

The Temptation of Christ.

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THE conclusion of the previous inquiry is briefly as follows. Jesus found not only popular expectations, the authority of which He was not likely to admit, but even prophetic utterances indicating features in the Messianic kingdom inconsistent with, nay, contradictory to the moral and spiritual ideal which His own perfect filial consciousness demanded. The authority that He assigned to the Holy Scriptures as a revelation of God's mind and will made Him at first distrustful of this inward denying and opposing voice; yet certainly, although gradually, after a severe inward struggle, He became convinced that the incorporation of these features in His plan and purpose meant denial of, and disobedience to God revealing Himself directly and distinctly in His own consciousness. With the moral energy and intensity which afterwards showed itself in His passionate rebuke of Peter's remonstrance, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan,' when describing His experiences in the wilderness to His followers, He spoke of this opposition of His own convictions and the prophetic utterances as a conflict with Satan; but at the same time by His quotation of passages of Scripture in His rejection of each suggestion He indicated that He knew Himself to be in perfect harmony with the fundamental moral and spiritual principles of the older revelation, although forced to take up an attitude of independence towards some of its subordinate external elements.

1. If this account of the origin of the temptations in the consciousness of Jesus be accepted, the temptation in the wilderness becomes a proof, not of any moral weakness in Jesus, but of His matchless, unapproachable moral greatness. As often interpreted, the temptation in the wilderness appears morally improbable. A personality of the moral elevation and intensity which Jesus uniformly displayed seems to be, not by any metaphysical necessity, but by an ethical improbability, above and beyond any vulgar temptations of appetite, vanity, or ambition. It offends our sense of moral fitness to think of Him as feeling

any of the common passions of human nature so keenly that they became temptations. No, His temptations must have come to Him on the moral heights in which He dwelt, must have been conformable to His lofty calling, and must have assumed forms so disguised, as to make a serious demand on His unerring moral insight, so persuasive as to put a severe test on His unfaltering moral courage. Is this requirement not fully met by the account of the temptation which has just been given? Not positively sinful passions, but a relatively inferior and inadequate ideal appealed to Him. He had the insight to discover the inferiority and inadequacy, the vigour to reject it as a temptation.

2. If it is said that this explanation takes its reality from the temptation, makes it impossible for us to say that He was 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,' the answer is not far to seek. It is surely a very shallow view of man's moral nature, that there must be identity of sins in order that there may be similarity of moral experience in temptation. The temptation to speak a false word is as really a temptation, involving the same moral struggle issuing in shameful defeat or thankful victory, to the man of honourable instincts, as the temptation to a debauch is to the drunkard. Moral experience has reality on the higher as well as the lower levels of action. It might with reason even be maintained that the reality of temptation corresponds with the elevation of personal character attained, that the saint's temptations are to him more real than the sinner's. Accordingly, we must deny the validity of this objection. Jesus' temptations were as real, made as urgent an appeal, involved as severe moral tension, and were rejected with as heroic struggle, as any temptations to which men may be exposed; even although He was not allured and enticed by the same sins as appeal to other men. His temptations were peculiar to Him, because His vocation was solitary, and His relation to God was unique. Ordinary temptations would not

have been real to Him, just because His moral nature was extraordinary.

3. But even against this position an objection may be urged. It may be said that, if Jesus stands thus quite alone, above and apart from all men, He cannot be a guide and an example. If seeking His guidance and following His example meant doing the very same deeds, speaking the very same words, and living the very same life, then certainly the objection would be valid. But to be like Jesus does not mean to be the same as Jesus; imitation does not mean identity. If it did, then every country and every age, nay, every man would need another Jesus as guide and example. But in Jesus universal and eternal humanity was incarnated, the divine ideal of man was realised, the prophecy of human history was fulfilled; and therefore in His life we must look for moral issues, not in their lower, but in their highest forms; His temptations must express the final conflict of good and evil in man, and represent the most difficult choice set before human liberty.

4. That the humanity in Jesus may be a reality, and not a semblance, there must be a choice for the exercise of liberty. Where there is choice, wrong and right must be alike possible. Although we follow a healthy moral impulse in seeking to show that the temptations to which Jesus was exposed were not open and gross, but subtle and disguised, although our loyalty to and reverence for Him compel us so to interpret the narrative of His temptation, as to bring into clearer light the unapproachable moral elevation of His personality, yet we must in the end without hesitation or reservation affirm that He was free to choose the

wrong as well as the right. Without liberty no moral personality, no moral perfection, and therefore no ideal humanity realized. We need not ask what would have happened had Jesus chosen wrongly and not rightly. As empty and idle is this question as another, what would the world have been without sin? We cannot imagine what the world would have been without sin, and yet we do not affirm the necessity of sin. We cannot imagine what would have happened had Jesus chosen wrongly, but we must not therefore deny the possibility of the wrong choice. These speculative conjectures are not valid against moral certainties, that where there is manhood there must be freedom, and where there is freedom there must be choice of good or evil.

To appeal to the divinity of Jesus against this conclusion is to forsake the safe ground of history for the dangerous sea of speculation. Inferences from abstract definitions of divinity have no claim for a hearing, when we are dealing with facts. We have to ask ourselves not what our metaphysical notions of divinity imply, but what history tells us about the Word become flesh. If needful we must re-examine and readjust our metaphysical notions, that we may do justice to all the facts of the Incarnation. If our ideas of the divinity of Jesus make impossible or incredible His temptation as truly and fully a free choice of good or evil, so much the worse for our ideas; we must change them, however venerable their authority, or general their acceptance. And such a change will meet a truly religious demand. When God chooses to become man, it is impiety for us to doubt or to deny that He can become truly, fully, wholly man.

Recent Biblical Archaeology.

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THREE years ago a number of young German Orientalists founded a Society which had for its object the archæology of Western Asia and Egypt. They were all enthusiastic students of the monuments which modern excavation and research is so constantly bringing to light, and many of them had gained European reputations as decipherers and historians of the past. The *Transactions*

of the 'West Asiatic Society' (*Vorderasiatische Gesellschaft*), which have already appeared, are full of original and important matter, and deserve more support from English archæologists and biblical critics than they have hitherto received. The Society is now supplementing its *Transactions* by a series of short and popular manuals on the ancient East, and the results of the most recent