

relieved at the critical moment was natural enough. The refusal of such a request might well seem hard. But the king looked at things as an old soldier looks at them. It was his pride in his son that made him prefer him at the outset to the post of danger, and that bade him afterwards withhold the succour that he sought. The son was new to battles, and feared the worst. But his father had greater confidence in him than he had in himself; and he was loth, by interposing prematurely on his behalf, to rob him of that glory which he had it in view that he should gain. All this is obvious enough. Why, then, is it less obvious that the dealings of the Heavenly Father with His children may oftentimes be even of this sort?

But still the difficulty remains—and only emphasized apparently by these considerations—that Jesus distinctly teaches us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” His wisdom, and His knowledge of man is nowhere perhaps more notable than here. He takes as the starting-point for human prayer, not the willingness of the spirit, but the weakness of the flesh. To recur once more to the case of St. Peter. When he expressed his readiness to lay down his life for his Master, to follow Him, if need were, to prison and to death, he meant it, aye, meant it to the uttermost. When he declared that, whatever others might do, he at all events would never flinch, he was tremendously in earnest. “Lead me into temptation,” was his heart’s prayer for the moment. “Only try me, give me a chance of showing my manhood, and no one shall ever have cause to say that Peter was a coward.” He was like those Christians of a later day who courted martyrdom. And yet the witness he was asked to bear, when the time came he could not. He failed utterly, miserably, and all because of that very longing to be led into temptation. There is a strange irony in this. It sends us back to the weakness of the flesh as the proper starting-point, and light at once streams in. It was in the weakness of the flesh realized through and through that Christ Himself, while Peter and the rest were sleeping, sent up to Heaven His agonizing cry, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup