



“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.”—ST. MATT. vi. 13.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

**T**WO questions at once suggest themselves in regard to this petition. The first is, What is temptation? The second, Why should we pray to be kept from it? To these we may suitably add a third, In what senses will the thoughtful Christian chiefly offer it? As regards the meaning of temptation, it is to be observed that the word seems principally employed in the Bible, to denote three things, between which, if we are to understand the subject fully, we must be careful to distinguish. It is used first, then, to describe an enticement either on the part of Satan, or his agents, or our own corrupt nature, to sin. Thus he whose action in this respect is so frequent and manifold that St. Paul speaks of him as “the Tempter,” tempted Eve to distrust and disobedience; while St. James tells us, “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.” But, secondly, it is used in reference to circumstances and positions wherein desires and things, in themselves lawful, can only be gratified or done in violation of some higher law. We may instance here our Lord’s first and third temptations in the wilderness. *Hunger is, of course, a lawful appetite, and to satisfy it under ordinary circumstances is a blameless thing, but it could not have been sinlessly gratified in the way suggested to Him by Satan.* Again, of all things to be desired, surely that may be mentioned first which shall result in the complete manifestation of Christ’s everlasting kingdom; but never may the hour of Christ the Priest, or Christ the Prophet, be curtailed to anticipate the hour of Christ the King, and never may His kingdom be developed by means inconsistent with its own laws. Thirdly, temptation is an expression used in reference to the testing of our characters on the part of Almighty God. Thus Abraham was sorely tested in the matter of offering up his son; and the special object

of the wilderness journey, in respect of Israel, was thus stated by Moses. “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee, these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no.” In the first case, then, we see that temptation means enticement to things distinctly sinful; in the second, to things, which, though ordinarily lawful of attainment, are unlawful under the surrounding circumstances, or by the means proposed; while, in the third, it consists in exposure to severe tests or hardships, or calls to self-denial, which serve to prove the reality of the work of grace, and the disposition of the soul to fear the Lord. And now, bearing these distinctions in mind as regards the Scriptural use of the word, we shall perhaps be better able to apply the teaching of St. James, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.” This cannot mean that in no sense does God permit Himself to be proved and tried—for we know there are ways in which He permits this daily—nor yet that in no sense does He expose men to the fires of temptation with advantage, for, as Job said, “When He hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” But it does mean that never, in the sense contemplated in our first definition, is it possible for enticement to evil to spring from Him, for as the Greek word signifies, He is “un-versed” in it.

Let us now turn to consider the chief senses in which the thoughtful Christian will pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” No one, then, I think, who studies the Bible, can really suppose that our Lord meant us to offer this prayer in the sense of asking that our Heavenly Father would preserve us from all possible exposure to testing. To do so would be