

permission to Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to Palestine; in 539, at the same time that he acquired this power, he became 'king of Babylon, king of the lands,' and ceased to be only or even primarily 'king of Persia'; and the title 'king of Persia' ceased to be an adequate title. It is possible, indeed, that after 539 the title 'king of Persia' was still occasionally *included* in a long list of titles, and possible, too, that such a list may yet be discovered. What archæology, however, has rendered in the highest degree improbable is that, after 539, Cyrus ever styled himself *merely* 'king of Persia': it follows that it is in the highest degree improbable that Cyrus either in the first year of his reign (Ezr 1¹), or in any subsequent year, or in the months that preceded the beginning of his first year, issued a decree in the exact terms of Ezr 1²⁻⁴; whether these verses are an editorial modification of an actual decree, or a free composition of the writer based on the fact or supposition that Cyrus released the Jews, is not to be determined by the single question of the royal title, and there-

fore lies beyond the scope of the present discussion.

The main conclusions to be drawn then are two:—

1. The author of the narrative that makes frequent use of the title 'the king of Persia,' and who is commonly called 'the Chronicler,' lived after the fall of the Persian Empire (332 B.C.).

2. The 'decree' in Ezr 1²⁻⁴ is not an exact reproduction or translation of an actual decree of Cyrus.

But if the tendency of the Chronicler to use the title 'king of Persia' is thus marked, the consistent absence of the title from other parts of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is an important indication that those parts of the book are *not* the work of the Chronicler: and this has some bearing on the important question whether the Aramaic documents, or Hebrew memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, are what they purport to be. But once again the determination of those questions must rest on a wider range of considerations and cannot be further discussed here.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF HEBREWS.

HEBREWS II. 18.

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

THE earliest drift of doubt in reference to the Person of Christ was in the direction of a denial of His humanity. This bright, fair vision of the evangelists was only a vision. The Christ of the Gospels was too good to be a man. The opposite extreme succeeded to it. His Divinity was then questioned, and, the story of His life being accepted, it was affirmed that He was too intensely human to have been Divine. In the verse before us the writer is dealing with the first of these errors. He pictured Christ as a faithful and merciful high priest. Then was it not essential that He should be human as well as Divine; man as well as God? The priest must be one chosen from among men.

Not in majesty supernal, sitting easy on a throne;

Dealing sorrow out to others, with no sorrows of his own.

No; but 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' This is the line of thought pursued from the fourteenth verse on to our text; a line of thought which we venture to sum up in the assertion that the temptation of Christ was essential to His rendering that sympathy and succour which we so sorely need. You will notice that this last verse falls naturally into two divisions: first, Christ tempted; second, Christ the Succour of the tempted.

I.

CHRIST TEMPTED.

'He himself hath suffered being tempted.'

1. In itself, as God intended and made it, human nature is a holy thing—perfectly, immaculately pure. We know it only as tainted and corrupted with strong inclinations to moral evil—selfish, sensuous, disobedient. Even if we were not taught that this is a fallen, a disordered, a diseased condition, we should naturally so conclude. It would be a moral incongruity to

conceive of moral imperfection as a creation of God. Reason and common sense are on the side of the Scripture doctrine of the Fall. The teaching concerning Christ—the second man—is equally reasonable. If the incarnation be a truth at all, clearly the human nature which the Divine Christ took upon Him was not ordinary, tainted, fallen human nature. Every instinct would be offended by such a supposition. We are compelled to recognize a pure type of human nature free from all stain or tendency to sin. This is the theory of the miracle of the incarnation, and without miracle the incarnation could not be at all; the one difference, and the only difference, between Christ and ordinary men is this.

But there is in perfect holiness no exemption from trial, from temptation, from tests of obedience and fidelity, from positive solicitations to evil. He was tempted in all points as we are; only He did not, as we, sin in His sympathies with the temptation, in His yieldings to it. The Prince of this world, when he came, found nothing in Him.

Of all the artists who have attempted to paint the portrait of our Saviour there is but one, says a recent writer, whose work in any measure satisfies the heart. The reason of his success lies in this, that with a subtle, almost miraculous, power he has been enabled in that tender face to blend the human with the Divine, the common with the wonderful. And it is this mysterious mingling in the person of Jesus of humanity with its woes, and of divinity with its glorious uplifting power, that gives to the Man of Sorrows His divine sympathy, and enables Him to enter into all our sufferings, and sorrows, and trials, and temptations with the consoling comfort and help of one who was 'tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.'¹

We must remember what that word 'temptation' means. We have got into the habit of fixing upon it only one of its meanings, and that a very secondary one. To us temptation always suggests sin; to us temptation and sin sometimes seem almost synonymous. And yet the word itself has no necessary connexion with sin. The word 'temptation,' both in our own language and in the Greek and Latin, means simply 'trying,' 'testing,' 'proving.'²

2. Christ's temptations were adapted to His susceptibilities. A moral being is tested and tempted according to the sympathies of his own character. Temptation is possible only where there is susceptibility. Eve was tempted according to her susceptibility; so were the angels who fell. Our Lord's temptations were only such as could appeal to a pure human nature. He could not be

tempted as the drunkard, or the licentious, or selfish man is tempted. He could not be tempted as man is tempted whose conscience is depraved, whose moral feeling is corrupted. He was without sin.

3. Christ conquered through His complete antagonism to wrong. All moral natures can be assailed, appealed to, whether they will do right or not; but they may refuse every gratification that is wrong. The Divine Lord did this; whatever His human craving for food, or ease, or success, He instantly repelled every suggestion of wrong methods. No such suggestion could spring up in His pure soul; but it could be suggested from without. And the suggestion was met by the strong instinct of holiness, of right, of love, of obedience—'Get thee behind me, Satan.'

We do not conquer temptation when we merely refuse to yield to it, when some urging of conscience, some fear of consequences, some sense of stern law restrains us. A man may not dare to do, and yet may wish that he might do. A man conquers temptation only when his very desire repels it; when his whole nature rises up against its wrong, when the sense of law is lost in strong moral feeling, and he would not do it if he might. This was our Lord's victory; His entire soul was antagonistic to wrong. The tempter had nothing in Him.

4. A moral nature suffers from temptation in proportion as it is pure and perfect. It is not the mere temptation that causes the suffering, but the moral refinement and sensitiveness of the nature that is tempted. It may abhor the suggestion, may be far removed from all fear of yielding to it, and yet, from its very perfection, may suffer most intensely. In this way Christ suffered being tempted. His power of suffering from evil suggestion was infinitely greater than that of a man whose feeling is tainted by sinful sympathy; just as some men are physically, emotionally, and morally far more sensitive than other men. The greatest nature is capable of the greatest feeling; the purest nature endures the most from the suggestion of sin. The lower the scale of being, the lower the sensibility. The greatest soul has the greatest vibrations when it is touched.

'He suffered.' Whenever we speak of the sufferings of Christ, we always seem to have in mind the last scenes: the agony in the garden, the judgment in the palace, and the death on the Cross. Was not the mark of blood ever upon Him? Can we limit His sufferings to the last few days

¹ H. W. Morrow.

² A. G. Mortimer, *Twenty Lent Sermons*, 80.

before His death? In taking our nature did He not suffer pains we can never describe?

We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear.

'He suffered.' Remember He was unutterably holy. He was without sin; He was perfect Love incarnate. Yet He came into daily contact with rough, coarse, unhallowed souls, whose very presence near Him must have wounded His sensitive spirit. The daily experience of misunderstanding, of physical hunger, of weariness and fatigue, of criminal neglect, of hateful enmity—was not all this suffering of the most acute kind? 'He hath suffered being tempted.'

When we speak of Him as 'being tempted,' shall we limit that phrase to the interview He had with the Archenemy? Was not the whole of His life subjected to trial and temptation? Let us grasp the blessed truth that our Lord, in order that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest to succour His people, suffered being tempted.¹

Suffering is a question of nature. The educated man suffers more than the uneducated man; the poet probably suffers more than the mathematician; the commanding officer suffers more in a defeat than the common soldier. The more life, the more suffering; the billows of sorrow being in proportion to our manhood. Now Jesus Christ was not merely a man, He was Man; and by the very compass of His manhood He suffered more than any mortal can endure. The storm may pass as fiercely over the shallow lake as over the Atlantic, but by its very volume the latter is more terribly shaken. No other man had come with Christ's ideas; in no other man was the element of self so entirely abnegated; no other man had offered such opposition to diabolic rule: all circumstances combine to render Christ's temptation unique, yet not one of them puts Christ so far away as to prevent our finding in His temptation unflinching solace and strength.

Could Christ have been overthrown? Most certainly; otherwise His temptation has no message to man except one of despair. Whatever is less than infinite is temptable and peccable; Christ's humanity was less than infinite, therefore His humanity might have been overthrown. Sympathy can proceed only from community of situation. To say that Christ could not have been successfully tempted, and that the result of His temptation should comfort men, is equal to saying that, because no man can blow out the sun, therefore no man can blow out a taper. The record of the temptation is an act of cruelty, if it have no bearing on human strife; but an analysis of the temptation shows that the methods of assault are fundamentally the same, and that every answer is available for every tempted man.²

II.

CHRIST THE SUCCOUR OF THE TEMPTED.

'He is able to succour them that are tempted.'

I. A moment's consideration of the text shows how great is the need for the succour which Christ affords.

(1) 'Those who are being tempted.' We are at once at home with the phrase. It is an accurate description of all disciples. It expresses a fact of Christian experience which is at once universal and definite. Even those who feel themselves immune from temptation are but showing their tempted condition by such presumption! From the earliest moment to the latest hour of conscious experience we are warring against unseen foes. From the cradle to the grave we are aware of the fingers that touch us in the dark.

(2) Disciples are often sorely troubled because after conversion they are fiercely assaulted by Satan. They express surprise that they should be more tempted after conversion than they were before conversion. It is not at all abnormal for the soul thus to be surprised. It is quite a normal phase of experience. Before conversion the spiritual nature was dull, sleepy, dead. Sin had no sting, temptation no struggle, life no battle. But after conversion the spiritual nature is quickened; the soul is alive; the mind is spiritually alert. Not only is sin revealed, but the exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifest. No longer can the soul be quiescent; no longer does life seem a garden of roses: it becomes a stern battlefield, where bloody conflict has to be waged. What hitherto stood on neutral, if not on friendly, ground, now stands before the soul as an avowed enemy; temptation becomes a perpetual warfare; the more sensitive the nature, the more delicate the spiritual refinement; the more surrendered the will, the more aggressive and persistent the conflict. It is not the man who is painfully aware of his proneness to wander that is warned, but the man who feels safe from invasion: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.'

You may depend upon it, no man can be good without being tried. Do not suppose that you are to be made honest by never being tempted to be dishonest, or that you are to be sober in habits, by being so placed that you are not able to be intoxicated. You will be tempted. The chaff and the wheat must be separated. You will have to determine for yourself. There is the darkness, and there is the light; there is the right, and there is the wrong: which do you like? There is the narrow way, and there is the broad; there is the selfish, and there is the unselfish; there is the kind way of acting, and there is the unkind; there is the good life, and there is the bad life; which do you choose? These questions will come, in some form or other, almost every day. So that heaven will be filled, not by men who

¹ T. W. Riddle, *The Pathway of Victory*, 40.

² Joseph Parker, *Eccle Deus*.

never felt what evil is, but by men who said, I prefer holiness to sin.¹

2. Christ's power to succour is just as certain as our need.

(1) We can hardly be wrong in supposing that the temptation was a real means by which Jesus in His capacity of Saviour obtained victory over the tempter and became the means of communicating that moral victory to the tempted of all time. This is an aspect of our Lord's incarnation which has too much dropped out of the thought of the modern Church. The redeeming work of Christ had a threefold aspect—towards God, towards man, towards Satan. It looked Godward in uniting God to man, by vicarious mediation; it looked manward in reconciling man to God by evidencing the love of God to us; but it looked also Satanward in becoming the means of rescuing man from the dominion of evil and the evil one. The second Adam undid the work of the first, conquering where he fell. By man came sin, by man came victory—'In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.' Linked as Son of Man to every tempted soul, He possesses, as Son of God, infinite power to be tempted.

(2) The temptation of Jesus was the means by which He learned sympathy with the tempted whom He came to save. We must hardly venture to suggest the startling speculation that God in His pure, spiritual essence is unable to sympathize; that by His omniscient glance He can see human wants, but not feel them; that sympathy, being connected with nervous organism, could be felt only by a human being; and that therefore it behoved Christ in all points to become tempted as we are; nevertheless, if we may not thus speculate, at least we cannot doubt that fellowship in suffering is a means of creating in a disinterested soul a perpetual sympathy. We admit that Jesus was not tried in the same manner as we; but we claim that His temptations were as real to His nature as ours are to ours, and adapted to test Him as ours are to test us, and if so, He can truly sympathize; for it is not necessary, before you can exercise sympathy, that you suffer precisely in the same way as those whom you pity. You can feel for a fellow-man writhing in pain, though you have never had the disease which torments him. You must have had experience of some pain, but you

¹ Norman Macleod.

need not have felt exactly the same pain. To sympathize with a soldier, you must yourself have been in battle, but it is not necessary that the machinery of war which he encounters should be identical with that with which you contended.

The captain of an Atlantic steamer, out in a storm, will speak with a feeling to which you on the land must be a stranger, of weaker vessels than his exposed to the same hurricane. As his ship toils and struggles, thrills and trembles, he feels what the thunderous shock of those cataract waves must be to other and frailer craft. So our Lord has, through that human experience of His, a rare power of sympathy. 'He knows what sore temptation means, for He has felt the same.'²

One of the clerks in the Treasury Office, who had to prepare some part of the estimates for the Budget, when Mr. Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer, once made a mistake of several millions in the figures he sent in. The mistake was not discovered till Mr. Gladstone had made his Budget speech, and the effect of the mistake was that he was put to great trouble in rearranging his taxation proposals in order to meet the amended figures.

The clerk who made the error anticipated the very worst consequences from his blunder. And when one day Mr. Gladstone sent for him into his office he made sure the moment of his dismissal had come. Judge then of his amazement when Mr. Gladstone, instead of giving him a lecture and his dismissal, complimented him on the skill and patience which had enabled him for so many years to deal with the enormous figures of our national revenue with such accuracy and exactitude. What wonder that the clerk broke down under kindness like that! He had expected to be judged harshly and punished severely, but Mr. Gladstone—a financial genius himself—knew the intricacies and difficulties of our national accounts, and he judged pitifully because he knew.³

I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers; in His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force, soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.⁴

(3) Christ's very sinlessness qualifies Him to sympathize and succour. We sometimes reason, 'Christ never knew sin by personal experience of it. How can He understand me, and feel for me, who am a sinner?' But how do the facts stand? Look out into the world, Who manifests sympathy for sinners? Do fellow-sinners? No! Do you find the fallen woman sympathized with by those

² T. H. Pattison, *The South Wind*, 272.

³ J. D. Jones, *The Gospel of Grace*, 277.

⁴ Cowper.

of her own class? No! It is the pure woman who is ready to stretch a helping hand to her, and to pluck her up, if it may be so, out of the horrible mire of sin. Sinners have no feeling for sinners. It is to those who are not stained with his vices, and who are not co-partners in his crime, that the sinner must go for comfort and for help. The fact is this. Sin hardens the heart—it always does—and therefore incapacitates for sympathy. The sinful man is always the selfish man. When temptation is yielded to, and sin results, we lose our sense of the painfulness of temptation and therefore become disqualified for sympathy with those who are tempted.

You can stand outside some vile place that is pervaded with a pestilential miasma. The stench which assails you is well-nigh intolerable. It causes you positive pain. And you pity, you sympathize with the people who dwell in the midst of it, exposed to its horrible influence; and you would gladly do all in your power to extricate them, and place them in some healthier and pleasanter situation. That is your feeling whilst you are outside. Now enter in. Put yourself under the influence of the miasma. Breathe the tainted air. Get used to it. And what is the result? Why, that your feeling of pain is gone, and with it your sympathy with the people who are unhappily exposed to so deleterious an influence. And thus it is with sin. Christ, who stood wholly outside sin, felt the pain of it, and could sympathize with those who were exposed to its influence.¹

3. And Christ's succour is as practical as it is certain. The figure employed in this assertion is at once arrestive and helpful. The suggestion is of one who runs up to help in response to the cry of distress. It is a picture of the strong deliverer running to the rescue of the weak. 'He is able to run up to the aid of those who are being tempted.' Not only does He lend His ear, He gives His hand. Not only does He see their distress, He runs up to relieve it. He is more than a match for the most aggressive battalion. The very sight of His advance is a sure sign of victory. The very gaze of His eye is the promise of deliverance.

Some years ago there was a great fire in an American city. Much was said in the papers of what should be done to relieve the distressed sufferers; but there was one place where a collection was at once set on foot, and the needed help sent without delay. While other towns were consulting what ought to be done, Chicago had stepped into the breach, and why? In Chicago they themselves had had a great fire:

they knew the needs of those who were so suddenly left homeless, and a fellow-feeling made them wondrous kind. They were in touch with the situation, hence the readiness of their sympathy.

4. But Christ's succour is dependent on our attitude towards Him. Christ is willing to impart the succour and strength required, but we must be prepared to receive it. He is willing to undertake for us, but are we willing that He should? Do we really believe experimentally that the Lord is able to give us victory over acute temptation? The answer to that question depends very largely upon our attitude to daily dependence. Only as we are daily living in a state of trustful dependence can we experience the power of the Saviour to give deliverance in the hour of temptation.

In a farmhouse in Cheshire a mother sat near the fire surrounded by a young family. The minister was speaking words of consolation and encouragement to the mother, who two years previously had passed through a fearful operation, and in a few days would have to pass through a second more dangerous than the first. He spoke of the mystery and pain of life, of the nearness and help of God. She said, 'Sir, it will be all right. He always gives me enough grace. He always succoured me. He adds His strength to mine, and we triumph!'²

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¹ G. Calthrop, *The Future Life*, 73.

² William Saywell.