STUDIES IN THE "INNER LIFE" OF JESUS.

V.

The Temptation.

1. The contrast between the brief allusion to the Temptation in Mark's Gospel, and the longer records in Matthew's and Luke's presents a critical problem, of which no entirely satisfactory solution has been offered. It is not likely that, if Peter had known the fuller account, he would have failed to give it a place in his public teaching, and that Mark, his companion, if he had heard it from his lips, would have omitted it from his record. But it is also unlikely that if the bare reference preserved in Mark had been all that was known in apostolic circles, the author of the common source of Matthew and Luke would have taken the liberty of framing an imaginative narrative to gratify unsatisfied curiosity. Without any attempt to account for the apparent ignorance of Peter, which the actual omission in Mark seems to involve, on the ground of the greater improbability of the invention of the narratives in Matthew and Luke, it will be assumed in this Study that we have a right to treat the story of the temptation as a historical account, and not an imaginative composition.

2. As there were no witnesses of this experience, the record must be ultimately derived from Jesus Himself. On some appropriate occasion, for some important purpose, He must have told His disciples what He had passed through, not from any vain desire to talk about Himself, but with the intention of warning them against a similar danger to which they were themselves exposed, or of justifying to them a course of action to which they were opposed. If we ask ourselves, when would Jesus be most likely to speak about His temptation, we need not hesitate long for an answer. No fitter time can be thought of than just after

the confession of His Messiahship by the disciples and His announcement of His passion to them. His rebuke of Peter surely required explanation and justification. Peter must be made to understand that he was playing the part of the Tempter. How could Jesus more impressively show that Peter's thoughts and plans, in which the other disciples shared, savoured not of God, but of men, than by a confession of His own experience? He Himself had been tempted to take the course which was being preferred by His disciples to the path of Divine appointment, on which He had just expressed His resolve to enter, and had rejected the course which they proposed as a submission to the solicitations of Satan himself. It was some such serious crisis in His relation to His disciples which compelled Him to make this self-disclosure, from which, we may be sure, He painfully shrank.

3. If this communication had this direct practical purpose, it would necessarily assume the most effective didactic form. Jesus was not giving His disciples material for His biography; He was seeking to make intelligible to them His own experience for their defence and safety. We need not look then for literal history, but may rather expect parabolic instruction. So great was the distance, mental, moral and spiritual, between the Master and the disciples that, had He recorded His experiences with prosaic accuracy, and not poetic suggestiveness, they could not have understood Him. The disguised, subtle and plausible suggestions of evil in which His moral discernment and spiritual vision discovered temptations, would not have appeared dangerous or injurious to their blunter sensibilities. He was compelled to bring His temptation down from the height of moral and spiritual ideality in which He lived even to the depth of reality in which they moved. It was quite in accord with His usual method as a teacher that He should seek to reach the reason and grasp the conscience

by embodying truth in a tale. But as Jesus was a poet as well as a thinker, His parabolic method was no artificial expedient, but a natural expression of His mind and spirit. He did not go out of His way to speak figuratively in order to produce the greatest effect; it was His own way so to speak.

4. To take the narrative literally involves us in many serious difficulties. Is it credible that Satan could assume a bodily form at will, that he could transport Jesus from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the Temple, and thence to the top of the high mountain (it is certain Jesus would not transport Himself, or God Him, for Satan's purposes), or that all the kingdoms of the world could be seen in one moment of time from one mountain? If we cannot take the whole narrative literally, we simply confuse ourselves by attempting to combine historical and figurative elements in the story. Again, is it probable that, if these suggestions, baldly stated in the words of the narrative, had been plainly put before Jesus by Satan himself, He would have felt them to be at all serious? The manifest presence of Satan would have made his solicitations innocuous. We may be sure it was in more secret and subtle forms than those which the narrative, taken literally, brings before us that Jesus was tempted. The evil which brought Him into any moral peril must have had at least the appearance of good. We do Him no honour in assuming that He could have been so easily tempted. To preserve His innocence it is not necessary, as is often taken for granted, to assume an external tempter. A man's moral "within" and "without" does not correspond with the outside and the inside of his body. Every man's consciousness has an abundant and varied content, which is not so exclusively his own that he can be held directly responsible for it all. He hears and remembers the thoughts and plans of other men. Only if he assents to them and approves of them can he be praised

or blamed for them. These stores of the mind may become the occasion of temptation, but the mere possession of them does not involve any guilt. Jesus did not live in mental isolation, in a moral vacuum, but He knew the wishes and hopes of others, and these could become the source of temptation to Him without any external tempter.

5. The first question regarding the temptation to which we must attempt an answer is this: What new element was there in the consciousness of Jesus at this time that made Him liable to so prolonged and so serious a strain of temptation? He had come to the Jordan to submit Himself to the baptism of John as His self-dedication to His vocation. How He conceived that vocation the last Study sought to discover. The conclusion reached was that He regarded Himself as the Servant of Jehovah, destined to save the people from their sins by the sacrifice of Himself. But the conclusion of the third Study must be taken along with this. Even as a youth He thought of God as His Father. His filial consciousness toward God accompanied His fraternal consciousness towards men, and we cannot assert which was more original, but may assume that the two aspects of an indivisible consciousness were mutually conditioned. It was not His filial relation to God which He discovered at His baptism, although that was confirmed. At His baptism His fraternal consciousness, which had brought Him to be baptized, was approved. In neither can we find the reason for the Temptation. In it rather He had to maintain His dependence on God, and His sympathy with man in face of a new element which had entered into His experience at the baptism. He became conscious, as it would seem for the first time, of supernatural power. How was the exercise of this endowment to be related to the submission which He rendered to God and the service which He offered to man. The suffering Servant of Jehovah seemed to have no use for miraculous activities. Must He

then surrender this vocation and assume the functions of the Messiah so long expected and so ardently desired? Must He, as His supernatural endowment seemed to indicate, turn from His own aspirations and fulfil the people's expectations? Was He to prove Himself the Son of God by supernatural greatness or by sacrificial lowliness? That, we may conjecture, was the question which had to be answered in the wilderness.

6. The question related to His vocation, and not to His individual relation to God. It has been assumed that Jesus was on this occasion tempted to use His supernatural power for His own self-indulgence, self-protection and self-advancement, to work miracles to meet His own needs, to deliver Himself from dangers, and to further His own greatness, to annul practically the Incarnation by raising Himself above the human conditions which had been accepted. This is quite a credible and intelligible explanation, but there is a very good reason why it should be set aside. Even Christian theologians have done injustice to the consciousness of Jesus by throwing to the forefront the claims which He made for Himself, and by letting fall into the background the duties which He accepted as His vocation. Not His person, but His vocation was His exclusive interest. He perfected His person as He fulfilled His vocation. His person was so identified with, so absorbed in His vocation, that it is altogether unlikely that He would think of Himself apart from His work. It may therefore be doubted whether He was ever so much concerned about His own comfort, safety or fame, apart from the claims of the kingdom of God and His calling therein, as to be liable to any temptation to seek His own ends by wrong means.

7. Even if the temptations related to His vocation, we must still choose between two possible references. Did the three forms of temptation refer to the means to be employed in the establishment of the kingdom, or to the ends to be

sought in the government of the kingdom when established? Was the question to be settled one of immediate policy or of ultimate principle? It may seem as if we could not distinguish two separate issues here. Must not the means correspond to the ends, will not the means determine the ends? That is a moral certainty; but men are constantly hiding it from themselves, for they do evil that good may come, and seek moral and spiritual ends by physical and secular means without perceiving the inconsistency. They delude themselves into the belief that inferior causes may yield superior effects instead of accepting the certain law of an exact equivalence. While it is conceivable that Jesus might have been tempted to pander to popular prejudices and passions to gain a popularity which He might afterwards use in the interests of His kingdom, yet it is not likely that He would for a moment consent to use means inconsistent with the ends He set before Him. We may assume that the temptation related to ends, not means merely.

8. How was He to use His power for the ends of the kingdom? There were abounding misery and need in the land. Should not the kingdom bring comfort and relief? The land of promise was in many parts drear and barren. Should not the earthly seat of the kingdom of God be fertile, fragrant, beautiful? The chosen people was held in bondage by a foreign oppressor. Revolt was steadily and ruthlessly repressed. Yet, although there might be great danger in the effort to cast off the Roman yoke, should not the venture be made in reliance on God, whose will it must be to set His people free? Nay, with a pure worship and a righteous life might not the delivered nation hope even to take the place of the imperial oppressor, and to exercise a world-wide dominion, not cruelly and unjustly, but righteously and mercifully? Might not the kingdom bring fertility and prosperity for the land, deliverance and security

for the people, nay, even the rule of truth and righteousness over all the nations of the earth? Such may have been the suggestions regarding the ends of the kingdom which passed before the mind of Jesus, and which He rejected as temptations of Satan.

9. How did these suggestions come into the mind of Jesus? They were presented to Him in the popular expectations of the Messianic age, with which He must have been quite familiar, as He had not lived in solitude, but in free and frank intercourse with men. It is not necessary now to indicate all the contents of this popular hope. Three features of it show a striking resemblance to the forms of the Temptation. The earth was to be renewed; the foes of the Messiah after a vain attack were all to be overthrown; the kingdom of glory in Palestine was to extend its borders to include the other nations. Jesus must have realized that He must either definitely accept or decisively reject these expectations in His ministry. What could be more probable than that He should deliberately face the issue in order to settle it finally?

10. But it may be objected: Would Jesus assign sufficient importance to these popular expectations to be in any way tempted to realize His vocation by fulfilling them? It must be remembered that these expectations were not the vain and wayward imaginations of the people, but drew their inspiration and justification from prophetic predictions. The prophets had depicted the Messianic age as one of material prosperity, political emancipation and imperial dominion for God's chosen people. The land is to become a garden; the people are to cast off every yoke; the other nations are to seek incorporation in Israel as the condition of Jehovah's favour. Taken literally, these predictions could afford the material for Jesus' Temptation.

11. Against suggestions, derived not only from the popular expectations, but even from the prophetic predictions, Jesus'

own ideal of His work, drawn, as we have already seen, from those portions of the Holy Scriptures with which His filial and fraternal self-consciousness had intuitively recognized its affinity, had to be maintained. Here lay the stress of the Temptation. Here He felt the inward strain. He reverenced and recognized the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Yet, as in His public teaching afterwards He acknowledged that some of the commandments of the Law had been given for the hardness of men's hearts, so He was now led to the discovery that some of the predictions of the prophets, if literally fulfilled, would have led Him to courses of action, inconsistent with, contradictory to, the inward testimony of His own moral conscience and religious consciousness. It is noteworthy, however, that in the Holy Scriptures He found the spiritual principles, by the acceptance of which He overcame. It was not by base indulgence, or vain ostentation, or vulgar ambition, that He was tempted; but so unique was His vocation that He had to transcend even the anticipations cherished by prophets, and that it would have been infidelity for Him to be and do what prophets had expected the Messiah to be and do. How keen must have been the moral insight which made such a discovery, and how great the moral strength which accepted the burden of loneliness which His greatness imposed!

12. This view of the Temptation surely makes it more credible to us that He was tempted. We cannot think of the common temptations of pride and lust, and hate, as assailing Him; but His temptations were elevated as His Person and His vocation. Just as we are tempted to make the lower choice possible for us, so was He; but while our lower choice is a sin instead of a duty, His lower choice was the fulfilment of expectations, due to a lower stage of the revelation of God, instead of fidelity to His own inward testimony to the final stage of God's self-revelation to man.

This does not lessen the reality of the temptation, for the temptations on the lowest moral level are not the most real, and those on the highest least so. The saint's temptation to self-righteousness is just as real as the drunkard's temptation to self-indulgence. As the saint has none of the drunkard's temptations, but has his own, which would mean nothing to the depraved man, so Jesus, untouched by our temptations, was really tempted by suggestions of evil, which never come within the range of our experience.

13. In conclusion, it may be frankly admitted that Jesus' fall before any temptation appears a moral improbability; and that the question of what would have happened had He on this or any other occasion yielded to sin is just as speculative as the question of what would this world have been without sin, and as little deserving of serious consideration. But we must beware of putting for the moral improbability a metaphysical impossibility. Jesus was free to choose the wrong course as well as the right; otherwise His Temptation would have been a mere pretence, and His Incarnation a mere semblance. Without moral freedom there is no real human personality; if on the one hand there is no temptation, then on the other there is no perfection. There can be no legitimate appeal against this conclusion to His divinity, as we must conceive the divinity consistently with the reality of an Incarnation, and must not imagine that we magnify the divinity by mutilating the humanity. We must begin with history, and not metaphysics, with Jesus' own consciousness, that He was tempted, and not with any inferences which may be drawn from the conception of the Logos, prior to and unconditioned by the Incarnation. We truly laud the grace of the Son of God only as we confess that He who was so rich became so poor that He was tempted in all points, even as we are, yet without sin.

NOTE.

The writer ventures to present here for consideration a possible solution of the critical problem referred to in the first paragraph of this Study, of the admissibility of which he himself is not sufficiently convinced to justify his assuming it throughout his treatment of the subject, which, however, seems attractive enough to warrant its mention. If we may regard the narrative found in Matthew and Luke as ultimately derived from Christ's own teaching at Caesarea Philippi, and may interpret it not literally, but symbolically, we may ask the question whether the narrative is intended to present figuratively only the initial temptation in the Wilderness, or also the subsequent temptations which Jesus during the course of His ministry experienced? It is noteworthy that we do find in the records several incidents, of which the various forms of the Temptation may be regarded as symbolic representations. The multitudes whom He had once fed sought to be fed again, and would doubtless have been well pleased to be relieved of all their temporal anxieties by His supernatural power. Might this not be symbolized by the suggestion to turn stones into bread? Jesus was challenged by the rulers in Jerusalem to show some sign in proof of His authority to cleanse the Temple. He was required by the scribes in Galilee to show a sign from heaven that they might believe. That temptation might be figuratively represented by the demand that He should cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. The multitude sought to force on Him an earthly kingship; His disciples were eager for His rule as the Son of David; He steadily refused to gratify His friends by fulfilling these hopes. Need the offer of world-wide dominion mean anything else, or more? At first sight it does seem more probable that Jesus would not at the beginning of His ministry anticipate the dangers which He would meet, and need to escape; but, being guided step by step, would reject

this or that method of exercising His power and establishing His claims, only when the judgement and decision was forced on Him by His external circumstances. These two considerations might lend some support to the following suggestion, if it should commend itself as a legitimate solution of the critical problem. We may suppose that of the initial temptation there was no detailed narrative, and Mark's Gospel preserves all that was known about it in Apostolic circles. But among the *Logia* there was this narrative of subsequent temptations, delivered by Jesus to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi. The two Evangelists who used the *Logia* as well as Mark's Notes assumed that this narrative must be a fuller account of the Temptation thus briefly referred to in Mark, and accordingly detached it from its context in the *Logia*, and inserted it in the proper chronological sequence instead of Mark's brief reference. As the writer does not profess to be an expert in Synoptic criticism, he will not dare to pronounce any dogmatic judgement on the subject. If the suggestion is inadmissible, the two considerations which seem to lend it support lose their probability. For it is not at all unlikely that Jesus was by an initial temptation forewarned and forearmed, and so saved in the strain and stress of His work from the additional burden of discovering the principles which were to be applied on each occasion of doubt or difficulty. As we have seen, there was nothing to hinder His knowing beforehand what sort of a Messiah was expected, and He would be desired to be. The striking resemblance between His inward temptations in the Wilderness and the outward temptations He met with during His ministry is simply an evidence of His clear and full knowledge, won by the normal exercise of His mental powers, of the conditions under which His work had to be done, and shows how thorough had been the thirty years' Preparation for the three years' Ministry.

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