

## THE THREE TEMPTATIONS OF THE CHRIST

From Bethlehem to Calvary, by Alice A. Bailey

“Christ's entire life was one long *via dolorosa*, but it was illumined always by the light of His soul and by the recognition of the Father. Though, as recorded in the New Testament, it was divided into definite periods and cycles, and though obviously the detail of what He had to do was only progressively revealed to Him, His life constituted one great sacrifice, one great experience and one definite purpose. This definiteness of objective, and this consecration of the whole man to an ideal are conditions indicative of the state of initiation. All life's happenings are related to the carrying forward of the life task. Life takes on true significance. This is a lesson which all of us, uninitiate and aspiring, can now learn. We can begin to say, "Life to me, as I look back on it, is not a succession of experiences but one great experience illumined here and there by moments of revelation."17

This illumination grows more constant as time goes on. The ancient Hindu teacher, Patanjali, taught that illumination is sevenfold, progressing by successive stages.18 It is as though he were dealing in thought with the seven illuminations which come to all the sons of God who are in process of awakening to their divine opportunities: the illumination which comes when we decide to tread the Path of probation, and to prepare ourselves for initiation. Then the light is shed on the distant vision, and we catch a fleeting glimpse of our goal. Next the light is shed upon ourselves, and we get a vision of what we are, and what we can be, and enter [Page 104] upon the Path of discipleship, or—in the terminology of the Bible—we begin the long journey to Bethlehem. Then there are the five initiations which we are studying, each of which marks an increase of light which shines upon our way and develops that inner radiance which enables all God's children to say, with Christ: "I am the Light of the World,"19 and to obey His command wherein He tells us to "let your light so shine before men that they may see."20 This light, in its seven stages, reveals God—God in nature, God in Christ, God in man. It is the cause of the mystical vision about which so much has been written and taught and to which the lives of God's saints in both hemispheres have ever testified.

One wonders about the first man who received the first faint glimpse (with his dim inner light) of the infinite possibility lying ahead. He caught a glimpse of God, and from that minute the light from God waxed more and more intense. There is an ancient legend (and who shall say that it is not based on fact?) that Jesus of Nazareth was the very first of our humanity, in a dim and far distant past, to catch this glimpse, and that He was, through the consistency of His constantly directed effort, the first of our humanity to emerge into the very Light of God Himself. St Paul perhaps touched this truth when he spoke of Christ as the "Elders in a vast family of brothers."21 Whether this legend is true or not, Christ entered into light because He was light; and the history of man has been a gradually growing illumination, until today radiance is everywhere to be found.

In this light, inherent and divine, latent and yet emanating from God, Christ saw the vision, and that vision demonstrated to Him His Sonship, His Messiahship and the path of His suffering. This vision is the heritage and the revelation of each individual disciple. This mystical revelation can be perceived, and once perceived, remains a fact—inexplicable often, but a definitely clear and inescapable reality. It gives [Page 105] the initiate the confidence and the power to go forward. It is affective in our experience and is the root of all our future consistency and service; it is also unassailable. Upon this basis we move with courage from the known towards the unknown. It is finally ineffable, for it emphasises our divinity, is founded upon divine quality, and emanates from God. It is a glimpse into the kingdom of God, and a revelation of the path to be trodden on our way there. It is an expansion which enables us to realise that "the Kingdom of God is a state of the soul, coming from the spirit and reflected in the body."<sup>22</sup>

The first step into this kingdom is through the new Birth. The second step is through the baptism of Purification. It is a process of growth in the characteristics of the kingdom, and the gradual attainment of that maturity which marks the citizen of that kingdom. To this, Christ testified through the baptism when He attained maturity, setting us an example, and through His triumphant passing of the tests of the three temptations He demonstrated the needed purity.

The babe in Christ, the little child, the full-grown man, the perfected man! Through the Bethlehem experience the babe is born. The little child grows to maturity and manifests in his purity and power at the Baptism. He demonstrates at the Transfiguration as the full-grown man, and, on the Cross, he stands forth the perfected Son of God. An initiation is that moment in which a man feels and knows through every part of his being that life is reality and reality is life. For a brief moment his consciousness becomes all-enfolding; he not only sees the vision and hears the word of recognition, but knows that the vision is of himself, and that the word is himself made flesh.

This is the essential factor. An initiation is a blaze of illumination thrown upon the river of existence, and it is in the nature of a whole experience. There is no indefiniteness in it, and the initiate is never quite the same again in his consciousness. [Page 106]

In the river Jordan the light from Heaven streamed upon the Christ, and His Father spoke those words which have sounded down the ages and have evoked response from all aspirants to the kingdom. The spirit of God descended as a dove upon him. The dove is ever a symbol of peace. For two reasons it was the chosen sign at this initiation. Water, as we have seen, is the symbol of the emotional nature, which nature when purified through initiation, becomes a peaceful limpid pool, capable of reflecting the divine Nature in its purity. Thus, in the form of a dove, the peace of God descended upon Jesus.

Secondly, the essential dualities of existence are typified for us in the Bible. The Old Testament stands for the natural lower man, the virgin Mary aspect, carrying within itself the promise of

the Messiah, of Him Who shall come. The New Testament stands for the spiritual man, for God made flesh, and for the birth of that which the material nature carried and veiled for so long. The Old Testament opens with the appearance of the raven at the time of the founding of the ancient world, as we can begin to know it. The New Testament opens with the appearance of a dove—one the symbol of the raging waters, the other the symbol of the waters of peace. Through Christ and the unfoldment of the Christ life in each human being will come "the peace which passeth understanding."<sup>23</sup>

Standing there in the waters of Jordan, Christ faced the world as Man. Standing upon the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, He faced the World as God. But in this initiation, He stood on a level with His brethren and demonstrated purity and peace. Let us remember that "from the point of view of others only that man is original who can lead them beyond what they already know, but this he cannot do until he has become their equal in their knowledge."<sup>24</sup> This is a point to be remembered. Christ was purified. But ahead of Him lay the temptations. He had [Page 107] to become in His consciousness (either anew or through the recovery of an ancient past of test and trial) our equal in all points—of sin, of weakness and of human frailty, and of human success and achievement. Christ had to demonstrate His moral greatness as well as His divinity and His perfection as man attaining maturity. He had to pass through the tests to which every would-be citizen of the kingdom must be subjected when called upon to prove his fitness for the privileges of that kingdom. Of this kingdom the church is the outer and visible symbol, and though faulty and weak in the interpretation of its essential teachings, it symbolises the form of the kingdom of God. But this is not the kingdom of the theologians. It is not entered through the acceptance of certain formal beliefs. It is entered by those who have passed through the new birth, and gone down to Jordan.

The citizenship of this kingdom was on trial in the Person of Christ, and so He goes down into the wilderness, there to be tempted of the devil.

In this intimate episode in the life of Jesus Christ we are given perhaps the first real insight into the processes of His innermost mind. The following words open the story and are significant:

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."<sup>25</sup>

This story of the temptation in the wilderness is most controversial. Many questions have been propounded and much agony of soul has been experienced by the serious believer who endeavours to reconcile common sense, Christ's divinity, and the devil. Was it possible that Christ could in reality [Page 108] be tempted, and if so, could He have fallen into sin? Did He meet these temptations as the omnipotent Son of God, or did He meet them as a man and therefore subject to temptation? What is meant by the devil? And what was the relation of Christ to evil? Had this wilderness story never been told to us, what would have been our attitude to Christ? What really took place in the consciousness of Christ while in the wilderness? For what purpose are we permitted to share with Him this experience?

Many such questions arise in the mind of the intelligent man, and many have been the commentaries written to prove the particular point of each writer. It is not the purpose of this book to deal with the difficult subject of evil, nor to define the times when Christ was functioning as a man, and when He was functioning as the Son of God. Some believe that He was simultaneously both, and was "very God of very God"<sup>26</sup> and yet essentially and utterly human at the same time. People make these statements, but they are apt to forget the implications. They affirm with decision their point of view, and omit to carry their attitude to a logical conclusion. The inference is that we are allowed to know about the temptation in order to teach us, as human beings, a needed lesson; let us therefore study the story from the angle of Christ's humanity, never forgetting that He had learned obedience to the divine spirit, the soul in man, and was in control of His body of manifestation.

He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;"<sup>27</sup> He came in a human body, and was subject to human conditions as also we are; He suffered and agonised; He felt irritation, and was conditioned by His body, His environment and the period, as we all are. But because He had learnt to master Himself, and because the wheel of life had done its work with Him, He could face this experience and meet evil face to face, and triumph. He taught us thereby how to meet temptation; what to expect, as disciples preparing [Page 109] for initiation, and the method whereby evil can be turned into good. He met temptation with no great new technique or revelation. He simply fell back on what He knew, what He had been taught and told. He met temptation each time with "It is written,"<sup>28</sup> and employed no new powers to combat the devil. He simply utilised the knowledge which He had. He used no divine powers to overcome the Evil One. He simply used those which we all possess — acquired knowledge and the age-old rules. He conquered because He had taught Himself to overcome. He was the master of conditions at that time because He had learnt to master Himself.

Such a mastery by the soul may indeed be utterly beyond our immediate attaining, but the command of Christ stands for all time: "Be ye therefore perfect;"<sup>29</sup> and some day we too shall meet the temptations in the wilderness and also come forth as He, unsullied and undefeated. Such experience is inevitable for all, and cannot eventually be escaped. Christ did not escape it, and neither shall we. "It is the possibility of being tempted," says Dr. Selbie, "which shows the real greatness of human nature. Apart from it we should be merely unmoral creatures.... It is with the capacity to choose between ends, and the actions leading to them, that the possibility of sin emerges."<sup>30</sup> This calls for more than superficial consideration. Humanity itself is at stake, in the wilderness story. The whole world of material things, of desire and of ambition, was arrayed before Christ, and because He reacted as He did, and because none of these aspects of life could affect Him, we too can stand free, assured of our own ultimate victory. Christ as man achieved victory. We too can do the same.

To this triumph of the soul over matter and of reality over the unreal, Christ gave testimony in the wilderness experience, and it is towards the same goal that all who follow in His steps are moving. The triumph which was His will [Page 110] be ours when we meet the problem in the

spirit in which He met it, turning the light of the soul upon it, and resting back upon past experience.

In the Baptism initiation, Christ's purity and freedom from evil had been demonstrated before men. Now they have to undergo a different test. From the crowd and from the experience He went to the solitary place and for forty days and nights He was alone with Himself, standing between God and the Evil One. Through What agency could this evil force reach Him? Through the agency of His own human nature, through the medium of loneliness, of hunger and of His own visions. Christ was thrown back upon Himself, and there, in the silence of the desert, alone with His thoughts and desires, He was tested throughout all the parts of His nature which might be vulnerable. "As He is, so are we in this world,"<sup>31</sup> vulnerable in all points. The difficulty with most of us is that we are vulnerable in so many petty ways, and in every trifling situation we are apt to fall. The crux of the situation, as far as Christ was concerned, was that these three temptations were climaxing tests, in which the three aspects of the lower nature were involved. They were synthetic temptations. In them was no petty, trifling, silly tempting, but the gathering up of the forces of the threefold lower man—physical, emotional and mental—into one last effort to control the Son of God. Evil is thus constituted, and we shall all some day have to face this testing—this triple evil, this devil, such as Christ faced. Three times He was tempted, and three times He resisted, and only after this capacity to react to form and to material benefit had been finally put aside was it possible for Christ to pass on to His world service and the Mount of Transfiguration. One of the finest thinkers in the field of Christian interpretation today tells us that "all they who are destined for the Kingdom must win forgiveness for the guilt contracted in the earthly aeon by encountering steadfastly the world-power as it collects itself for a last attack. For through this guilt they were still subject to the power [Page 111] of ungodliness. This guilt constitutes a counterweight which holds back the coming of the Kingdom."<sup>32</sup>

Christ faced this last attack and emerged victorious, thus guaranteeing to us our ultimate victory.

The devil approached Jesus when the forty days of solitary communion were over. We are not told what Christ did in those forty days. No account is given to us of His thought and determinations. His realisation and consecration at that time. Alone, He faced the future, and at the end, encountered the tests which released Him from the power of His human nature.

As we study the life of Jesus this solitariness emerges ever more clearly. The great souls are always lonely souls. They tread unaccompanied the most difficult parts of the long way of return. Christ was ever lonely. His spirit drove Him again and again into isolation. "The great religious conceptions which haunt the imaginations of civilized mankind are scenes of solitariness: Prometheus chained to his rock, Mahomet brooding in the desert, the meditations of the Buddha, the solitary Man on the Cross. It belongs to the depth of the religious spirit to have felt forsaken, even by God."<sup>33</sup>

Christ's life alternated between the crowd whom He loved and the silence of the solitary places. First He is to be found in the daily life of the family experience, where the intimacies of personalities can so sadly imprison the soul; thence He passed into the solitary desert and was alone. He returned, and His public life began, until the publicity and noise and clamour of this were succeeded by the deep and interior silence of the Cross, where, forsaken of all, He went through the deep dark night of the soul—utterly alone. Yet it is in these moments of complete silence, when the soul is thrown back upon itself and there is no one to help, no hand to aid and no voice to strengthen, that those revelations come and that clear insight is developed which enable a Saviour to emerge for the helping of the world.

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Christ was tempted of the devil. Is it necessary in a book such as this to give an interpretation of the devil? Is it not apparent that there are in the world today two dominant concepts, both of them passing out as factors in the consciousness of the young, and therefore determining their later beliefs—the devil and Saint Nicholas, or Father Christmas? These names embody opposing ideas. Each of them symbolises one of the two major problems with which man has, in his daily life, to deal. These are called by Oriental philosophers the "pairs of opposites," and surely it is the manner in which man handles these two aspects of life, and his subjective attitude to them, which determine whether his life reacts to evil or to good. The devil is the symbol of that which is not humanly divine, for there are evil things done by man which, when done by an animal, are not so regarded. A man or a fox, for instance, may raid a chicken coop, but in the one case a moral law is broken, and in the other a natural instinct is followed. An animal may kill another animal in rage or in defense of its female, but when a man does the same thing it is called murder, and he is duly punished.

Father Christmas is the embodiment of that which is selfless; he is the symbol of giving and of the Christ spirit; he therefore stands to man as a reminder of God, just as this other figment of the imagination, the devil with horns and tail, is a reminder of that which is not God, that which is not divine.

"The key is supplied by mythology. The myths demand a serious interpretation in correspondence with objective reality, they must not be treated as pure poetry without any solid truth behind them, a mere play of the imagination! The garment which clothes the substance may be as fabulous, as fantastic, as inconsistent and as patchy as you please. But this does not alter the fact that popular mythology tells of an invisible reality, and of mysterious 'figures,' 'figures' remember, not 'forces' at work everywhere. Everything is alive and possesses a soul. The world is full of spirits, of souls. The myths speak of them. Who invented these myths? Nobody. For inventions are arbitrary, are fiction. But these tales are accepted [Page 113] by those who tell them and by their audience as unquestioned truth. The psychology of the primitive compels him to regard things in this way 'magically.' What in our more developed and more individual psychology has become a 'sub-conscious' in which the collective life of our ancestors is still operative is the normal psychology of the primitive, a state of 'natural somnambulism' with its distinctive forms of sensitiveness, telepathy, and second-sight, a direct

apprehension akin to the artist's of the whole in its parts, of the essential in a multiplicity of detail."<sup>34</sup>

To this the symbols of the devil and of Father Christmas bear testimony—embodiments of the primal dualities in the realm of quality. Man's entire existence, as man, is spent swinging between these pairs of opposites, until eventually the balance is achieved and, from then on, he moves towards that which is divine. It might profit all of us if we pondered long and deeply at times upon these two extremities of human existence—good and evil, light and dark, life and form, spirit and matter, the self and the not-self, the real and the unreal, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, pleasure and pain, the urge and the drag, the soul and the personality, Christ and the devil. In these last two the problem of the three temptations is summed up. These dualities have also been defined as finiteness and infinity which are the characteristics, one of man and the other of God. That which emphasises our finite nature is of humanity, that which is comprehensive is of God. We shall see, in our study of these three temptations, how clearly the distinctions between the dualities emerge. Christ, in the temptations, could not contradict Himself; and thus identifying Himself with perfection, He gives us a presentation of a human being "in the world, and yet not of the world,"<sup>35</sup> tempted of the devil yet free from wrong reaction to the devil's suggestions. Thus He was a free soul, which is a divine soul, untrammelled by desire and its tests, undefiled by the flesh and its temptations, and liberated from the sins of the mental processes. Such is [Page 114] the will of God for each and all of us, and the writer quoted above says: "There cannot be freedom ... unless the divine will is genuinely one with that of finite beings in a single personality."<sup>36</sup> Such a Personality was Christ. Good is the contradiction of evil, and Christ's attitude to the devil was one of uncompromising contradiction. In this He clarified the issue and did what all souls can do. Herein, as I have earlier pointed out, lies His uniqueness and His distinction—it consists in the basic fact of His utilising those methods of service, triumph and sacrifice which are available to any of us. Many in the past have died for others; many have faced evil with uncompromising opposition; many have dedicated their lives to service, but none have succeeded with the completeness and the perfection of Christ.

His greatness, it cannot be too often reiterated, lies in His universality. Dr. Bosanquet deals with this question of personality as follows:

"What I am urging is rather that our true personality lies in our concrete best, and that in desiring its development and satisfaction we are desiring an increase of our real individuality, though a diminution of our formal exclusiveness.... It will be rejoined that true individuality—greatness of range and organization—augments personal distinction as well as comprehensiveness. Undoubtedly, but it decreases exclusiveness. The great world-men are not born simply of their earthly parents. Whole ages and countries are focussed in them.... In desiring a highly developed perfection we are desiring to be something which can no longer be identified either with or by the incidents of the terrestrial life."<sup>37</sup>

If these words are studied in connection with Christ's temptations, the wonder of what He did emerges, and is encouraging for all of us, His younger brothers, equally sons of God.

Therefore as a whole man and yet utterly divine, Christ entered into final combat with the devil. As a human being, [Page 115] in whom the divine spirit was fully expressing itself, He faced the evil in His own humanity (when viewed apart from God) and emerged victorious. Let us not attempt to divorce these two—God and man—when we think of Christ. Some thinkers emphasise His humanity and ignore His divinity. Therein they are surely in error. Others emphasise His divinity and regard as blasphemous and wrong all those who have placed Him on an equality with other human beings. But if we regard Christ as the flower of the human race, because the divine spirit had full control and showed forth through the medium of the human form, we in no way belittle Him or His achievements. The further men progress upon the Path of Evolution, the more they become conscious of their divinity and of the Fatherhood of God. At the same time, the more deeply they appreciate the Christ, the more convinced are they of His perfected divinity and His mission, and the more humbly do they seek to follow in His steps, knowing Him to be the Master of all the Masters, very God of very God, and the Teacher alike of Angels and of men.

This perfected divinity is now to be tested and approved. He has now to demonstrate to God, to the devil and to humanity the nature of His achievement and how the powers of the lower nature can be overcome by the powers of the soul. These temptations can be understood very simply by all aspirants and disciples, because they embody universal tests which are applied to the human nature in which we all share and with which We all wrestle in some form and in some measure. It matters not whether we do so from the promptings of conscience, from the control of the higher nature, or through the clear light of divinity. This, all disciples have ever recognised.

We shall consider these three temptations in the order given by St. Matthew, which is different from that given by St. Luke. St. Mark simply mentions that Christ was tempted of the devil, whilst St. John does not refer to them at all. These three temptations tested out all the three aspects of [Page 116] the lower human nature—the physical, the emotional-desire nature, and the mind or mental nature We read that:

"When he had fasted forty days and forty nights he was afterwards anhungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."<sup>38</sup>

There are two interesting facts connected with all these temptations. Each of them begins with "If" on the lips of the devil, and each is met by Christ with the words "It is written." These two phrases link all three episodes and give the clue to the whole process. The ultimate temptation is doubt. The test we have all to face eventually, and which climaxed in Christ's life until He vanquished it upon the Cross, is the test of our divinity. Are we divine? How must our divine



powers express themselves? What can we do, or not do, because we are sons of God? That the details of each difficulty, test and trial may differ is relatively immaterial. That the tests may first be focussed in one aspect of our lower nature or another is equally unimportant. It is the general lifelong urge to divinity which is on trial. To the man who is but a little evolved the problem of divinity as a whole does not present itself. He can be preoccupied only with the detail, with the problem in the immediate foreground of his life. This he handles or not, as the case may be by the light of conscience. For the disciple, the detail assumes less importance, and the general truth of his sonship begins slowly to concern him. He then handles his life conditions from the angle of that theory. For a perfected son of God, such as the Christ, or for the man nearing perfection, the problem must be handled as a whole, and the life problem must be considered from the angle of divinity itself. Such was the issue with Christ, and such the implications hidden in the devil's threefold "If."

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Rightly or wrongly, it seems to me that we have erred in interpreting all truth from the angle of the mediocre. That is what has been done. Truth is capable of interpretation in many ways. Those who are simply physical-emotional beings, with therefore little vision, require the protection of theology, despite its imperfections and dogmatic or untenable assertions. This they need, and the responsibility of those who administer dogmas to the "little ones" of the race is great. Truth must also be given in a wider form, and with a more general connotation to those who are beginning to live consciously as souls, and who can therefore be trusted to see the meaning behind the symbol and the significance behind the outer appearance of theology. Truth, for the perfected sons of God, must be something beyond our dreams, of so deep a significance and of such comprehensiveness that it is futile for us to speculate upon it, for it is something to be experienced and not to be dreamed; something to enter into and not to vision.

Christ's reply each time should be viewed in this triple manner. "It is written," He says, and the unthinking and small-minded regard this as endorsing the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. But surely, He was not referring back only to the ancient sayings of the Jewish Scriptures, beautiful as they are. The possibilities of error are too great to warrant our unquestioning acceptance of every word in any scripture in the world. When the processes of translation are studied this becomes glaringly apparent. Christ meant something much deeper than "The Bible says." He meant that the signature of God was upon Him; that He was the Word, and that that Word was the expression of truth. It is the Word of the soul (which is the influx of divinity) that determines our attitude in temptation and our response to the problem presented by the devil. If that Word is remote, deep-hidden by the veiling form, only distorted sounds will issue forth, and the Word will not be potent enough to withstand the devil. The Word is written in the flesh, defaced and almost invisible though it may be through the activity [Page 118] of the lower nature; it is upon the mind that the Word sounds forth, carrying illumination and insight, distorted as yet though the vision may be, and the light scarcely seen. But the Word is there. Some day each of us can say with power: "It is written," and see that Word expressed in every part of our human nature as individuals and — at some distant date — in humanity itself. This is the "lost Word" of the Masonic tradition.

Oriental philosophy refers frequently to four spheres of life or four problems which all disciples and aspirants have to face, and which constitute in their entirety the world in which we live. There are the world of Maya, the world of glamour and the world of illusion. There is also that mysterious "Dweller on the Threshold" to which Bulwer Lytton refers in Zanon. All of these four Christ met and vanquished in the desert-experience.

Maya refers to the world of physical forces in which we dwell, and with this the first temptation concerned itself. Modern science has told us that there is nothing visible or invisible which is not energy, and that every form is simply an aggregate of energy units in constant ceaseless motion, to which we have to adjust ourselves and in which we "live and move and have our being."<sup>39</sup> Such is the outer form of Deity, and we are part of it. Maya is vital in character, and we know little of its effect upon the physical plane (with all that that term connotes), and upon the human being.

"Glamour" refers to the world of emotional being and of desire, in which all forms dwell. It is this glamour which colours all our lives and produces false values, wrong desires, needless so-called necessities, our worries, anxieties and cares; but glamour is age-old, and has us in so close a grip that there seems little we can do. The desires of men, down the centuries, have brought about a situation before which we turn back appalled; the rampant nature of our longings and wishes, and their glamorous effect upon the individual, provide psychological laboratories with all their material; the [Page 119] wish life of the race has been wrongly oriented and human desire has been turned outward to the material plane, thus producing the world of glamour in which we all habitually struggle. It is by far the most potent of our delusions or mistaken orientations. But once the clear light of the soul is thrown into it, this miasma of forces is gradually dissipated. This work constitutes the major task of all aspirants to the mysteries.

"Illusion" is more mental in its impact. It concerns the ideas whereby we live, and the thought life which more or less (although mostly less) governs our daily undertakings. We shall see, as we take up the consideration of these three temptations, how in the first temptation Christ was confronted by maya, with physical forces of such strength that the devil could take advantage of them in an effort to confound Him. We shall see how in the second temptation He was tempted by glamour, and with the submergence of His vital spiritual life by a misconception and an emotional use of His divine powers. The sin of the mind, which is pride, was called into activity by the devil in the third temptation, and the illusion of temporal power to be used for right ends we may be sure was presented to Him. Thus the possible interior weakness of the three aspects of Christ's nature was tested, and through them the vast sum total of the world maya, glamour and illusion was poured in on Him. Thus He was confronted with the Dweller on the Threshold, which is only another name for the personal lower self, regarding it as a unified whole, as is only the case in advanced people, disciples and initiates. In these three words—maya, glamour and illusion—we have synonyms for the flesh, the world and the devil, which constitute the threefold test that confronts every son of God on the verge of liberation.

"If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." Let us use our divine powers for personal physical ends. Let us put the material physical nature first. Let us assuage our hunger, whatever it may be, and do it because we are divine. Let us use our divine powers so as [Page 120] to gain for ourselves perfect health, long desired financial prosperity, popularity for our personality, for which we crave, and those physical surroundings and conditions which we want. We are sons of God and are entitled to all these things. Command that these stones be made bread for the satisfaction of our supposed need. Such were the specious arguments used then, and being used today by many teachers and schools of thought. These are peculiarly the temptations of the aspirants of the world today. Upon this theory many teachers and groups thrive, and curiously enough, they do so quite sincerely and entirely convinced of the rightness of their position. The temptations which come to the advanced souls in the world are most subtle. The use of divine powers for the meeting and satisfaction of purely personal, physical needs can be presented in such a manner that they may seem entirely right. Yet we do not live by bread alone, but by means of the spiritual life which (coming forth from God) pours into, and is the life of, the lower man. This is the first essential for understanding. Upon that soul life and upon that inner contact the emphasis should be laid. The healing of the physical body, when diseased, would be satisfactory to the individual, but living as a soul is of more importance. The emphasis upon a divinity which must express itself entirely through the meeting of a physical need, in a monetary manner, most definitely limits divinity to an attribute of itself. When we live as souls, when our inner life is oriented to God, not because of what we can receive but because we have the developed sense of divinity, then the forces of divine life will pour through us and produce what is needed. This may not necessarily bring about complete immunity from disease or produce financial affluence; but it will mean a sweetening of the lower nature, a tendency to self-forgetfulness, and unselfishness which puts others first, a wisdom which concerns itself with the teaching and helping of others, a freedom from hatred and suspicion which will make life pleasanter for those with whom we associate, and a kindness and inclusiveness which leave no time for the separated [Page 121] self. That this type of inner nature will make for a sound body and freedom from physical ills is quite possible, but not inevitably so. In time and space, in a particular life and at a special time, illness has its uses and may be a profoundly desirable blessing. Poverty and financial stringency may re-establish a lost sense of values and enrich the heart with compassion. Money and perfect health may be disasters to many. But the use of divine power for selfish ends, and the affirming of the divine nature for purposes of individual healing, seem a prostitution of reality, and constitute the temptation which Christ so triumphantly met. We live by the life of God. Let that life flow in "more abundantly" upon us and we shall become, as Christ became, living centres of radiant energy for the service of the world. Probably what may happen will be better physical health, because we shall not be so preoccupied with ourselves. Freedom from self-centredness is one of the first laws of good health.

The question of healing, engrossing the attention of so many thousands at this time, is too broad to be considered here, and far more complicated than the average healer or healing group realises. Two things only would I point out:

One is that the affirmation that all disease is the result of wrong thought does not warrant too hasty acceptance. There is much disease in the other kingdoms of nature; animals, plants and minerals suffer from disease as do human beings, and these kingdoms antedate the appearance of the human family upon Earth. Secondly, the affirmation that one is divine and therefore entitled to good health may be ultimately true when divinity is really expressed, but it is not expressed by affirmation, but by conscious intelligent organised soul contact. This results in living as Christ lived, with no thought of self but only concern and interest in others.

Christ met this temptation to use His divine powers for selfish ends by the quiet reiteration of His divinity—a divinity which was based on the universality of the Word. It is perhaps apposite here to remind ourselves that upon the Cross He was taunted by the words, "He saved others; Himself [Page 122] He cannot save."<sup>40</sup> The maya or delusion of the physical nature could not hold Him; from that He stood free.

Today the World Aspirant, humanity, stands confronted with this temptation. Its problem is economic. It is concerned basically and definitely with bread, just as, symbolically speaking, Christ's problem was the problem of food. The world is faced with a material issue. That there is no evading this issue is true, and that men must be fed is equally true. Upon what basis shall the problem be met? Will one be regarded as too idealistic and as an impractical mystic and visionary if one falls back, as Christ did, upon the fundamentals of life, and takes the position that when man is readjusted and reoriented as a spiritual being his problem will automatically take care of itself? One surely will be so regarded. If one feels, as do many today, that the solution of the problem lies in a revaluation of life and a re-education in the underlying principles of living, is one entirely astray and to be regarded as a fool? Many will so regard one. But the solving of man's problem solely in terms of his physical needs may only succeed in plunging him more deeply in a material marsh. Meeting his demands entirely from the angle of bread and butter may be much needed. It is. But it should be accompanied with something which will meet the need of the whole man, and not simply that of his body and its desires. There are things which matter essentially to man, which are of greater moment and value than the things which concern the form, even if he himself does not realise it. Christ gave a little time to the feeding of the multitude. He gave much time to teaching them the rules of the kingdom of God. Men can be trusted to take what they want. They are doing so at this time on every hand. But the things which truly matter must at the same time be emphasised and taught, or the end will be disastrous. When we have cleaned the human house of abuses, as the revolutionaries in every country and land claim to be doing, unless that house is beautiful as a result, and unless its inhabitants have ideas based on divine [Page 123] essentials, the last state will be worse than the first. Seven devils may enter into the house, according to Christ's parable.<sup>41</sup> Unless God indwells the house, when cleaned, and unless our revaluations and national adjustments lead to that leisure and peace of mind wherein the soul of man can come to flower, we are headed towards still worse disasters. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."<sup>42</sup>

It is essential for the right understanding of this temptation that we remember our earlier distinction that such passages in the Bible are interpreted from the angle of the souls involved. Christ meets the devil on the ground of His divine nature. If thou art the Son of God, take advantage of the Fatherhood of God, and cast thyself down. This temptation is different from the first, though it appears to embody the same type of test. The clue to this is found in Christ's answer, where He takes His stand upon His divinity. This He did not do in the earlier temptation. The devil in this test quotes scripture to his own ends. He also takes Christ into the Holy Place, the battle-ground, and it is upon this that the devil casts doubt. The glamour of doubt descends upon the Christ. Hungry, lonely, and weary of conflict, He is tempted to question the very roots of His being. I do not question the fact that Christ was assailed by doubt. The first traces of that glamour which descended upon Him like a great darkness in the Crucifixion assailed Him now. Was He the Son of God? Had He a mission, after all? Was His attitude one of self-delusion? [Page 124] Was it all worth while? He was attacked where He was the strongest, and in this lies the potency of this temptation.

In an ancient scripture of India, The Bhagavad Gita, the disciple Arjuna stands faced with the same issue. He is involved in a great battle between two branches of the same family – really between the higher and the lower self – and he, too, questions what he shall do. Shall he go ahead with the battle and the test, and so triumph as the soul? Shall he assert his divinity and defeat the lower and the non-divine? In a commentary on The Bhagavad Gita these words occur:

"There is a spiritual significance to all this and the situation of Arjuna is well chosen to bring out great spiritual truths. He stands for the personal self beginning to grow conscious of the Higher Self; touched and enkindled with the spiritual light of that higher self, yet full of dismay and terror from the realisation of what obedience to the Higher Self must mean. The contests of the brothers is now concentrated within a single nature, the life of a single man. A war must be waged within himself, a war long and arduous for the life of the Soul. Nothing but high courage, joined with faith and aspiration, makes the contest possible, and even then there will be shrinking and dismay."<sup>43</sup>

A greater than Arjuna (who stands as the symbol of the disciple on his way towards perfection) faced a similar issue with courage, faith and aspiration, but the question was the same: Is the life of the soul a reality? Am I divine? Christ faced this issue without dismay, and triumphed by the use of an affirmation of such power (because it stated a truth) that the devil temporarily could not reach Him. He practically said: "I am the Son of God. Thou mayest not tempt me." He took His stand upon His divinity and vanquished the doubt.

It is interesting to realise that humanity today stands in the glamour of doubt. Doubt is on every hand. It is an emotional matter. The clear, cool, analysing and synthesising intellect does not doubt in this sense; it questions and waits. [Page 125] But it is in the Holy Place, with a full knowledge of what is written, and frequently after victory, that doubt descends upon the disciple. Perhaps, after all, that sense of divinity which has hitherto upheld the disciple is itself but glamour and not reality. That there have been experiences of a divine and supernatural nature the disciple cannot doubt. There have been moments when there has been "a sense of Divine access as different from other experiences, as original and inexplicable, as Sex or as the sense of Beauty—as hunger or thirst,"<sup>44</sup> for there is no question that "at the heart of all religion and all religions there is an experience unique, and not to be accounted for by evolution from other experience."<sup>45</sup> But perhaps that too is simply phenomenal, and not real; something that passes, with no immortal basis; something that is experienced as part of the world glamour, but does not and cannot endure. Perhaps God is just a name for everything that is, and, for the individual conscious soul, there is no definite persistence, no essential divinity, and nothing real—only a momentary flash of an awareness. Let us put this sense of divinity to the test and see if, with the change of physical destruction, something lasts which is spirit and is immortal.

As one studies the way in which Christ met this temptation one is inclined to believe that (having affirmed His belief in His Own Divinity) He simply ignored the temptation. His method was so brief and concise, and remains undeveloped as to detail. The way out, in this particular temptation, is dual: to recognise it for what it is, unreal, simply a glamour which has no true and lasting existence, just a delusion which assails us; and then to rest back upon the experience of God. If for one brief minute we have been in the Presence of God and known it, that is real. If the Presence of God in the human heart has at any moment, for an instant, been a reality, then let us take our stand upon that known and felt experience, refusing to deal with the [Page 126] detail of the glamour of doubt, of emotion, of depression or of blindness in which we may temporarily find ourselves.

But the doubt in the world today will be solved only when men bring to bear upon the problems of humanity, of God and of the soul, not only the clear cool light of the intellect, illumined by the intuition, but also the potency of past experience. If the sense of God has persisted in the world for untold ages, and if the testimony of the mystics and saints, the seers and the Saviours of all time is historical and verifiable—as it is—then that testimony, in its wealth and universality, constitutes a fact as scientific as any other. These are days when a scientific fact seems to have some glamorous appeal. Cycles of mysticism, cycles of philosophy, cycles of scientific expression, cycles of rank materialism—such is the cyclic way we walk, and such is our history. But persistent through them all runs the thread of God's Plan. Steadily through them all, the soul of man marches from one unfoldment of consciousness to another, and our concept of divinity constantly gains in richness and reality. That is the fact upon which humanity can stand, the divine soul in man. That is the fact upon which Christ took His stand when the devil tempted Him a second time.

"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."46

Christ has been tested in His physical nature and has triumphed. He has been tried in His emotional-desire nature, and we have found that neither the forces of the physical nature nor the glammers which the emotional-feeling nature inevitably bring could cause him to swerve the slightest from the path of spiritual living and expression. All His desires were directed towards God; every activity of His [Page 127] nature was rightly adjusted and divinely expressed. This triumph must have been known to Him, and this realisation carried in itself the seeds of the final temptation. He had triumphed over materialism and over doubt. He knew that the form side of life could not attract Him, and He had fought through to a full recognition of His divinity. Therefore He had conquered the extremes of His nature, its highest and lowest aspects. He expressed now the quality of divinity. The divine reality which He sensed and upon which He relied was potent to penetrate the maya and dispel the glamour. Pure desire was left—desire for God. He had been tried in two aspects of His nature—the material and the divine—and as God-Man He overcame the evil one. Primarily, both temptations lay in the region of desire. The call is to personal desirelessness.

So with Christ, desire was transmuted into power, though victory achieved led to developments which had in them the possibility of danger. It was in the realm of power that Christ was next tried. A character that has been carried to a high degree of perfection and which has established a unity between the source of power, the soul, and the instrument of power, the personal lower self, produces what we call a personality. That personality can be a definite source of danger to its owner. The sense of power, the knowledge of achievement, the realisation of capacity and the sensed ability to rule others because one rules oneself, have in them the germs of temptation, and it was here that the devil next attempted to ensnare the Christ. People are apt to be astonished when it is pointed out to them that a fine character can itself be a source of difficulty. It is difficulty of a peculiar kind, in that the things done and the words spoken by a highly developed person whose character is outstandingly fine and whose personality is well rounded out can do much harm—even when the motive is right or apparently so. Such persons wield much more power than the average.

Just what is a fine character, and how is it produced? First, of course, it is produced by the wheel of life and the Galilee [Page 128] experience; then by conscious effort and self-initiated discipline; and finally by the processes of integrating the various aspects of the lower nature into a synthetic whole, into a unity for purposive use.

In the case of Christ in the third temptation, His "conscious values or purposes" were being tried. His integrity must be undermined, if possible, and the unity for which He stood must be forced to disintegrate. If this could be done, and if the standard which He set could be upset, His mission was, from the start, destined to fail. If He could be deceived by the illusion of

power, if ambition of a personal nature could be developed in His consciousness, the founding of the kingdom of God might be indefinitely delayed. This temptation was an attack at the very root of the personality. The mind, the integrating factor, with its ability to think clearly, to formulate definite purpose and to choose, was under test. Such temptations do not come to the little-developed, and because of the strength of the character involved they are of the fiercest kind and the most difficult to handle. The call of the devil was to Christ's ambition. Ambition is, par excellence, the problem of the developed aspirant and disciple—personal ambition, love of popularity, worldly ambition, intellectual ambition, and the dictatorship of power over others. The subtlety of this temptation consists in the fact that appeal is made to right motive. It would—such is the implication—be good for the world of human affairs if it all belonged to Christ. By simply recognising the power of the devil, the material force in the world, as being supreme, that control over the kingdoms of the world could be given to Christ. He was offered it as the reward of a single recognition—given alone and unseen on the top of a high mountain—to the power which represented, or symbolised, the triple world of external living. If Christ would briefly fall down and worship that great power, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them would be His; and we know enough about Him to realise that there would have been no selfish motive in this gesture, could He have [Page 129] been induced to make it. What stood between Him and the acceptance of this opportunity? His reply indicates it clearly, but needs understanding. What intervened was His knowledge that God was One and God was All. The devil showed Him a picture of diversity, of many kingdoms, much division, of multiplicity, plurality, separated units. Christ came to unify, to bring together and to unite in one all kingdoms, all races and all men, so that the words of St. Paul could be true in deed and in fact:

"There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."<sup>47</sup>

Had Christ succumbed to the enticements of the devil and, from apparent right motive and love of humanity, accepted the proffered gift, these words would never have been fulfilled, as they surely will be at some date, perhaps not so distant as the chaotic present might lead us to think. Christ held His values true and His purpose unchanged. The illusion of power could not touch Him. That which was real had such a grip of His mind that the unreal and the immediate could not delude His consciousness. He saw the picture whole. He saw the vision of a world wherein there could be no duality but only unity, and from His efforts to bring that future world into being He could not be swerved.

Where this vision exists, lesser values and smaller issues cannot hold the ardent heart. Where the whole as a possibility is grasped, the part falls into its rightful place. Where the purpose of God stands clearly revealed to the mind of the seer, the lesser ends or motives, and the tiny wishes and desires for and of the personal self fade out of the picture. At the end of the road of evolution lies the consummation, the kingdom of God, not the kingdoms of the world. They are parts of a future whole, and will be later welded into a spiritual synthesis. But that kingdom, as



we shall see in our final chapter, when we sum up the results of initiation, is [Page 130] not brought into being through personal ambition, personal effort and personal desire. It comes through the submergence of the part in the whole and of the individual in the group. But this is brought about willingly and intelligently, with no loss of personal prestige, usefulness or sense of identity. It is not enforced or demanded by the group or state or kingdom, as is so frequently the case today. Dr. van der Leeuw tells us:

"If we would enter the kingdom this attitude must change to that of Christ whose love has become radiating, ever giving out to the surrounding world, whether deserving or not, whose life is centred in the Divine, common to all. In Him there is no remnant even of a separated personality, battling for its own existence or aggrandizement; the cup of His existence is emptied of all that is personal and become filled with the wine of the divine life, shared by all. We, by continuous though possibly unconscious effort, may maintain the centre of separate life which we call our personality; if we would follow Christ, we have to give up the laborious struggle for individual assertion in the desire to be the life of the Whole rather than that of a part. Thus alone can we enter the Kingdom where no separateness can be."<sup>48</sup>

Christ's temptation consisted of a demanded recognition of duality. But to Him, there was only one kingdom and one way into the kingdom, and one God Who was bringing, slowly indeed but surely, that kingdom into being. His mission was to reveal the method whereby unity could be brought about; to proclaim that inclusive love and that technique of at-one-ment which all who would study His life and react to His spirit could follow. He could not therefore fall into the error of diversity. He could not identify Himself with multiplicity when He embraced in His consciousness, as God, the larger synthesis. Pope, in his famous Essay on Man, sensed this, and expressed it in words familiar to all of us:

"God loves from whole to parts, but human soul  
Must rise from individual to the whole. [Page 131]  
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,  
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;  
The centre moved, a circle straight succeeds,  
Another still, and still another spreads;  
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace;  
His country next; and next all human race;  
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of the mind  
Take every creature in, of every kind;  
Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,  
And Heaven beholds its image in his breast."

Then the devil leaves Him. He could do no more, and Christ "departed into Galilee,"<sup>49</sup> going back again to the round of daily living. The Galilee experience can never be evaded by any Son of God whilst incarnate in the flesh. He then did three things: first, hearing that John the Baptist had been cast into prison, Christ took up the task laid down by him, and went on with the

preaching of repentance. Next, He chose with care those who were to work with Him, and whom He had to train to carry forward the mission of the kingdom, and then He began that increased service which is ever the signal to the world that a man has become more inclusive and has passed through another initiation. Even though the world may not at the time recognise that signal, it is never again just the same world as it was before the initiation is taken and the service rendered. The emergence of an initiate into the field of the world makes that field different.

Christ went about doing good, "teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people."<sup>50</sup> He had registered before God and man, and to Himself, His perfection. He emerged from the wilderness experience tried, tested, and with His divinity completely vindicated. He knew Himself to be God; He had demonstrated to Himself His divine humanity. And yet as is the way with all the [Page 132] liberated sons of God, He could not rest until He had shown us the way. He had to transmit the great energy of the Love of God.

Perfected, serving and with a full knowledge of His mission, Christ now enters into the period of active work which must precede the next initiation, that of the Transfiguration."

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CHAPTER FOUR - The Third Initiation: The Transfiguration on a High Mountain

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