

THE LORD'S PRAYER VI.

"Deliverance From Evil"

By Rev. Professor Jordan, D.D.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.—*Math. VI. 13.*

"Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen." These noble words are a fitting conclusion to any hymn or prayer which we may utter at the throne of Almighty God, but we do not think that they formed part of the prayer as it fell from the lips of our Lord. It does not occur in St. Luke's version and only in some manuscripts of St. Matthew's gospel. It does not come within the scope of these papers to discuss such matters at any length. We simply mention it here because we are thus led to regard the words of our text as the last petition of the Lord's prayer. We do not really lose anything, as we have already dealt with those thoughts of God's kingdom and glory which are brought before us in the beginning of the prayer.

This prayer has a comprehensive outlook. It appeals to memory which deals with the past, to faith which deals with present realities, and to hope which looks forward to future blessings. The prayer is in this respect an epitome of the well-balanced life of a healthy soul. We are all influenced by our circumstances and dispositions; but if our experience is fresh and full it will look in all these varied directions. One man is always looking to the past, praising the "good old times," and saying, "Oh that I were as in months past." Religious experience with such a man is too much a thing of memory which gives his life continually a backward look, thus deadening faith and crippling hope. He talks too much of what has been instead of what is. He sings now and then, "O happy day that fixed my choice on thee, my Saviour and my God," but does not ponder as deeply as he ought that other saying of the same poet, "High heaven that heard the solemn vow that vow renewed shall daily hear." Then there is another man who lives too much in the present. He regards religion not only as a living present sensation, lively enjoyment. He does not draw as much upon the past as he might do, or plan for the future with strenuous resolution and fervent hope. This kind of life is apt to be too dependent upon outside influences, and to seek the forms of ministry which kindle the most present excitement. This is not the life of deep thought or vivid imagination, but of changeable emotion. It has its own flower and fruits but does not strike roots deep down or send out its branches wide into the heavens. There is still another type in the man who lives too much in the future. He is always going to do great things. Some little he has done and something he now feels, but this is as nothing compared with what he may do to-morrow. He is always expecting some great opportunity, and feels sure that he will rise to it. There is much that this man might do now out of which probably great things would grow, if he would only take a firmer hold of the present. I do not say that any of us is exactly like any of these types of men, but I do say that there is a predominant influence in each life, and we are in danger of being made one-sided by it. We may make too much of memories of the past, or depend too much on present stimulants, or speculate too largely in future possibilities. Our life needs to be a continuous life, well linked together. When we look at the past we must note not simply our little successes which flatter our pride but also our failures and sins which make it important for us to cry, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." If our souls are alive memory will act as a quickening influence on conscience. In our present life we must cultivate an intelligent faith which ex-

pects God in various ways to give his children bread. Thus all our moments of worship and hours of work may be spent in his presence. In our dreams of the future we must not only cry in a general way for the coming of the Heavenly kingdom, but must cast ourselves upon our Father's care in these words, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." This petition suggests many practical thoughts as to the religious experience of a godly soul. Only a few can be dealt with now.

I. We have in this closing petition a practical application of the opening words of the prayer. We learn to say "Our Father" and to fill our minds with thoughts of his goodness and glory in order that we may come devoutly to him for practical, personal guidance. We are not to sing in vague rapture but to accept as sober truth the words:

"He leadeth me, Oh blessed thought, Oh words with heavenly comfort fraught."

Whate'er I do, where'er I be,

Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me." If we are believers, if we have entered into the spirit of the prayer for forgiveness and for daily bread, we may expect God to take us by the hand and lead us through life's difficulties. There is great comfort in this thought. We feel that we are not an atom in the great mass of humanity to be whirled hither and thither by wild, lawless forces. We are children, and although our father's family is large He can understand the need of each one. This fact that God can guide the individual soul has always been largely dwelt upon by the inspired writers. They were not content to rejoice in belonging to a God-guided nation and to say "He took not away the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night from before his people." They went on to declare that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way." The psalmist, weary with his weakness, and perplexed with the problems of life, was ready to despond, but when the cloud passed away from his soul he reproached himself and found rest in the thought, "Thou shalt guide me by thy counsels and afterward receive me to glory." If we lose this truth religion has no reality and life has no meaning. There is legitimate and inspiring comfort in placing over against the uncertainty of the future the certainty of God's love. Is not life full of change, can we tell what may happen to us? Riches may fly away, business may become bad, health may suddenly break down, friends may be quickly torn from us, our little ones may be left helpless in this cold world. There are many who often have thoughts of this kind. These are also haunted with fears concerning their own strength and stability. They tremble lest they should fall from Christ and bring disgrace upon his cause. We cannot pooh-pooh such fears—they are too common and too real to be lightly charmed away. We must meet them with this great fact of God's constant leadership of love. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God" which is in Christ Jesus. How does a child act? It throws all the future on father and mother, and that is right in a child. The father's heart would be grieved if his child went abroad with all kinds of fears about to-morrow's life. In the spirit of obedient love we ask God to guide our life, and we must be consistent by placing often before our over-anxious souls the fact of our Father's love. We place over against our own unfaithfulness and the faithlessness of men the faithfulness of God. "He is faithful that promised,"

He has promised to guide us with his eye. He promises not to put upon us a burden of temptation too heavy for the strength he gives. God does not bless us because we are worthy, but because we are needy; and he is ever seeking to make us more worthy and more prepared for his fellowship. This should give us hope for the future. Our life is not altogether in our own hands. He who knows all the secrets of our hearts and controls all the forces of the universe is our guide. We can look up to him and say:

"Leader of faithful souls and guide
Of all who travel to the sky,
Come and with us, even us, abide,
Who would in thee alone rely,
On thee alone our spirits stay,
While held in life's uneven way."

II. There is comfort for us in this general fact that we may ask God to guide our moral life; but there is helpful instruction when we examine this request more minutely. We desire to be guided away from temptation and to be delivered from evil. The most spiritual truth needs to be dealt with according to the laws of common-sense. I met a statement recently to the effect that this prayer, offered so piteously by many souls, is never answered. The heavens are dumb and men are left to wander in paths beset by temptation. How strange that those who tell us that nothing can be known about God and religion should know so much! Let us look reasonably at this. We do not think of asking God that the whole set of conditions under which we live should be changed. Our Lord was too much a child of God to offer any such request or to teach it to us. When praying for his disciples he did not ask that they might be taken out of the world but that they may be kept while in it, that is, guarded from its wickedness. It is because this life is a probation, a place of frequent temptation, a moral battle-field, a spiritual school—it is because we know life to be this and expect it to continue such, that we offer this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." We do not mean to imply that God tempts men, though it may be well that he should lead some men through trying ordeals for their own good and the good of others. Then he stands ready to help the lowly, trustful soul. Weapons are furnished wherewith we may meet the evil one, and angels minister to us in moments of weakness. We who are fathers know that we cannot keep our children in a glass case to keep them from temptation. We cannot allow them to go out alone into the world until they know something of its dangers, and we try through years of quiet teaching to prepare their minds that they may choose the good part. We do not believe that there is sin in being tempted. "Is it one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall." The fiercer the temptation the greater the joy and reward if it is resisted and conquered. Our Saviour was tempted and did not sin. The temptations that assailed him were exceedingly subtle, but he met each one of them by manifestations of childlike confidence in the Father.

Where the mere fact of being tempted may be no proof of sin the kind of temptation may show where we are in the spiritual life. Our Saviour's temptations were not coarse, vulgar ones, swear or kill, and had to struggle constantly against such things it would of course show that we were very low down in religious experience. But it may be possible to make too much of that; for, while the forms of our temptation change with our changing life, the spirit to which temptations successfully appeal is the same—the spirit of selfish greed, of presumptuous pride or vain unbelief. What then do we make of this petition? We do not profess to fathom it and put its precise meaning in a few clear cut sentences. We believe, however, that the prayer indicates the spirit of strength. It teaches