

obviously to ask Him to reverse His usual mode of training souls, and would go against the prayer of our Great High Priest Himself; Who pleads not that God would take us out of this world of temptation, but that He would keep us from the evil. The prayer, however, may be especially applied in three ways: first, to those sudden temptations to sin, in which, with great subtlety and malice, the powers of evil assail us, showering fiery darts upon us, and appealing to the traitor in the citadel of our hearts; next, to the restraining of that spirit in ourselves which is ready recklessly to expose itself to sin's allurements; and lastly, to negligence in using that watchfulness and prayer which are the appointed means for the fulfilment of this petition; for it cannot be too strongly impressed on us that while Christ teaches us to offer it He makes us, in a measure, responsible for the answer. A distinction was once drawn by the great Lord Mansfield, which strikingly illustrates the second of these thoughts. He said, "There is all the difference in the world between the popularity which follows and the popularity which is followed after." The man who pursues popularity finds that, like his own shadow, it flees before him, while if he is content to go on his way it will surely follow. In the same way there is all the distinction possible between temptation into which we plunge ourselves and temptation into which God permits us to be plunged. To use this prayer, and then to expose ourselves to temptation, is nothing less than to mock Almighty God; but to pray that we may not be exposed to it for reasons I am about to mention, combined with a spirit of trust and dependence if exposure comes, is the surest way to victory. But, alas! this salutary shrinking from temptation is not always the feeling uppermost in our minds. Sometimes we are self-reliant and unmindful that many an one who has exposed himself to temptation has come out of it with his head hanging like a broken bulrush. Sometimes we think that surely it would be a grand thing to stand like Abraham on Mount Moriah, in the forefront of the battle, and, like him, to win a splendid victory, forgetful that He Who thus tried His servant trained him for it, step by step, through the circumstances of his life; and though always able to make us

more than conquerors, if He confronts us with temptation, has taught us by His Son that our safety rather lies in praying constantly that He would keep us from it.

But now, lastly, why is this? A few chief reasons must suffice. Pray we first, then, "Lead us not into temptation," because of the strength, the malice, and the subtlety of our foes. More subtle is the serpent than any of us suppose, more able to disguise himself, more skilful to ensnare us, and more cruel in his designs. Next, let us use this prayer because of the proneness to temptation which exists in all our hearts. None of us can say what Christ said, "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." In each of us, though truly Christ's, "the infection of nature doth remain"; and a chord within is usually only too responsive to the call of temptation from without. Thirdly, let us so pray, because, where resisted, temptation oftentimes means torture; and where yielded to it always means sin; and lastly, because He Who knows and loves us best has told us so to pray. No one knows the human heart so well as He; and just as lovingly as He said to His disciples in the garden, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation," so now, in this petition, as we may be sure, He guides us for the best. Some day we shall know all the reasons why He says so, and all we have lost because we omitted to do so, and all the blessings which the petition has secured. And yet, though we pray on this wise faithfully, do not let us be surprised if at times temptation comes. The cultivation of the spirit which this prayer breathes forth will best qualify us to meet it. The desert bush may be enveloped in devouring flames; the furnace may be heated seven times beyond its wont; but the presence of the Lord is always able to deliver. And in such a case not only may we be confident and hopeful, but, if trustful and dependent, joyful too. "My brethren," says St. James, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"; and for this reason that He Who teaches us, as a rule, to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," will, under these circumstances, not only make a way of escape, but fulfil the promise, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life."