

The Temptation

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temptation as Christ, and Christ in those peculiar circumstances, might be expected to experience. And further, this appropriateness of all the circumstances hardly seems to be perceived by the Evangelists themselves who narrate them. Their narrative is not like a poem, though it affords the materials for a poem; it is rather a dry chronicle.

Let us consider the situation. We are to fix in our minds Christ's peculiar character, as it has been gathered from the Baptist's description of him. His character then was such that he was compared to a lamb, a lamb of God. He was without ambition, and he had a peculiar, unrivalled simplicity of devout confidence in God. Such is the person to whom it is now announced by a great prophet that he has been called to a most peculiar, a pre-eminent career. But this does not fully describe the situation; a most important circumstance has yet to be mentioned. From the time of his temptation Christ appeared as a worker of miracles. We are expressly told by St. John that he had wrought none before, but all our authorities concur in representing him as possessing and using the gift after this time. We are to conceive him therefore as becoming now for the first time conscious of miraculous powers. Now none of our biographies point this out, and yet it is visibly the key to the whole narration. What is called Christ's temptation is the excitement of his mind which was caused by the nascent consciousness of supernatural power.

He finds himself in a barren region without food. The tumult of his mind has hitherto kept him unconscious of his bodily wants, but the overwhelming reaction of lassitude now comes on. And with the hunger comes the temptation, "Son of God, into whose service all natural forces have been given, command that these stones become bread." The possession of special power, and nothing else, constitutes the temptation here; it is the greatest with which virtue can be assailed. By it the virtuous man is removed from ordinary rules, from the safe course which has been marked by the footsteps of countless good men before him, and has to make, as it