temptations is given differently by St. Matthew and St. Luke; St. Matthew placing second the scene on the pinnacle of the Temple, and St. Luke the vision of the kingdoms of the world. Both orders cannot be right, and possibly St. Luke may have been influenced in his arrangement by the thought that a temptation to spiritual pride and the arbitrary exercise of miraculous power was a subtler and less transparent, and therefore more powerful one, than the temptation to fall down and recognise the power of evil. But the words, "Get thee behind me, Satan," recorded by both Evangelists (Luke iv. 8; Matt. iv. 10)—the fact that St. Matthew alone gives a definite sequence ("then," "again")—perhaps, too, the consideration that St. Matthew, as one of the Apostles, is more likely to have heard the narrative immediately from the lips of Christ—give greater weight to the order which he adopts. One was chronological and the other a simple list giving no thought to chronology. Dr. VBK

Jesus had conquered and rejected the first temptation by the expression of an absolute trust in God. Adapting itself, therefore, with infinite subtlety to the discovered mood of the Saviour's soul, the next temptation, challenging as it were directly, and appealing immediately to, this absolute trust, claims the illustration and expression of it, not to relieve an immediate necessity, but to avert an overwhelming peril. "Then he brought Him to the Holy City, and setteth Him on the pinnacle of the Temple." Some well-known pinnae of that well-known mass must be intended; perhaps the roof of the *Stoa Basilikè*, or Royal Porch, on the southern side of the Temple, which looked down sheer into the valley of the Kidron below it, from a height so dizzy that, according to the description of Josephus, if any one ventured to look down, his head would swim at the immeasurable depth; perhaps Solomon's Porch, the *Stoa Anatolikè*, which Josephus also has described, and from which, according to tradition, St. James, the Lord's brother, was afterwards precipitated into the court below.

“*If*”—again that doubt, as though to awake a spirit of pride, in the exercise of that miraculous display to which He is tempted—“if Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down.” “Thou art in danger not self-sought; save Thyself from it, as Thou canst and mayest, and thereby prove Thy divine power and nature. Is it not written that the angels shall bear Thee up? Will not this be a splendid proof of Thy trust in God?” Thus deep and subtle was this temptation; and thus, since Jesus had appealed to Scripture, did the devil also “quote Scripture for his purpose.” For there was nothing vulgar, nothing selfish, nothing sensuous in this temptation. It was an appeal, not to natural appetites, but to perverted spiritual instincts. Does not the history of sects and parties, and churches, and men of high religious claims, show us that thousands who could not sink into the slough of sensuality have yet thrust themselves arrogantly into needless perils, and been dashed into headlong ruin from the pinnacle of spiritual pride? And how calm, yet full of warning, was that simple answer, “It is written again, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’” The word in the original (*ἐκπειράσεις*—Matt. iv. 7; Deut. vi. 16) is stronger and more expressive. It is, “Thou shalt not *tempt to the extreme* the Lord thy God;” thou shalt not, as it were, presume on all that He can do for thee; thou shalt not claim his miraculous intervention to save Thee from thine own presumption and folly; thou shalt not challenge His power to the proof. When thou art in the path of duty trust in Him to the utmost with a perfect confidence; but listen not to that haughty seductive whisper, “Ye shall be as gods,” and let there be no self-willed and capricious irreverence in thy demand for aid. Then—to add the words so cunningly omitted by the tempter—“shalt thou be safe in all thy ways.” And Jesus does not even allude to His apparent danger. Danger not self-sought is safety. The tempter’s own words had been a confession of his own impotence—“Cast *Thyself* down.” Even from that giddy height he had no power to hurl Him whom God kept safe. The Scripture which he had quoted was true, though he had perverted it. No amount of temptation can ever *necessitate* a sin. With every temptation God provides also “*the way to escape* :”

“Also it is written,
‘Tempt not the Lord thy God,’ He said, and stood:
But Satan, smitten by amazement, fell.”

3. Foiled in his appeal to natural hunger, or to the possibility of spiritual pride, the tempter appealed to “the last infirmity of noble

minds," and staked all on one splendid cast. He makes up for the want of subtlety in the form by the apparent magnificence of the issue. From a high mountain he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and as the *κοσμοκράτωρ*, the "prince of this world," he offered them all to Him who had lived as the village carpenter, in return for one expression of homage, one act of acknowledgment.

"The kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them!" "There are some that will say," says Bishop Andrewes, "that we are never tempted with kingdoms. It may be well, for it needs not be, when less will serve. It was Christ only that was thus tempted; in Him lay an heroic mind that could not be tempted with small matters. But with us it is nothing so, for we esteem more basely of ourselves. We set our wares at a very easy price; he may buy us even dagger-cheap. He need never carry us so high as the mount. The pinnacle is high enough; yea, the lowest steeple in all the town would serve the turn. Or let him but carry us to the leads and gutters of our own houses; nay, let us but stand in our windows or our doors, if he will give us so much as we can there see, he will tempt us thoroughly; we will accept it, and thank him too. . . . A matter of half-a-crown, or ten groats, a pair of shoes, or some such trifle, will bring us on our knees to the devil."

But Christ taught, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

There was then living a man who, scarcely in a figure, might be said to have the whole world. The Roman Emperor Tiberius was at that moment infinitely the most powerful of living men, the absolute, undisputed, deified ruler of all that was fairest and richest in the kingdoms of the earth. There was no control to his power, no limit to his wealth, no restraint upon his pleasures. And to yield himself still more unreservedly to the boundless self-gratification of a voluptuous luxury, not long after this time he chose for himself a home on one of the loveliest spots on the earth's surface, under the shadow of the slumbering volcano, upon an enchanting islet in one of the most softly delicious climates of the world. What came of it all? He was, as Pliny calls him, "*tristissimus ut constat hominum*," confessedly the most gloomy of mankind. And there, from this home of his hidden infamies, from this island where on a scale so splendid he had tried the experiment of what happiness can be achieved by pressing the world's most absolute authority, and the world's guiltiest indulgences, into the

service of an exclusively selfish life, he wrote to his servile and corrupted Senate, "What to write to you, Conscript Fathers, or how to write, or what *not* to write, *may all the gods and goddesses destroy me, worse than I feel that they are daily destroying me, if I know.*" Rarely has there been vouchsafed to the world a more overwhelming proof that its richest gifts are but "fairy gold that turns to dust and dross," and its most colossal edifices of personal splendour and greatness no more durable barrier against the encroachment of bitter misery than are the babe's sandheaps to stay the mighty march of the Atlantic tide.

In such perplexity, in such anguish, does the sinful possession of all riches and all rule end. Such is the invariable Nemesis of unbridled lusts. It does not need the snaky tresses or the shaken torch of the fabled Erinnyes. The guilty conscience is its own adequate avenger; and "if the world were one entire and perfect chrysolite," and that gem ours, it would not console us for one hour of that inward torment, or compensate in any way for those lacerating pangs.

But he who is an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven is lord over vaster and more real worlds, infinitely happy because infinitely pure. And over that kingdom Satan has no power. It is the kingdom of God; and since from Satan not even the smallest semblance of any of his ruinous gifts can be gained except by suffering the soul to do allegiance to him, the answer to all his temptations is the answer of Christ, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

Thus was Christ victorious, through that self-renunciation through which only can victory be won. And the moments of such honest struggle crowned with victory are the very sweetest and happiest that the life of man can give. They are full of an elevation and a delight which can only be described in language borrowed from the imagery of heaven.

"Then the devil leaveth Him"—St. Luke adds, "~~till a fitting opportunity~~"—"and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."

Again, the textbook author is flirting with an inferior translation. Make sure you locate and read this verse and all other verses in the lessons in your KJV.

Stop here and take Lesson Five Test.