

# THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

*DISCOURSES UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.*

BY

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# CONTENTS

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## THE BOOK OF JOB—

	AGE
INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	I
SATAN AT WORK . . . . .	6
THE ASSAULTS OF SATAN . . . . .	15
THE TRIAL OF JOB . . . . .	22
THE ARGUMENT OF ELIPHAZ.—I. . . . .	30
THE ARGUMENT OF ELIPHAZ.—II. . . . .	39
JOB'S ANSWER TO ELIPHAZ . . . . .	48
THE FIRST SPEECH OF BILDAD . . . . .	56
JOB'S ANSWER TO BILDAD.—I. . . . .	65
JOB'S ANSWER TO BILDAD.—II. . . . .	73
THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.—I. . . . .	81
THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.—II. . . . .	90
THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.—III. . . . .	98
JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.—I. . . . .	106
JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.—II. . . . .	115
JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.—III. . . . .	123
JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.—IV. . . . .	131

THE BOOK OF JOB (*continued*)—

	PAGE
JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.—V. . . . .	139
THE SECOND SPEECH OF ELIPHAZ . . . . .	147
MISERABLE COMFORTERS. . . . .	156
COMFORTERS AND FLATTERERS . . . . .	163
THE SECOND SPEECH OF BILDAD . . . . .	172
JOB'S REPLY TO THE SECOND SPEECH OF BILDAD . . . . .	180
AN ANCIENT CONCEPTION OF WICKEDNESS.—I. . . . .	188
AN ANCIENT CONCEPTION OF WICKEDNESS.—II. . . . .	197
THE PROFITABLENESS OF RELIGION . . . . .	205
THE LAST SPEECH OF ELIPHAZ . . . . .	216
RECONCILIATION AND RESULTS . . . . .	225
JOB'S REVIEW OF THE CONTROVERSY . . . . .	235
MAN DESIRING GOD . . . . .	244
MORAL ANTIQUITY . . . . .	255
QUIET RESTING-PLACES . . . . .	263
WHAT IS WISDOM?. . . . .	272
SUNNY MEMORIES . . . . .	282
CHANGES OF FORTUNE . . . . .	291
JOB'S RETROSPECT AND PROTEST . . . . .	302
ENDED WORDS . . . . .	310
THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.—I. . . . .	319
THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.—II. . . . .	329
THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.—III. . . . .	339
THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.—IV. . . . .	350
THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN . . . . .	358

THE BOOK OF JOB (*continued*)—

## THE THEOPANY:—

	PAGE
JOB, chapter xxxviii. ( <i>with Annotations</i> ) . . . . .	366
————— xxxix. " " . . . . .	368
————— xl. " " . . . . .	370
————— xli. " " . . . . .	371
THE THEOPHANY.—I. . . . .	374
THE THEOPHANY.—II. . . . .	382
THE THEOPHANY, AS A WHOLE . . . . .	391
AFTER THE STORM. . . . .	398
THE EXALTATION AND DEATH OF JOB . . . . .	407

## "HANDFULS OF PURPOSE"—

A CALL TO PERSONAL SACRIFICE . . . . .	417
"Thus did Job continually." (Job i. 5.)	
THE GREAT PUZZLE OF METAPHYSICAL LIFE . . . . .	418
"Whence comest thou?" (Job i. 7.)	
MESSENGERS AND MESSAGES . . . . .	418
"And there came a messenger unto Job." (Job i. 14.)	
THE POTENCY OF SILENCE . . . . .	419
". . . none spake a word unto him." (Job ii. 13.)	
EXAMPLE BETTER THAN PRECEPT . . . . .	420
". . . it touched thee and thou art troubled." (Job iv. 5.)	
SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATIONS . . . . .	421
"Now a thing was secretly brought to me." (Job iv. 12.)	
THE FOOLISH TAKING ROOT . . . . .	422
"I have seen the foolish taking root." (Job v. 3.)	
THE WISE AND THE CRAFTY . . . . .	424
"He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." (Job v. 13.)	

**"HANDFULS OF PURPOSE" (continued)—**

	PAGE
<b>AN APPOINTED TIME TO MAN . . . . .</b>	<b>424</b>
"Thou shalt come to thy grave in full age." (Job v. 26.)	
<b>THE DISCIPLINE OF REVERSES . . . . .</b>	<b>425</b>
"The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat." (Job vi. 7.)	
<b>CONCERNING ERRORS . . . . .</b>	<b>426</b>
". . . cause me to understand wherein I have erred." (Job vi. 24.)	
<b>SPEAKING IN ANGUISH . . . . .</b>	<b>427</b>
"I will speak in the anguish of my spirit." (Job vii. 11.)	
<b>THE RESULT OF LONELINESS . . . . .</b>	<b>428</b>
"Let me alone." (Job vii. 16.)	
<b>SPIRITUAL TRAINING . . . . .</b>	<b>428</b>
"Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase." (Job viii. 7.)	
<b>SELF-JUSTIFICATION AND SELF-CONDEMNATION . . . . .</b>	<b>429</b>
"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me." (Job ix. 20.)	
<b>THE CREATOR THE REDEEMER . . . . .</b>	<b>430</b>
"Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me." (Job x. 8.)	
<b>A SERIOUS FACT . . . . .</b>	<b>431</b>
"I am full of confusion." (Job x. 15.)	
<b>ASPIRATION AND LIMITATION . . . . .</b>	<b>431</b>
"It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?" (Job xi. 8.)	
<b>INFERIORITY AND SUPERIORITY . . . . .</b>	<b>432</b>
"I am not inferior to you." (Job xii. 3.)	
<b>SECRETS OF LIEE . . . . .</b>	<b>433</b>
". . . the soul of every living thing." (Job xii. 10.)	
<b>DIVINE VISITATION . . . . .</b>	<b>434</b>
"He . . . maketh the judges fools." (Job xii. 17.)	
<b>THE PLACE OF SAFETY . . . . .</b>	<b>435</b>
"He maketh them to stagger like a drunken man." (Job xii. 25.)	

<b>"HANDFULS OF PURPOSE" (continued)—</b>		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>CONCERNING THE SINS OF YOUTH</b> . . . . .		435
"Thou . . . makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." (Job xiii. 26.)		
<b>MITIGATIONS OF TROUBLE</b> . . . . .		437
". . . full of trouble." (Job xiv. 1.)		
<b>AN ENQUIRY AND A VERDICT</b> . . . . .		438
"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." (Job xiv. 4.)		
<b>HUMBLING QUESTIONS</b> . . . . .		438
"Art thou the first man that was born?" (Job xv. 7.)		
<b>THE WORDS OF JESUS</b> . . . . .		439
"I have heard many such things." (Job xvi. 2.)		
<b>DAILY CONFLICT</b> . . . . .		440
"God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked." (Job xvi. 11.)		
<b>THE BREVITY OF LIFE</b> . . . . .		441
"When a few years are come." (Job xvi. 22.)		
<b>COMPENSATIONS IN AFFLICTIONS</b> . . . . .		442
"Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow." (Job xvii. 7.)		
<b>FRIENDS AND FRIENDLESSNESS</b> . . . . .		443
"My familiar friends have forgotten me." (Job xix. 14.)		
<b>ON TAKING ROOT</b> . . . . .		444
"Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?" (Job xix. 28.)		
<b>A PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION</b> . . . . .		445
"How can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job xxiv. 4.)		
<b>PRAYER A DELIGHT</b> . . . . .		445
"Will he always call upon God?" (Job xxvii. 10.)		
<b>THE BLESSEDNESS OF SERVICE</b> . . . . .		446
"I was eyes to the blind." (Job xxix. 15.)		

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<b>"HANDFULS OF PURPOSE" (continued)—</b>		<b>PAGE</b>
<b>MORAL MYSTERIES</b> . . . . .		447
	"Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness." (Job xxx. 25, 26.)	
<b>THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE BIBLE</b> . . . . .		448
	". . . an interpreter, one among a thousand." (Job xxxiii. 23.)	
<b>ON CHRISTIAN UNITY</b> . . . . .		449
	"Let us know among ourselves what is good." (Job xxxiv. 4.)	
<b>CONCERNING KINGS AND PRINCES</b> . . . . .		449
	"Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly?" (Job xxxiv. 18.)	
<b>INDEX</b> . . . . .		451

## THE BOOK OF JOB.

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I HAVE sometimes most clearly seen the whole tragedy of Job in a waking dream, the whole passing before me in twilight shadows, losing itself in thick darkness, reappearing in light like the dawn, always changing, always solemn, always instructive: a thing that surely happened, because a thing now happening in all the substance of its eternal meaning.

Is it a pillar grand in height, and finished all over with the dainty care of an artist whose life has been spent in learning and applying the art of colour? How stately! How heaven-seeking because heaven-worthy! Whilst I admire, I wonder religiously. I see the hosts of darkness gathering around the erewhile flashing capital, and resting over it like midnight sevenfold in blackness; then the lightning gleams from the centre of the gloom, then the fire-bolt flies forth and smites the coronal once so glorious, and dashes it in hot dust to the earth, and the tall stalk so upright, so delicate, so like a well-trained life, reels, totters, falls in an infinite crash! Is it true? Every word of it! True now—may be true in thee and me, O man, so assured of stability and immovableness. There is danger in high places. Is there a Spirit which hates all noble-mindedness and seeks to level the spiritual pile with mean things? Evil Spirit! The very Devil, hating all goodness because hating God! But stop. After all, who smote the pillar? Whose lightning was used to overthrow the fair masonry? O God of gods, the devil's Creator and Master, without whom



Satan could not be, nor hell, nor trees forbidden, nor blast of death,—O Mystery of Being,—what can our souls say in their groaning, and how through anguish so intolerable can they pray? I am afraid to build, because the higher the tower the deadlier the fall. Dost thou watch our rising towers and delight to rain thy fire upon them, lest our pride should abound and our damnation be aggravated by our vanity? And God's own Book it is that tells the good man's pain, and revels in swelling rhetoric over the rottenness and despair of the man who feared God and eschewed evil! And what unguided hands, if hands unguided, set the tale of wrong and woe and sorrow next to the very Psalter? Is not the irony immoral because cruel? Or is there meaning in all this? Is it life's story down to the very letter and jot of reality? How better to come out of the valley than to the harping and song of musicians who have known the way of the Almighty and tasted the counsels of heaven! Cheer thee, O poor soul! thou art to-day miserable as Job, but to-morrow thou mayest dance to the music of David,—to-morrow thou mayest have a harp of thine own!

A tree of the Lord's right hand planting arises loftily and broadly in the warm air. Birds twitter and sing as they flit through its warp and woof of light and shade—a tree whose leaves might heal the nations. What sudden wind makes it writhe? What spirit torments every branch and leaf? What demon yells in triumph as the firm trunk splits and falls in twain? Was it grown for such a fate as this? Better if the seed had been crushed and thrown into the fire, than that it should have been thus reared and perfected and then put to shame amongst the trees of the field.

Who can give speech to this flood as it plunges from rock to rock in the black night-time? Hush! There is a man's voice in the infinite storm:—"Let the day

perish in which I was born : let it be darkness ; let that night be joyless, let no song enter into it ; let them who curse the day stigmatise it who are ready to stir up the leviathan ; why died I not from the womb ? then had I lain down and been quiet ; I had slept ; . . . there the wicked cease from troubling, and there the wearied mighty rest ; the prisoners sweetly repose together, they hear not the voice of the exactor, and the slave is free from his lord." These are human words, but are they not too strong, too rhetorical to be true ? No ; for who can mechanise the rhetoric of woe ? " Why is life given to the miserable, and to one who would be blithe to find a grave ? I have no quiet, no repose, for trouble on trouble came, and my sighs gush out like waters long dammed back." No doubt the rhetoric is lofty, yet with a strange familiarity it touches with happy expressiveness all that is most vivid in our own remembrance of woe. " I loathe my life : I will give loose to my complaint : I will speak in the bitterness of my soul : to God I will say, Condemn me not, show me why thou contendest with me. As the clay thou hast fashioned me, and to dust thou causest me to return : thou hast poured me as milk and compacted me as cheese. As a fierce lion thou huntest me, then thou turnest again and showest thyself marvellous." Job has found fit words for all mourning souls ; so they borrow of him when their own words fail like a stream which the sun has dried up. What woe the poor little heart can feel ! Herein is its greatness : it is in its own way as the heart of God. " Truly, now, he hath worn me out : thou hast made all my household desolate, and thou hast shrivelled me up. God giveth me up to the ungodly, and flingeth me over into the hands of the wicked. He seized me by the throat and shook me. He breacheth me with breach on breach. He rusheth on me like a man of war."

In what good man's sick chamber is not Job welcome ? Welcome because he can utter the whole gamut of human

woe? He can find words for the heart that is ill at ease, and prayers for lips which have been chilled and silenced by unbelief. His woe belongs to the whole world. All other woe is as the dripping of an icicle compared with the rush of stormy waters. "Even to-day is my complaint bitter; my hand is heavy because of my sighing. Behold I go forward, but he is not discernible; and backward, but I perceive him not; on the left hand in his operations I perceive him, but I comprehend him not; on the right hand he is veiled, and I see him not."

Let us now go into the tragedy in detail. We may learn how to bear the ills we cannot escape. We may answer the apparently unanswerable question of Lear:—

"Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,  
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these?"

## PRAYER.

LORD JESUS, we pray thee to continue to heal on the Sabbath day, the day was made for healing : we are healed by its calm ; the spirit of peace is the spirit of that holy time. May our hearts be tranquil with God's peace ; may Sabbath dawn upon the weariest heart ; may all lives know that this is the day which the Lord hath made, and may we be full of gladness during its golden hours. Is not this a little of heaven sent down to earth ? Is not this the entrance to eternity ? Thou knowest what the week is, with all its six days' roughness and tumult, disappointment, misery, mocking unrest, painted triumph ; yet thou hast set us in the battle, and thou art watching the fight ; thou art training us by contention, and making us pure by well-accepted controversy. May nothing of thy purpose be lost because of the blinding details of the conflict ; may we lay to our hearts the solemn truth that thou dost mean to make us men ; by loss or gain, by sunshine or shadow, by laughter or by tears, thou wilt make us men. This thou didst mean from eternity ; when the Lamb was slain there, and when all thy purpose of love was written in thy book, it was that we might become perfect men in Christ Jesus, the image and likeness of God, the very reflection of thy glory. If we can keep this in mind, then labour is rest, every day is Sabbath day, and every woe comes to make us purer souls. But we so soon lose the thought, and wander away into idle dream and pointless speculation, and vex ourselves with questions and mystery which can never be solved. Would God we were wiser, simpler, truer to the divine purpose of life ! then should the summer come sooner, and the golden harvest, and thou shouldst have satisfaction in our fruitfulness. When we confess our sin we take hope again : if we never confessed we never could hope ; to know ourselves to be sinners is to begin to feel after the cross, to ask questions at Calvary, to put serious inquiries to our souls. Help us to feel the burden of sin, that we may feel the gospel of mercy. Save us from indifference, callousness, all manner of carelessness regarding the altar, the truth, and the destiny of men ; quicken us that we may ask thee questions respecting ourselves, and consult thee with regard to this gnawing worm, this unquenchable fire, this perdition of sin. For all thy lovingkindness how can we praise thee in hymns sweet enough ? Thy compassions are new every morning, are conceived on purpose for us, are earlier upon the earth than the dew is ; thy faithfulness continueth every evening, it is out among the earliest stars, nay, it leads the host and brings them forth. How good is God ! Thy goodness draws forth our tears, and stops our speech with the emotion of thankfulness. Where thou art most needed thou wilt be most present. The Lord hear us at the Saviour's cross, tree of sacrifice, tree of blood, the altar-tree, where no man ever prayed and was then sent away empty. Amcn.

## Chapter I.

## SATAN AT WORK.

**W**HEN we read that "there was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job," we are to understand a noble, conspicuous, influential, and altogether unique man. The narrator is not pointing to any man,—a dramatic shadow, a figure which he intends to use for dramatic purposes; he is indicating the greatest man in the society to which that man belongs—say a typical man, the best specimen of humanity, altogether the finest, completest, strongest man. It is well to understand this, because if there is to be any great contest as between human nature and malign powers, we should like it to be as equal as possible. We should feel a sense of discontentment were the devil to challenge some puny creature—a man known only for his meanness and weakness. On the other hand, we feel that the conditions are admirable as to their proportions and completeness, and the best, strongest, purest man is chosen to represent human nature in the tremendous contest. That is the case in the present instance. Read the character—

"That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (v. 1).

This is a complete character. What more could be added? What need for further vision of God, or supply of grace, or miracle of progress? Have we any character equal to Job's, as thus described, in the New Testament? Even if Job be but a dramatic personage, the Old Testament is not afraid to have such a man represented upon its pages. But we must not stop at that point; otherwise we should come to false conclusions respecting the growth of character under Old Testament conditions. The Old Testament makes its men more rapidly than the New Testament does; and we are not to take back the New Testament by which to judge the men of the Old Testament. If men do not grow so rapidly in the gospels and epistles, it is because the spirit of moral criticism has changed, has become more searching, has looked for fuller and wider results, has penetrated beyond and beneath the surface, and asked questions about motive, purpose, inmost thought. Here, however, in Old Testament life,

and under Old Testament conditions, is the completest man of his day. What can he do with Satan? What can Satan do with him?

Not only was the personal character complete, but the surroundings were marked by great prosperity, affluence, all but boundless resources, as resources were reckoned in Oriental countries.

"His [Job's] substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household" (v. 3).

Who could get at him? You must knock at a hundred gates before you can present yourself before the presence of this king. Circle after circle concentrically surrounds, environs, protects him. He is within at the very centre of all circles. We have to leap over tower after tower before we come to the tower of brass, solid, seamless, within which he is entrenched and concealed.

Not only have we a complete personal character, a great substantial fortune, but there is in this mysterious man a priestly feeling. The father of the family was then the priest of the household. His sons and daughters were social; they grasped one another with the hand of love; they exchanged liberally all the courtesies which make up much of the happiness of social life. The father was not amongst them; he was away, but still looking on. He said: It may be that in all their feasting and enjoyment my sons have sinned, and have misunderstood God in their hearts; therefore, I will arise early in the morning and offer sacrifices on their account. Although this is now done away ceremonially and literally, yet there abides the priestliness of fatherhood and motherhood—that strange, never-perfectly-described feeling, which says, There is yet something to be done about the children: they are good children, their fine qualities it is impossible to deny, but human nature is human nature after all, and another prayer for them may do good. That prayer may never be offered in words, it may be offered in sighs, in wordless aspirations, in the strange, never-to-be-reported language of the heart. Yet, still, there is the fact, that in every true heart there is a priestly instinct that cannot be satisfied until it has remembered in prayer some that may have strayed, and others that may need special vision of light and special

communication of grace. "Pray without ceasing." Pray often. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." - And the God of peace shall fill your hearts with eternal Sabbath day.

So far, then, we are reading a noble poem. Were the statement to end with the first five verses, it would be difficult to match the paragraph by aught so rich in spiritual quality, so noble in personal character, so sweet, tender, and friendly in social feeling and exchange of love. But where does life's chapter end? An end it seems not to have. Life would rather appear to be all beginnings, new attempts, new mornings, new endeavours, new resolutions, and the end is always far off, making great promises, and exercising a wondrous influence in life by its allurements and beckoning and promise of rest. It is in this way that posterity does much for us, notwithstanding the ignorant gibe concerning it. The end makes us do what we attempt in the present. We cannot work for the past. If we work at all, it must be for the future, for, blessed be God, things are so shaped and set together that no man liveth unto himself, or can so live: even while he attempts that miracle he fails in its execution, and does good where no good was intended. No credit to him. It will not be set down to his credit in the books. Still, as a matter of fact, even the bad man cannot spend his money without doing good in many unintended ways. Where, then, we repeat, does life's chapter end? Certainly it does not end in the case of Job by a description of his personal character and his social status.

In the sixth verse we come upon the inevitable temptation. Every man, woman, and child has got to have a face-to-face interview with the devil. Adam was not tempted for all the race. He but symbolised the tragic and awful fact that every man is led up into the Eden of his time to be tried, tested, pierced, assaulted, and put to extremities, so that he may be revealed to himself. That is the great difficulty—namely, the difficulty of self-revelation; because a man seeing some other man do a wickedness stands back and says *he* could not have done that; whereas he could have done it every whit, with just as red a

colour, and just as black an infamy, whatever it was—the murder by Cain, the treachery committed by Jacob, the kiss inflicted by Iscariot. So every man must be revealed to himself, and made to feel that his heart—not some other man's heart—is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The devil could not rest. He must go to and fro in the earth, and walk up and down in it, so long as there is one good man upon it. It is the good man that adds another flame to the devil's hell. He does not care about indifferent characters, doubting minds, wavering faiths; men who are orthodox to-day, heretical to-morrow, speculative on the third day, and immoral all the time: they occasion him no anxiety, they are all well chained, and the chain is well fastened in the pit. But a really good man—a veritable Job—must be the devil's vexation. He must be a mystery to the satanic mind. Nor can the devil afford to let him alone. One Job will do more harm to bad policies and bad spiritualities than a thousand nominally professing good men could ever do. Job will be looked at, estimated, talked about; people will say, Here is concrete goodness, real, sound character, and the kind of faculty that gets hold of all the worlds that are good, and represents all sides of life quite radiantly and fascinatingly. "Whence comest thou," black fiend, spirit of night, demon? "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it,"—it is my earth, my estate, my hunting-ground: as yet I have only scorched it; I want to burn it through and through. Why not sit down? I cannot! Why not? Because there is a man upon it that I want to ruin. Here is no poetic strain, no dramatic exaggeration, no colour put in merely for the sake of literary effect: this is strong, sound reason, broad and deep philosophy, an unchangeable reality in moral economies: the bad cannot rest while the good are within sight, and the good cannot escape the last temptation, the fieriest assault of the enemy. A marvellous power is the power of goodness: bad men are afraid of it; no heart that has in it a wicked scheme dare so much as come before a good man and say—My scheme is thus, and so, and such: will you join me in it? Dishonesty fears honesty. This is the power of the good over the evil—the restraining power, the refining power, and the elevating power, as to its social effects. Do we give the enemy any trouble?



When he hears our prayers is he alarmed, saying, Verily they are growing in grace : they daily get one inch nearer heaven : on the third day they will be perfected, and seize the very city, and take it by the violence of love ? Or does he say, The prayers are going down in quality : they have now descended to mere talk : there is no blood in them, no sacrifice, no atonement kindred according to its own capacity with the atonement wrought by the Son of God : these are not prayers ? If so, he will not be troubled by our presence, though we be a million strong and rich with all earth's gold mines. It is character that the devil fears—solid, pure, noble, brilliant character,—just as good at the core as it is on the surface ; solid in its cubic completeness and reality of goodness.

But Job was misunderstood by the devil, who said, This is a question of circumstances : if I could take away his seven thousand sheep, he would be less religious ; if I could break in upon the five hundred yoke of oxen, he would begin to whimper and whine like a common man ; if his balance at the next reckoning should be in three figures instead of five, he would forget to pray that night : this is how I must assail him ; I shall never get at this man through his principles, I must get at him through his property,—that is my policy. There was the fatal misunderstanding of the man. Being misunderstood, Job was also underestimated. Who can tell the good man's full measure of strength ? He is a man of many resources. We read of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and there is a sense in which every Christian is endowed with those riches, so that being impoverished at one point he is as wealthy as ever at all other points : he can overget all distress and all loss. It is interesting to hear a being from another world talk. Here the devil gives us his description of Job's position. It will be intensely interesting to hear how the position of a man can be described by an infernal spirit. What he says can be rendered into our mother-tongue. We do not sufficiently consider that it is a devil who is made to speak in one instance, or an angel in another ; we take it as if devil and angel were natives of the same clime with ourselves, and had undergone the same schooling, and had used the same words, with the same colour and weight of emphasis. Nothing of the

kind. These people are speaking a foreign tongue; yet they speak it as with a native accent. Hear the devil upon the position and security of Job:

“Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land” (v. 10).

He reads like a surveyor; he peruses a memorandum, and gives out the facts in literal lines. “Hast not thou made an hedge about him?” I have walked round that hedge; I have tried it here, there, and at seven other places; I have gone round it in summer and winter, in spring and autumn, by night and by day, when the snow was on the ground and when the sun was in full summer heat, and the hedge is round about him with the solidity of iron; and not about him only, but “about his house, and about all that he hath on every side”—every sheep, every camel, every ox, every ass seems to be hedged about, so that I cannot strike one of them: I have no chance; thou hast shut me out from opportunity in regard to this man: give me the opportunity, and I will bring his piety to ruin—“put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face” (v. 11). The devil did not speak without reason. He is sometimes forced to facts. He could have substantiated this declaration by countless instances; he could have said, I have overthrown kings before to-day; I have seen the effect of poverty, loss, pain, distress, exile, upon some men who had quite as good an appearance as Job has: their piety has gone after their property: they no sooner were thrown down socially than they were unclothed religiously, and were proved to be, practically, at least, hypocrites: I want to see the same plan tried upon Job; it has succeeded in cases innumerable—it cannot but succeed here. But the point now immediately under consideration is the devil’s estimate of the good man’s position, and the devil says the good man is hedged about; he is protected on every side; all that he has excites the interest of heaven; there is not a sheep in the flock that God does not account as of value. This is real. This is the very testimony of Jesus Christ himself, who says, The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do we realise this to be our happy condition? We do not. As Christian men and women we are just as fretful, anxious, and dispirited, in the

presence of cloud and threatening, as are our worldliest neighbours. If that is not true in some instances, let us bless God for the miraculous exceptions; but wherein it is true we affirm the devil's estimate of our supposed security: it is a security which believes in black ink letters, in actual and positive property, and is not a security which rests in spiritual promise of spiritual protection.

This incident destroys the idea that environment can keep away temptation. How often have we said to ourselves, If our circumstances were better, our religion would be stronger; thus men tell lies to their own souls; thus men degrade life into a question of surrounding and circumstance and condition; thus men say that "fat sorrow is better than lean"; and thus men add up the worldly conditions of assaulted life, and say, With such conditions the assault really amounts to nothing. All spiritual history declares against that sophistical doctrine. Every man has his own battle to fight. Job had a deadlier battle to conduct than we can have, because he was a stronger man; there was more in him and about him; he exhibited, so to say, a larger field, and was therefore accessible at a greater number of points. We think of royalty in its palace, see itself upon the throne, and saying, What can reach me here? I am safe beyond the touch of temptation. We think of great influence, as of statesmen and rulers, and we suppose that if we were as elevated as they are we should be out of the reach of the devil's arrow. Sometimes we think of great genius, of the marvellous minds that can create worlds and destroy them, and recreate them, and dramatise the very air, and populate it with images that shine and talk, that dazzle and amuse the very men who created them; and we say, Such genius can know nothing of temptation; only those who are in sordid conditions, driven down to the dust to find to-morrow's bread, men doomed to daily grinding,—only they can know what temptation is and pain and sorrow. Such is not the case. No palace can shut out temptation; no high authority or rulership can escape the blast of hell; and as for genius, it seems to be the very sport of infernal agency. Environment, then, is no protection against temptation. What is the protection? There is none: every man must be tempted, every Adam must fall, every Adam must eat of the

forbidden tree ; one after the other, millions in a day, on they go, without exception, without break : "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Certainly. If that chapter had not been in his life, the life would have been incomplete, and would have been no gospel to us : we should have said, The reading is very good, but it is like the reading of a poem, or the perusal of a musical composition ; we have not yet come to the hell-chapter, the devil-clutch, the fight with him who overthrew our integrity, and chained our spirits to his chariot. So we have Christ's temptation written in plain letters, the whole story told in highly accentuated speech, the articulation distinct, every syllable throbbing with life. What then ? Do we rest there, and say, Behold the end ? Then were the world not worth making, then had the Creator committed an irretrievable mistake : this is not the end. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man," and with every temptation God will make a way of escape. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations ; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" and purity, increase of faith and increase of grace ; and the temptation may become the root of much true strength and joy.

In the case of Job the internal is proved to be greater than the external. When the trials came one after another like shocks of thunder, "in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But did he speak ? That is the point. If he did not, perhaps he was dazed ; he felt a tremendous blow on the forehead, and reeled, and was not in a condition to bear witness about the matter. If he said anything let us know what he did say. Could he speak in that tremendous crisis ? Yes, he spoke. His words are before us. Like a wise man he went back to first principles. He said, Circumstances are nothing ; they are temporary arrangements ; the man is not what he has but what he is ; I do not hold my life in my hands saying, It weighs so much, and count up to a high number. Job went back to first principles, to elementary truths ; he said :—

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither [that is how I began] : the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away [as he had a right to do ; I had nothing of my own] ; blessed be the name of the Lord" (v. 21).

There he stands, a naked man, destitute, childless, friendless, practically houseless, without property, all the environment changed; and now that all the walls are thrown down we can see the more clearly how the man kneels, and with what heart-eloquence he prays. We never do see some men until the walls of their prosperity are thrown down. When they have lost all, then they begin to make an impression upon us. Said one man, from whom every penny in the world was taken, "The treasure is all gone, but I have an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." He was a minister of the gospel, a man in high pulpit position; but circumstances were against him, the events of the day impoverished him; he was left without gold, silver, copper, chair to sit upon, bed to lie upon, book to read, and in that condition he said, in our own country and in our own time, "The treasure is all gone, but I have an inheritance that cannot be destroyed." We should not have known the man but for the circumstances which tested him and revealed him. What was real in his case is possible in every other case. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The more things we have the better, if we use them aright. There is no crime in wealth. There is no iniquity in being rich. Blessed be God, there are men who are rich and good,—abounding in wealth, and yet the more they have the more the church has, the more the poor have. We bless God for them. They hold their riches with a steward's faithfulness, with a trustee's fidelity. Nor is there any virtue in poverty. A man is not a saint because he has no clothes, no house, no fortune. Nothing of the kind. All these questions, on both sides, go deeper, go right into the spirit and soul and heart of things, and "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Said one man, "I have nothing except that which I have given away." His meaning was that at last, although fortune had been heavy against him, he had as a real property, in his very memory and soul, every farthing he had ever given in the cause of charity: they could never be taken away from him. There is one wealth we need never part with, one substance we may keep for ever—in health, in sickness, in summer, in winter, in earth, in heaven, in time, in eternity, and that substance is a spotless, holy character.

## Chapter II.

"Touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (v. 5).

### THE ASSAULTS OF SATAN.

**R**EMEMBER that the man spoken about is "a perfect man and an upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil." The speaker is Satan, who came with the sons of God on the first occasion, and said, "Touch all that Job hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." He was allowed to touch Job's property, and he failed in his purpose. On another occasion the same devil came back with the sons of God, and enlarged his proposition. He said, "Touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face."

We are fully agreed that there is no devil. That may be taken for granted. It is impossible for us to believe that there is a devil, and for this reason. Simply because there is nothing devilish, therefore how can we believe that there is a devil? Everybody is so good, everybody is so honest; all our habits, and practices, and customs are so transparently and beautifully moral, that it is utterly impossible for us to believe that there is a devil. Why do we speak of the existence of the devil? Because there is so much devilishness. The best way to prove that there is no devil is to get rid of the devilishness. When we have cleansed that out of the way we shall make it exceedingly difficult to believe either in a personal or an impersonal devil. But when persons are so dishonest, so quick in sharp practice, so malign, so cruel, so ready to take advantage, so prepared to oppress the weak and to mislead the ignorant, it becomes quite easy for us to believe that perhaps there is a devil!

In this incident it will be our privilege to see the devil twice wrong. Here is a man called Job who is chosen as the battle-

field. In all lines and spheres of life some particular persons are called upon to illustrate universal truths and confer universal blessings. It is necessarily and unchangeably true that one man must die for the people. The great contest before us is God against the devil, and up to this time we have never seen that battle so sharply defined. We have always felt that there was a contest going on, but we never saw them face to face, hand against hand, mouth against mouth, before. It will be interesting to watch the encounter. We do not know that the devil has ever made this high challenge before. He has always been walking and working in the dark: he has been moving about stealthily and taking advantage where he could—but we are not aware that he has ever with undisguised audacity actually challenged the Almighty to fight it out in one particular case. At last the challenge has been given; it has been accepted, Job is the battlefield, and on the result will depend the veracity either of God or of the devil. But what of Job in that case? had he no compensations? was it all battle, and suffering, and pain, and humiliation on his part? Was there nothing on the other side? Does God simply afflict some men and leave them with their afflictions—does he simply gather his clouds over some heads and cause them to discharge their pitiless storms without setting the rainbow on the cloud-laden sky? It is easy for us who have endured but the secondary pains and ills of life to suggest compensations to those who are our leaders in suffering and our veterans in bearing the chastisements, the penalties, and visitations of God. Still, it is surely something to be God's proof-man, to be called out as the particular man on whose character, intelligence, grace, patience, fortitude—great results are staked. Surely God will not call a man to endure all the devil can inflict upon him without secretly giving that man sustenance, and at the end throwing upon his devastated life a fuller and gentler light than ever has illumined its yesterdays.

That is the view which we should take of our afflictions; that is to say, we should feel that perhaps we are made the medium through which God is answering the devil's challenge. The devil may have been saying to the Almighty concerning this man or that: "Take his health away, take his trade away, touch his

bone and his flesh, subtract considerably from the sum total of his indulgences, and his enjoyments, and then he will curse thee to thy face." That is the view every man and woman should take of personal sorrow and individual trial. The devil may have said, "Take his only son away, and thou wilt take his religion away," and God has allowed that dear boy to be removed—how dost thou bear? There are great stakes pending: God said, "He will bear it well, with the grace of a sanctified hero." The devil said, "He will burn his Bible and cast down his family altar." Who is right? If thou art bearing that heavy loss well, bowing thy poor old knees at the same altar, and saying, with a choking in thy throat, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," thou hast enabled God to strike the devil on the face. The Lord help thee: it is bitter suffering; there is a hard stress upon thy poor life; thou needest all the grace treasured in the immeasurable heart of Christ; but his grace is sufficient for thee—draw heavily upon it, and the more thou dost yearn for that healing grace, the more shall it be given thee to overflow; it cannot be given to satisfy.

Could Job now look over the ages that have been healed and comforted by his example, stimulated to bear the ills of life by the grateful memory of his invincible patience, surely even now in heaven he would be taking in the reward of his long-continued and noble endurance of the divine visitation. It may be so with thee, poor man, poor woman: thou dost not get all the sweet now: this shall be a memory to thee in heaven, long ages hence: the wrestling thou hast now may minister to thee high delight, keen enjoyment, rapture pure and abiding. Who can tell when God's rewards end—who will venture to say, "This is the measure of his benediction?" He is able to give and to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. When, therefore, persons inquire of thee, What compensation hast thou? say, "It is given by instalments, to-day, to-morrow, in death, in the resurrection, all through the ages of eternity. Ask me thousands of ages hence, and I will reply to thy question concerning compensation." Life is not limited by the cradle and the tomb, and it is not between these two mean and near points that great questions are to be discussed or determined.



Job has been read by countless readers. His, of course, was a public trial, a tragedy that was wrought out for the benefit of multitudes in all generations. Nevertheless it is literally and pathetically true that every man, the very obscurest, has his readers, fewer in number it may be, but equally earnest in attention. Think you that your children are not taking notice of you, seeing how you bear your temptations, and difficulties, and anxieties? Think you not that your eldest boy is kept away from the table of the Lord because you are as atheistic in sorrow as ever Voltaire was? Do you know that your daughter hates church because her pious father is only pious in the three summer months of the year? He curls under the cold and biting wind as much as any mean atheist ever did: therefore the girl saith, "He is a sham and a hypocrite—my father in the flesh—no relative of mine in the spirit." You have your readers: the little Bible of your life is read in your kitchen, in your parlour, in your shop, and in your warehouse; and if you do not bear your trials, anxieties, and difficulties with a Christian chivalry and heroism, what is there but mockery on earth and laughter in hell? God give us grace to bear the chastisement nobly, serenely; bless us with the peace which passeth understanding, with the quietness kindred to the calm of God; and help us when death is in the house, and poverty on the hearthstone, and when there is a storm blinding the one poor small window we have, to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. If I perish I will pray, and perish only here." That is Christianity—not some clever chatter and able controversy about metaphysical points, but noble temper, high behaviour, faultless constancy, invincible fortitude in the hour of trial and in the agony of pain.

Let us give the devil his due. We admit that the devil had but too much reason to believe that his propositions concerning Job were right. He did not speak without book. He had at his girdle many proofs that strong men had fallen under his stroke. The devil, therefore, may have reasoned that if so many had yielded to his ministry, Job, the mightiest and brightest of all, might yield as well. Why might he not? Name his victories—Adam, Cain, Saul, and a hundred others—was he not, therefore, entitled to reason inductively from a very considerable basis and

area of fact that Job would fall too? Where was he wrong? He was wrong in supposing that Adam, Cain, or Saul were godly men, that they had in them the divine and imperishable seed of truth. We altogether exaggerate Adam. What was he? He never was a boy—he never had anybody to speak to up to a considerable period of his life—he had no intellectual friction, no ambition, no opportunity of developing and growing strong by contest and antagonism. He was innocent in a negative way: he had done nothing, and so far he was good enough—but he had to be tried as every man has to be tried, and he fell. And Saul, mighty king but weak in heart, he was not a godly man. The true belief of the sons of God was not in that man, and therefore he fell. He was nominally right—officially right—called outwardly to a certain position, but the seed of God was not in him, and where the seed of God is not found in the heart, no matter what the intelligence may be, or the official influence, the man must fall.

Now the devil came upon a distinctively different man: he assailed Job, who was a perfect man and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil—that is the man to fight, then. If the devil conquers there, he will tear the heavens to pieces, he will break up the throne of God, he will disband the angels, he will scatter the baleful fires of perdition upon the walls and floors of heaven's city. It is, therefore, a great fight—it is a critical battle; everything depends upon the issue, for God has given permission to assail this perfect man, and therefore he has put perfectness of character to the test. No godly man has ultimately fallen. No man in whom is the seed of the divine life can fall finally, for he hath the seed, the life, the Spirit of God abiding in him. Slips enough—alas! too many. Crimes too: see David, see Peter, for appalling proof. Falls daily—though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down. This is what we mean by the final perseverance of the saints: this is what we mean by the triumph of the grace of God in a poor human life. No man knows better than the true child of the Almighty how possible it is to sin in thought, in word, in deed, and to sin daily, yet under all the sin to have an inextinguishable love. Whoever has the true root in him shall be found at last to the praise and glory of God. Is

this a dangerous doctrine to preach? Only because all doctrine is dangerous in some cases and in some circumstances; but this is our joy, our strength, our hope: if we have to be saved because we are always doing the right thing in the right way, accomplishing all our purposes, fulfilling all our duties—we never shall be saved. We are to-day no further than the publican was when he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But we know that, bad as we are, foul with many crimes, deep in the heart is love to Christ, and that inexplicable presence in the soul of divine elements and divine faculties comes up through all the superincumbent guilt, and shines at the top of it an inextinguishable light.

Even in Job himself we have complaint enough, murmuring enough, but in Job we have the true life, and therefore at the last he is more than conqueror. In this case we see really all that the devil can do. What is it in his power, as given by God, to inflict? Bereavement, poverty, pain, humiliation. God has given him these four great dogs to set upon our life: they will bite and gnaw us, but they cannot kill the true child of God. The devil has only one soliloquy: his is really the poorest intellect in the universe. He says, "I have got Job on my hands, what shall I do? Let me see: I will kill his sons and his daughters, and will take away his flocks and his herds, and I will give him boils; I will cover him with loathsome disease, and I will make his life disagreeable, and in every way I will plague him and torment him, and I will do it now." That is the devil's brief programme: he cannot add a line to it if he could fill his hell by the doing of it. Beyond his chain he cannot go. Thou knowest, poor soul, what he can do—bereavement, poverty, pain, humiliation; sit down, count the cost, add it up line by line, item by item, and when thou hast done so, know the sum total, and ask whether the grace of God is sufficient to meet an exigency such as that result brings before thy view.

How afflictions may be made to show God's grace! Let us try to take that view of our difficulties, cares, and sorrows. Great battles may be fought in our little lives: let us therefore every day think that God is fighting out some case along the line

of our experience, and that our behaviour may have something to do with God's own satisfaction. We have been managing our own affairs for many years and have failed: let us resign the administration of our lives and ask the Almighty to work his will in and through us without any suggestion, much less any interposition, from our side. The sorrow, it is bitter: it must have been soaked—soaked in the bitterest aloes that the devil could pluck from the foulest trees; but God's grace is sufficient for us.

What is our special difficulty? Is it a home difficulty? Angels are waiting there, saying, "We have a great fight going on in this house: here is a poor life worried—worried—and we are waiting to see whether the devil's poison or God's grace shall get the better." Is it a business difficulty? Things have got twisted, honest, honourable man though you be, and you cannot disentangle them. God is saying, "I tied the knot—I allowed the devil to tie it—and we are both waiting to see the result of thy fingering." Try, wait, try again: pray, hope—ah, there! a touch did it at last: and the unravelled string lies out before thee, a straight line. Whatever our difficulties or sorrows, a great battle is being fought out in our lives; let us fight it sedulously, daily, constantly, lovingly. We have heard of the patience of Job: may the memory of that patience encourage us to toil on, suffer on; under the consciousness that on the third day, in our degree, we shall be perfected.

## Chapter iii.

### THE TRIAL OF JOB.

**J**OB has made two speeches up to this point. Both of them admirable—more than admirable, touching a point to which imagination can hardly ascend in its moral sublimity:—

“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (i. 20, 21.)

Mark in how short a space the sacred name is mentioned three times. The second speech is equal in religiousness to the first:—

“Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (ii. 10.)

Again the divine name is invoked, and set in its right place, at the very centre of things, upon the very throne of the universe. Job’s first speech was so full of noble submission, and so truly religious and spiritually expressive, that it has become a watchword in the bitterest Christian experience. Who has not said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”? Sometimes there has been hesitation as to the close of the sentence; the voice has not been equally steady throughout the whole enunciation: the sufferer has been able to say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,”—then came a mark of punctuation not found in the books, not known to writers and scholars—a great heart-stave; and after that the words were added with some tremulousness—“blessed be the name of the Lord.” But it is not easy talk. Do not let us imagine that passages like this can be quoted glibly, flippantly, thrown back in easy retort when grief has come and darkened the house and turned the life into a cloud. Words so noble can only be uttered by the heart in its most sacred moments, and

then can hardly be uttered in trumpet tone, but in a stifled voice; yet, notwithstanding the stifling and the sobbing, there is a strong tone that goes right through all the bitterness and the woe, and magnifies God. Where have we found these words? We have found them on our tombstones. Walk up and down the cemetery, and read the dreary literature which is often to be found there, and you will in many instances come upon the words of Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." It has helped many to bear the loss of children: is there any greater grief in all the resources of woe? This passage has wrought miracles in face of the empty cot. Strong men have been able to write even upon the tombstones of little children—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Hardly like the Lord when he so took away. He might have taken away all the flock, and ripped up all the trees in one black night, and the passage could have been quoted with somewhat of exultation; the loss would have been as nothing; so long as the children were about the mourner they would make him forget his loss. What but the grace of God, the Father of the universe, could make a man bear the silence which follows the loss of children? The miracle has been wrought, and the bearing of that silence has not been a stoical answer to a great distress, but an answer full of intelligence—intelligence growing up into consent, and consent that has sometimes said in moments of rapture, "I would not have it otherwise." These are the eternal miracles of grace.

Reckoning the first and second speeches as one deliverance, we now come to another view of Job's case. Job's tongue is loosened, and his words are many. How did he come to speak so much? Because his friends had gathered around him, and after seven days and seven nights of silence, "Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day." What a secret masonry is this of friendship and sympathy. Job would have taken his grief downward, as it were, swallowed it, digested it, and turned it mayhap into some degree of spiritual strength; but the sight of friendship, the touch of sympathy, brought it out of him—evoked, elicited it; and what other form of speech was so true to his **inmost feeling** as the form which is known as malediction? Do

not read the words as a grammarian would read them. Do not parse this grammar! the speech is but one sentence, and it rushes from a soul that is momentarily out of equipoise. Our friends often draw out of us the very worst that is in us. It is one of two things under the mysterious touch of fellowship and sympathy: either we surprise our friends by the dignity and volume of our prayer, or we amaze them by our power of deprecation and malediction. But the Lord's recording angel never sets down the words as terms that are to be grammatically examined, critically scrutinised, as if we had gathered ourselves up for a supreme literary composition, and were prepared to be judged finally by its merits as a literary structure. We best comment upon such words by repeating them,—by studying the probable tone in which they were uttered. We read them best when we read them through our tears. They do us good when we forget the letters but feel all the magic of the grief. Let no wanton man trample upon this sacred ground: no lion should be here, nor any ravenous beast go up hereon; it should not be found here; but the redeemed of the Lord should read this chapter, and they should annotate it with their own experience, and say, Thank God for this man, who in prose-poetry has uttered every thought appropriate to grief, and has given anguish a new costume of expression. To the end of time the wobegone will come to this chapter to find the words which they could never themselves have invented.

Notice how terrible after all is satanic power. Look at Job if you would see how much the devil can under divine permission do to human life: the thief has taken away all the property; the assassin has struck blows of death at unoffending men and women; the malign spirit whose name is Cruelty has carried the trouble from the body into the soul. When the Lord said, "but save his life," he seemed almost to add a drop to the agony rather than assuage the pain. Within a limited sphere, it would seem as if it had been more merciful to say, "Kill him, outright, at one blow; do not prolong the agony; smite him with a blow which means death." The words read, "but save his life,"—save his power of feeling, save his sensibility, save that peculiar nerve which feels everything, and which becomes

either the medium of ecstasy or of agony. But we must not judge the words within limits which our invention could assign; we must wait the issue to know God's meaning in sparing a life out of which the life was taken. Oh! what an irony, what a contradiction in terms—a lifeless life, a life all death! Yet even into the meaning of that mystery some souls can come to-day. Look at the picture, and as you look at it write underneath, This is what the enemy would do in every case. If there is any other picture in human life, do not credit that picture to the devil; if there is a happy little child anywhere, do not say, This is the devil's work; if to-day in all life's black misery there is a man who is momentarily glad, call that gladness a miracle of God: we owe nothing of beauty, music, love, trust, progress to the enemy; every smile is a sunbeam from above; every throb of gladness is communicated from the life of God. Perhaps it was well that in one instance at least we should see the devil at his worst. Such historical instances are needed now and again in any profound and complete perusal of human life. There must be no play-work here. The devil must show what he would do in every case by what he has done in one. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." There be those who ask whether there is any personal devil: why ask such a question? We have already answered that the devilishness, which is obvious, makes the existence of the devil more than a presumption: if there were no devilishness, there would be no devil. Let his work certify his existence.

What miracles may be wrought in human experience! The word "miracles" is not misapplied when we study Job's bitter malediction upon the day of his birth. See how existence is felt to be a burden. Existence was never meant to be a heavy weight. Existence is an idea distinctively God's. "To be"—who could have thought of that but the "I AM"? Existence was meant to be a joy, a hope, a rehearsal of music and service of a quality and range now inconceivable; every nerve was made to tingle with pleasure; every faculty was constructed to bring back to its owner harvests from the field of the universe. But under satanic agency even existence is felt to be an intolerable burden—to be, is to be in hell. "To be"—the verb



of every speech, and without which speech is impossible, is a conjugation of agony. Go through all the moods of this infinite verb, and it is like going through the gamut of grief. Even this miracle can be wrought by Satan. He can turn our every faculty into a heavy calamity. He can so play upon our nerves as to make us feel that feeling is intolerable. Then in the case of Job all the blessed past was forgotten. Not a word is said about the good time he has already enjoyed; there is nothing here of spiritual remembrance: there is no reference to the time when "his substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east" (i. 3). It is easy to forget sunshine. It is no miracle on our part that we obliterate the past in the presence of an immediate woe. We are accustomed to this obliteration. Our hand, with infernal skill, rubs out the record of yesterday's redemption. To this pass would the devil drive us! We should have no memory of light, music, morning, joy, festival: the past would be one great black cold cloud, without a hint of summer through which the soul has passed. Then again, in the case of Job, the spirit of worship was driven out by the spirit of atheism. There is no God in this malediction. Only once is the divine name invoked, and then it is invoked for no spiritual purpose. Yet the same man made all the three speeches. The man who said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord"; "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" uttered the whole of this back monologue. There is but a step between the soul and atheism. We have but to turn round from the altar to face a prayerless state and to forget the living God. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." What is there so easily shaken off as religious usage, spiritual habit, and all that constitutes an outward and public relation to the altar of heaven?

But the speech of Job is full of profound mistakes, and the mistakes are only excusable because they were perpetrated by an unbalanced mind. The eloquent tirade proceeds upon the

greatest misapprehensions. Yet we must be merciful in our judgment, for we ourselves have been unbalanced, and we have not spared the eloquence of folly in the time of loss, bereavement, and great suffering. We may not have made the same speech in one set deliverance, going through it paragraph by paragraph, but if we could gather up all reproaches, murmurings, complainings, which we have uttered, and set them down in order, Job's short chapter would be but a preface to the black volume indited by our atheistic hearts. Job makes the mistake that personal happiness is the test of Providence. Job did not take the larger view. What a different speech he might have made! He might have said, Though I am in these circumstances now, I was not always in them: weeping endureth for a night, joy cometh in the morning: I will not complain of one bitter winter day when I remember all the summer season in which I have sunned myself at the very gate of heaven. Yet he might not have said this; for it lies not within the scope of human strength. We must not expect more even from Christian men than human nature in its best moods can exemplify. They are mocked when they complain, they are taunted when they say their souls are in distress; there are those who stand up and say, Where is now thy God? But "the best of men," as one has quaintly said, "are but men at the best." God himself knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust; he says, They are a wind which cometh for a little time, and then passeth away; their life is like a vapour, curling up into the blue air for one little moment, and then dying off as to visibleness as if it had never been. The Lord knoweth our days, our faculties, our sensibilities, our capacity of suffering, and the judgment must be with him. Then Job committed the mistake of supposing that circumstances are of more consequence than life. If the sun had shone, if the fields and vineyards had returned plentifully, answering the labour of the sower and the planter with great abundance, who knows whether the soul had not gone down in the same equal proportion? It is a hard thing to keep both soul and body at an equal measure. "How hardly"—with what straining—"shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." Who knows what Job might have said if the prosperity had been multiplied sevenfold? "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." Where is the

man who could bear always to swelter under the sun-warmth of prosperity? Where is the man that does not need now and again to be smitten, chastened, almost lacerated, cut in two by God's whip, lest he forget to pray? "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then ye are bastards, and not sons." Let suffering be accounted a seal of sonship, if it come as a test rather than as a penalty. Where a man has justly deserved the suffering, let him not comfort himself with its highest religious meaning, but let him accept it as a just penalty; but where it has overtaken him at the very altar, where it has cut him down when he was on his way to heaven with pure heart and pure lips, then let him say, This is the Lord's doing, and he means to enlarge my manhood, to increase the volume of my being, and to develop his own image and likeness according to the mysteriousness of his own way: blessed be the name of the Lord! But what a temptation there is to find our religion in our circumstances! Who can realise the profound truth that to live is better than to have? We are prone to say that not to have is not to live. What a mystery is life! Men cling to it oftentimes in the extremest pain. Sometimes, indeed, just when the agony is at its most burning heat, they may say, Oh that I could die! but all human history shows that men would rather put up with much misery than give up life. There is a mystery in life; there is a divine element in being, in existing, in having certain faculties and powers. This is the way of the Lord!

Why has Job fallen into this strain? He has omitted the word which made his first speech noble. We have pointed out that in the first speech the word "Lord" occurs three times, and the word Lord never occurs in this speech for purely religious purposes; he would only have God invoked that God might carry out his own feeble prayer for destruction and annihilation; the word "God" is only associated with complaint and murmuring, as, for example, "Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from

above, neither let the light shine upon it" (iii. 4); and again—"Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" (iii. 23). This is not the "Lord" of the first speech; this is but invoking Omnipotence to do a puny miracle: it is not making the Lord a high tower, and an everlasting refuge into which the soul can pass, and where it can for ever be at ease. So we may retain the name of God, and yet have no Lord—living, merciful, and mighty, to whom our souls can flee as to a refuge. It is not enough to use the term God; we must enter into the spirit of its meaning, and find in God not almightiness only but all-mercifulness, all-goodness, all-wisdom. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Yet we must not be hard upon Job, for there have been times in which the best of us has had no heaven, no altar, no Bible, no God. If those times had endured a little longer, our souls had been overwhelmed; but there came a voice from the excellent glory, saying, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." Praised for ever be the name of the delivering God!

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#### NOTE.

**CURSING THE DAY.**—The translation of this passage is wrong, so far as the second clause is concerned, though the margin of our Bibles gives the word "leviathan" instead of "mourning." Rendered literally the text would run—"Let the curse of the day curse *it*—they who are skilled to raise up leviathan." Leviathan is the dragon, an astro-mythological being, which has its place in the heavens. Whether it be the constellation still known by the name "draco," or dragon, or whether it be serpens, or hydra, constellations lying farther south, it is not possible to decide. But the dragon, in ancient popular opinion, had the power to follow the sun and moon, to enfold, or even to swallow them, and thus cause night. Eastern magicians pretended to possess the power of rousing up the dragon to make war upon the sun and moon. Whenever they wished for darkness they had but to curse the day, and hound on the dragon to extinguish for a time the lamp that enlightened the world. Job, in his bitterness, curses the day of his birth, and utters the wish that those who control leviathan would, or could, blot that day and its deeds from the page of history.—*Biblical Things not Generally Known.*

## Chapter iv.

### THE ARGUMENT OF ELIPHAZ.

#### I.

WE must remember that the three comforters who came to Job in the hour of his great grief probably never heard such a speech as that which Job poured forth when after seven days and seven nights he opened his mouth, and cursed his day. Who could reply to such a speech? It may be that Eliphaz was the oldest and the chief of the comforters who came to the suffering patriarch, and therefore he began the conversation. The best comment upon his speech, as indeed upon the whole Book of Job, is not a critical handling of the individual words and sentences, but a paraphrase,—a turning of the grand old controversy into modern forms and present-day applications. It has been customary to sneer at the comforters of Job. Surely there is nothing to sneer at in the great speech of Eliphaz? It might be so read as to appear to be cold, haughty, reproachful, bitter, so as to turn Eliphaz himself into an insufferable Pharisee; but it may also be so read as to disclose in Eliphaz a Christian by anticipation, a philosophical comforter,—a man whose condolence was not the utterance of vapouring sentiment, but the balm of sanctified philosophy and reason. Better read it so. Why should these men have sprung all at once into reproachful critics? They had heard of their friend being impoverished, smitten down, crushed almost to death; they came from various quarters and from long distances to condole with him: what was there to turn them instantly into sourness, and to embitter their spirit? They themselves were so overcome by what they had seen of Job's grief and desolation that for a whole week, in and out, they could not speak a word to him. Strange, passing all credulity, that they should instantly turn themselves into sour critics, and throw stones at the sufferer with pharisaic self-conceit and haughtiness. There is nothing of this kind in the opening

of the conversation. What there may be by-and-by we shall discover. Evidently, however, the case was wholly new to Eliphaz. He was a somewhat ponderous speaker—slow, deliberate, majestic. Whilst he is talking we feel that he is looking round about the case, trying to discern its meaning; for it is wholly novel, and it comes upon him so as to create surprise. He has certain great principles with which he never parts; he has based his life upon certain solid philosophies, and whatever happens he will try everything by these great conclusions. But he talks slowly, and whilst he is talking he is thinking, and whilst he is thinking he is endeavouring to discern something in the case that will be as light upon a mystery, or a key to a stubborn lock. This kind of experience never occurred before: what wonder if some mistakes were made? and what wonder if Job resented even balm and cordial and music in such enfeebled distress? There are agonies which will not bear the utterance of words, even on the part of sympathising friends: well-meant remarks only seem to drive the iron farther into the quivering life. A broad view, therefore, must be taken of the whole situation, and taking that broad view it may happen that we shall change our whole appreciation of this history of Job, and find in it things that we had hitherto left undiscovered.

Eliphaz approaches the suffering man with an "if," and with a double interrogation:—"If we assay, or attempt, to speak, will it add to thy grief? If so, we will still hold our peace. Yet who can withhold or restrain himself from speaking? It is a poor thing to do; still, who can resist the impulse? Understand us: we do not want even to breathe upon thy pain, lest the breathing should increase its agony; yet, if we went home without saying a word, without endeavouring to present another view of the case than that which has darkened upon thy poor life, it would seem as if we were judging thee, and even by silent judgment increasing an intolerable pain. That, O poor suffering friend, is our position. We are afraid to speak, and yet we must speak. We could not have uttered a word if thou hadst not begun to speak thyself, but seeing that thou hast taken to speaking, may we follow thee? It may be that in talking out all these thousand problems relief may come. Let us then

reverently and tenderly betake ourselves to a contemplation of the marvellous drama and tragedy of human life." He begins as if he meant to succeed. He loses nothing by this apparent weakness. It is the beginning of his strength. If he were feebler he would be more furious: it is because he is strong that he can afford to be slow. Then he, with a master's skill, proceeds to a positive declaration:—"Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was fallen, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees" (vv. 3, 4). Sometimes an encouraging word by way of review helps a man to listen, to think, and to pray. All the beneficent past was not forgotten, the comforters knew the former status of Job—the chief man in the land, the prime counsellor; a very fountain of consolation; a man who was asked for and sought for when the whole horizon darkened with thunder. Sometimes we need to be reminded of our better selves. It may do us good to be told that once we were good, brave, wise, tender. A reference of that kind may bring tears to a strong man's eyes, and make him say in his heart—"If you think of me so kindly as all that, God helping me, I will pluck up courage and try again to be as good a man as you have supposed me to be." We lose nothing in our education of men by words of encouragement, seasonably and lovingly spoken. What is appropriate to a sufferer is sometimes appropriate to a prodigal. Tell him that once he was the bravest in the whole set at school, whose face would have gathered up into unutterable scorn at the bare mention of a lie or a thing mean and cowardly; tell him of the days when his name was a charm, a watchword, which had only to be spoken and at once it would symbolise honour, integrity, unselfishness. Let us try that species of medicament when we attempt to heal wounds that are gaping and bleeding, and that mean swift death.

Eliphaz is now entitled to say, "But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled" (v. 5). I see no taunt in these words. The man is rather called to recollection of what he himself would have said to other men, and, in the sixth verse, "Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?"—simply

means, in a broad sense : Recall thine own principles ; hasten to thine own sureties, and strong towers, and refuges ; thou didst point them out with eloquence and unction to other men, now will they not be enough for thyself ? Flee unto them, and accept sanctuary at the hands of God. Then Job was but human, for he did quail under desolations, and losses, and torments, concerning which he had comforted other men. If he live to get out of this, he will comfort them as he never comforted them before. We cannot tell (reading the history as if we had not read it before) what will become of this man ; but if he survive this night—all nights grouped into one darkness—he will speak as he has never spoken before ; he will be but a little lower than the angels.

In the seventh verse Eliphaz appears to be reproachful and bitter, and to suggest that Job had been playing the part of a hypocrite :—“ Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent ? Or where were the righteous cut off.” How easy it would be to spoil that music by one rough tone ; and how difficult it is to lift those words into music such as one strong man could communicate to another, more than his equal once in strength and dignity. But apart from the immediate application to Job’s case, here is a sublime historical testimony. Leaving Job for a moment, here is a challenge to the men who have read history—“ Who ever perished, being innocent ? Or where were the righteous cut off ?” Eliphaz knew of no such case, and Eliphaz, by his own talk, whoever he was, was not a little man, judging by his words, judging by the handling of his language. For the moment forgetting all about inspiration and theology, and taking the speech as a piece of literature, we are bound to say that the speaker is no contemptible person. He, having established his authority to speak by the very manner of his speech, challenges men to say when innocence perished, and where righteousness was cut off. The usual rendering has been : Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent,—if thou hadst been innocent thou wouldst not have been in this condition ; remember, I pray thee, where were the righteous cut off,—if thou hadst been righteous every son and daughter would have been living to-day, and the hills would have been alive with



thy flocks. But who reads it so? Surely not the brave, gentle soul inhabited by the angel of Charity or the angel of Justice. Read it in some other tone; then its meaning will be this: Job, remember who ever perished, being innocent? And we all know the life you have led: you have been eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, a tongue to the dumb, a home to the homeless; you have lived amongst us a spotless character: do not fear, therefore, you will not be driven to destruction: the strife is very heavy; all the winds of heaven seem to have conspired in one furious gust and to be driving thee away, but remember your integrity, and take comfort from the fact that innocence was never utterly destroyed: where were the righteous cut off? Job, there lives not a man who could charge you with unrighteousness; were any witness suborned to tell this lie, we would all rise up against him, and convict him of high treason against the law of truth and righteousness: that being the case, stand upon this grand broad fact, that God will not allow the righteous man to be cut off. Thus what appeared to be a harsh criticism is turned into a noble argument for the consolation and sustenance of a desolated and impoverished soul.

Eliphaz is not afraid to look at the other side of the case:

"Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed" (vv. 8, 9).

Then he falls into the images of the lions, so difficult to put into our language, because we have to help ourselves by epithets to give the full meaning of the metaphor of the lion. But the whole meaning of Eliphaz is this: Wickedness does perish: men that plough iniquity reap the black harvest; when they appear to come to the mountain-top it is that they may be the farther blown away into the infinite void. Thus the great comforter puts both cases before Job, intimating by the last metaphor that it would have gone hard with him if he had been either wanting in innocence or in righteousness; then surely God would have been severe with him, and would not have given him time to curse the day of his birth, but would have crushed him ere he had begun the eloquent malediction. That Job had been spared so far was part of the argument of Eliphaz, that something was to

come out of this trial which at present was not discernible by human foresight.

Now he changes his whole method of speech. He was surely a master in the treatment of human distress. Is there anything finer in all history than what follows from verses 12 to 19? It is only due to the Bible, whoever wrote it, to say that scholars learned in every tongue have confessed the sublimity of this representation of the revelation of God to the human soul. Let us read it:—

“Now a thing was secretly brought to me”—literally, Now a thing was stealthily brought to me; or, more literally still, Now a thing was stolen for me: a spirit put forth, as it were, a felonious hand, and brought something down from heaven to me; this is no idea of my own which I am now about to tell thee, Job; I will show thee a secret or stolen truth—“and mine ear received a little thereof”: there was much more that I could not follow; our words are such poor little vessels they cannot hold all heaven’s rain; my vessels gave out, not God’s revelation, but what I did catch I will hand over to thee, poor sufferer. “In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men”—when distance is nothing, when time is nothing, when we are our winged selves, when we can rise above the earth, and float through the air, or fly across seas, or complete the circuit of the horizon: in the mysteries of the night, when we can believe anything, however unusual, about ourselves; when we are so great, so wise, so far-sighted: when we seem to be in possession of the liberty of creation—“fear came upon me, and trembling”: I was melted, I was dissolved: fear “which made all my bones to shake”: so that this is no bravery, or audacity, or presumption on my part: I received this revelation when I was hardly able to receive it, as to the consciousness of mere strength. This is God’s way. He strikes great Saul to the earth, and when the man lies weakly on his back he brings heaven’s gospel to him. “When I am weak, then am I strong.” Lying there, in the wilderness of the night, in the desolation of darkness, in the weakness of fear, “then a spirit passed before my face”—what are “spirits”? who was the first man to invent the impossible,

to conceive the non-existent? His name should be famous in the world—"the hair of my flesh stood up"—as we ourselves have felt the rising in times of blank fear. The spirit "stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof": if shape it had, that shape had none. "An image was before mine eyes"—a shapeless image—as if the darkness had brought itself into a shapeless shape: "there was silence": I *heard* the silence; my breathing in it was like a tempest—oh that silence!—"and I heard a voice"—a whisper, as if all eternity had humbled itself into the smallest tone—"saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" These are not invented words. They bear their own seal upon them that they are a language from a higher place. There is an odour in them belonging to the gardens of paradise; there is a sublimity in them belonging to the throne of justice; there is an augustness in them as if they were embodied heavens. "Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants,"—for he knows they are but a breath, a vapour, frail even in their strength,—“and his angels”—his firstborn, the beings that began the mystery of finiteness—"he chargeth with imperfection": he calls them short lives, pieces of a whole, atoms of an infinite integer, broken fractions, sparks struck off. "How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?" He treats them according to their capacity; he is not harsh with them even in his judgments; he says they are but of yesterday: what can they know? They are built upon clay: how high can they rise? The poor weak clay would be crushed, and the whole tower would totter and fall.

That is part of the speech of Eliphaz: beginning with a question, proceeding to a tribute, advancing to an argument, and now approaching a great spiritual revelation which is of a moral kind. What if all morality be a revelation? What if we know nothing about justice and purity but what some spirit has "stolen" for us, or stealthily brought to us? What if our boasted talk about ethics and morals and good conduct be but an ungrateful forgetfulness that all we do know we have received from heaven?

How self-testing is revelation, according to the speech of Eliphaz !

“Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker” (v. 17).

This is the test of all messages. Say that a spirit has spoken to you, and we have a right to ask, What message did he deliver? Put that question in regard to this communication from the spirit-land. Say to Eliphaz, If a spirit spoke to thee, tell us his words, and by the words we will judge the quality and character of the spirit. Was it some frivolous communication he made? Let the communication speak for itself—“Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?” When a spirit speaks such words we know that the spirit is of God. To this test we would subject the Bible, always and everywhere. What does it say? What is the burden of its song? What is the purport of its message? If it be a book of frivolous anecdote, of maundering, pointless sentiment, of dream without practical value, of consolation that never touches the broken heart, then the world will be the richer for its banishment from all study; but if the book be self-evidencing, if it speak to us as if it knew us, if it can touch the wound without hurting it, if it can sit up with us all night, however long the night is, and speak to us in a language the heart can understand, then the world will not let it go. Let us have no fear as to the place of the Bible in civilisation and in the world at large: the hearts that owe it everything owe it preservation. Is there anywhere a finer description of human nature than these words—“mortal man?” We have read them so often that by our familiarity with them their originality is destroyed, and the vigour of the conception they represent. “Mortal man”—little, frail, dying man: call him king—you do but decorate death; call him ruler and prince and captain of a thousand hosts—you cannot by your epithets block out the infinite disadvantage of his mortality. Yet here is, to me at least, a sign that immortality was not unknown to the ancient patriarchal mind. It is too often forgotten that to have such a God as is revealed in the Bible is to have immortality. We cannot have the one without having the other. Eliphaz, by his very grip of things,

by his large reasoning, by his seizure and realisation of great things, *is* immortal. There are certain conclusions which follow without being named, without submitting to the degradation of words. Here, somewhere between the days of Abraham and Moses; here, at an assignable point in historic time, is a speaker who, looking over all he has seen of the world's story, calls man—proud man—calls him “mortal man.” This is a humiliation in the one aspect, but an exaltation in the other: the mortal is the fleshly, the visible, the palpable, and the ponderable; but if spirit can speak to man, then man has in him an answering spirit. We have, therefore, here in the sleeping Eliphaz, the disabled man, his bones shaking, his bodily strength all gone,—we have something left that can hold communion with heaven. Whatever that is, it could not die.

A very fine figure is given in the twentieth verse. Speaking of men, whom he has referred to as “mortal,” he says, “They are destroyed from morning to evening,”—literally, They are destroyed betwixt morning and evening. Morning and evening are as two great iron plates—gone is a man when they close upon him! He steps upon no eternities, he does not live from generation to generation, in his little personality,—proud, mighty, royal, rich: he will die somewhere betwixt “morning and evening.” Lord, teach us to know ourselves; Lord, teach us to know ourselves to be but men: so teach us to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place from one generation to another; continue to open the doors of thine eternity to our mortality; and when the eventide comes, in all its shadow and blackness, may this mortality be swallowed up of life!

## PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we are thine, and would be bondmen unto thee, and live evermore in the slavery of love. Sweet the bondage, light the yoke, which thou dost impose : without them we should have no liberty ; thine is a liberty that is glorious. The Son hath made us free, and therefore we are free indeed : how great the freedom of those who live in God, who are one with Christ, who yield themselves to the daily ministry of the Holy Ghost ! We have learned, through unimaginable suffering, to say, Not my will, but thine, be done ; and ever since we gave up our own will we have begun to live in heaven. This is the miracle of God ; this is the triumph of the Cross ; this is the mystery of all spiritual culture. Save us from ourselves ! In every sense we are of yesterday, and know nothing ; thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and there is no secret to thine eyes. O thou who knowest what is best, fittest, wisest for us, undertake our whole life, and set it out in portion and division, and let us feel how good thou art in permitting us to live. May our life be hidden with Christ in God, and thus become a double life, rooted so that it can never be eradicated, established, strengthened, settled, so that it never can be disturbed. Great peace have they that love thy law. Oh that we had hearkened unto thy commandments, and followed in the way of thy precepts ; for then had our peace flowed like a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea. But we are filled with sorrow, our hearts are cast down with self-reproach ; heal us lest we die, save us with daily salvation, that so our faithfulness may be kept alive. Go before us in all the way of life : it is difficult, it is steep, it is too much for our poor frail strength ; but we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us. O thou who art the Son of the Everlasting Father, the Brother of man, the Saviour of the world, come to us, and give us to know how good a thing it is to stand in thy strength, and to believe in thy grace. Amen.

## Chapter v.

### THE ARGUMENT OF ELIPHAZ.

#### II.

HAVING looked at the general aspect of the argument of Eliphaz, let us take up in detail some of the separate sayings, or sentences, which make that argument so remarkable for terseness and brilliance. Were we in these expositions in search of mere texts, we might linger long and profitably over

the speech of Eliphaz. We are not in search of texts, but of a central thought and purpose, used in argument and condolence in reference to a specific case of human suffering. We have heard the reasoning : let us look at some of the diamond words—the precious, memorable, and ever-quotable sentences of this great speaker.

“I have seen the foolish taking root : but suddenly I cursed his habitation” (v. 3).

This is a word of sympathy when the circumstances of Job are fully understood. Job may have been thinking that innocence ended in nothing, that prayer but returned upon the suppliant with new exasperations, showing how life was rich in nothing but disappointment and sorrow. He might have heard that houses in which no prayer was offered were standing foursquare, and that flockmasters who had no conscious God were increasing daily in flocks and herds and all manner of substance. Who can tell what subtle influences may have been operating upon his mind in this matter ? He may have been an Asaph in anticipation. Eliphaz tells him that he has noticed all these things : he has actually seen a foolish family as if it were about to become established by roots ; getting a real solid hold upon the earth, and sucking up its juices, and lifting itself up to the sun as if it would absorb all the light. Eliphaz says, I have seen that, but, in the name of God, and speaking in the spirit and genius of history, knowing as we know facts—not in their occasional aspects, but in their complete significance—I cursed his habitation ; I threw a shadow of disapprobation upon it ; for I said, All this is mere seeming, transient surface work ; there is no root ; this family—prayerless, godless, spiritless—is but growing up to its own destruction. A testimony of this kind could not but be healing to a man whose mind had been unbalanced for the moment. We are sometimes victimised by apparent facts ; we say, How can God live and rule when such and such events transpire ? Are not the events to be regarded as arguments ? and do not all the arguments point to the impossibility of a reigning and loving God ? Then how bewildered the mind is ; how it spins and whirls, and cannot steady itself, or see anything as it really is ! In such hours of bewilderment and distress we need some strong man, with round, clear, sympathetic voice, to tell

us that he sees more clearly than we do, that the old foundations of things all remain, and that history is not a succession of accidents, but the outworking of a sublime philosophy, the end of which is the coronation of righteousness, the enthronement of purity and nobleness. Such comforters are sent to us as from the very presence of God.

Yet Eliphaz will be complete in his statement. Job must have the whole case presented to him, and not be misled by mere aspects or sections of the troubled reality:—

“Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (vv. 6, 7).

A remarkable thing to have been said by a man who lived, as we have seen, somewhere between Abraham and Moses; in a time far, far away, when man, as we know him, was comparatively young—even then this sad philosophy had become established. “As the sparks fly upward” is a sentence which is variously read. We read it as simply metaphorical: as certainly as sparks fly off, fly upward, so certainly is man born unto trouble. If that is not a fact, you must have the evidence at hand. Why allow a statement like this to be preached from every pulpit, to be declared in every family, to be published in every form of Christian literature, if you have evidence in your possession the production of which would upset this calumny against heaven? But if man is born unto trouble, this is not only a fact; if it were merely a fact it might be dismissed as such, but in addition to being a fact it must be a doctrine: it is not a solitary circumstance, how unique soever in its individuality, it is full of pregnant and far-reaching suggestion; it compels the mind to ask direct and searching questions. Is it true that man is born unto trouble? Is there no happy man to stand up and say, No, that is a mistake; trouble I have had none; my days have been days of laughter and mirthfulness and festival: a summer-life has been mine, without one touch or breath or chill of cruel winter? There is no mention of trouble in what we have in the Bible as an account of the creation of man. There is a communing as between invisible and omnipotent persons. The communing runs after this fashion:



Let us make man in our own image and in our own likeness. Not a word about trouble. There was no intended sorrow in the purpose of the Creator. Then something must have happened. What has happened? Account for it as we may, there is no explanation of this trouble, its personality and universality and permanence, so complete, so direct, so rational, as that which is given in Holy Scripture. If man is born unto trouble, there must be some collateral evidence of it, as well as the direct proof of actual and positive suffering. Trouble means weakness as well as pain. When a man is in trouble he is not his full self; he is but half a man, or less than half: his faculties are clouded, his hands have lost their cunning, his whole system feels the influence of the tremendous stroke which has involved his life in trouble. As a matter of fact, have we such collateral evidence? Is man strong completely anywhere? Or vary the question: Is there any point at which man has not felt the influence of trouble, the enfeeblement of sorrow? Look at his works. He never built a house that time did not unroof, that time did not take down again. Poor man! Has he not skill enough to build a house that shall defy old time—ruinous, cruel time? Man never built a ship that God's great sea could not swallow up like a pebble. Poor man! Something must have happened to him at some time, or surely he could have made at least one vessel that would have defied all possibilities, and tempest, and stress of weather? Man never made a chronometer that keeps pace with the sun—exactly, astronomically, punctually; his poor chronometer is always falling out of beat, is always in need of survey and repair! Whatever man does—what he builds, what he writes, what he invents—we find upon it the seal of trouble, which is weakness, weakness which is sin, sin which has to be accounted for. When man writes his book he finds that he has omitted all the important matter. When man has completed his parliamentary statutes he finds that they admit of being interpreted in a thousand conflicting ways. Poor man! He dips his pen in weakness; he represents his story in one long spell of sorrow. If this be not so, produce the evidence. How glad we should be to find a man who had discovered a Bible which said man was not born unto trouble; who would tell us that he had found

a nation all young, all happy, all moving and living in the spirit of music. Until that nation is discovered we abide in the rock of our own experience, we stand in the sanctuary of what we ourselves have known and felt and handled. What man calls his progress is but a series of self-amendments. Why not face these facts, and search into their origin? If it be science to take some little stone back in its geological history until it is discovered as to its origin, it cannot surely be other than a greater science to take back some human emotion, some sad, awful human experience, and trace it to the starting-point.

Then Eliphaz changes the point of view. Speaking of God he says:—

“He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. . . . They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night” (vv. 12-14).

So the Bible is not only rich in spiritual testimony of what may be called a religious or Christian kind; it writes the history of the wicked as graphically as it writes the history of the godly. Eliphaz acknowledges the presence in human life of craftiness, cunning, inventiveness of an evil kind, counsel that is not ennobled by righteousness or made beautiful by charity. But he says he has seen all the pranks and antics of this craft, he has watched its way, and it has always come to ruin, and not to ruin of a dignified kind, but to ruin clothed with humiliation. If this be otherwise, again we utter the challenge, Produce the evidence. We shall take no refuge on superstitious altars and sanctuaries, saying, We are enclosed within these walls and cannot make any reply to you. We will stand right out upon the roof of the sanctuary, to be shot at by any man who can smite us from the eminence; or we will come out at the front door of the sanctuary, and say, If you have evidence contrary to that which we have produced, we only await its production on your part. This evidence is historically old; this is no new invention of modern theologians; the very words as used by Eliphaz are hoary with antiquity,—that is to say, they were not new even in his remote day, but even then they were the words of old history—venerable, unanswerable.

Now look at the view of God presented in the argument of Eliphaz. We have seen how he represents God as holy. Having discussed the question, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?" now consider God's approachableness:

"I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause" (v. 8).

In this instance the pronoun "I" is to be read with emphasis; that is not always the case; frequently, indeed, an emphasis is laid upon the "I" which destroys the music of the passage; but in this case Eliphaz ventures to put himself forward as a personal example of what he would do under given circumstances. We are to consider Eliphaz, therefore, as laying a great emphasis upon this opening word in the eighth verse—"I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause." Thus we are encouraged by another man's bravery. If he would but tell us explicitly what he would do, we might be impelled graciously to attempt the experiment as he has proposed it. This is what we want everywhere—a man who will boldly tell us what he would do under the stress and agony of life. He must not draw pictures, or suggest what other men should do, but should himself incarnate the necessity, and be what he would have others be. But has Eliphaz any ground upon which to base this decision of his with regard to coming before God? He says he has, for he describes God as one "which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number" (v. 9). But we may be repelled by dignity. The very majesty of God may overwhelm and discourage us. We would rather go to our own poor old mother than go to some god clothed only with the terribleness of universal government, conspicuous only for dazzling and unapproachable majesty. Eliphaz knew that; so he supplied the very element which we require—"who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields" (v. 10). Judge God by what he does in nature: let his showers of rain be accepted as a revelation of his quality; let his shepherdliness among the flocks be taken as the first chapter in which he reveals his real personality: watch the orchards in the springtime, rich with blossom, and see in all the many colours of that magical writing the Bible of nature. He who cares for oxen cares for men. He without

whom the sparrow cannot fall to the ground numbers the hairs of the heads of men. Reason upwards. Do not stop arbitrarily, saying, Here is wisdom, here is goodness, here is even what men call grace; but here we will draw a line. The patriarchs, the prophets, the psalmists, Christ and the apostles, all say, Carry on the argument fearlessly; then you will come to this sublime conclusion: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" If men, then God; if nature, then grace; if providence, then redemption: "The meanest flower that blows" has in it the mystery of the redeeming cross. What we want is the piercing eye, the seeing heart, the pure spirit.

But is there no tenderness in Eliphaz? We have been struck by his sublimity, by his mental nobleness, and by his gift in the utterance of august and overwhelming words and images; but a little tenderness would now soften the great argument and make us glad. Nowhere in all Scripture is there an example of purer tenderness than is given in the conclusion of the speech of Eliphaz. We find the proof from verses 17-26. "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." That is a new tone. Before, we had never associated happiness with correction. The general impression is that correction means misery, and that correction was sent to chastise sin: to what human heart has it ever occurred that loss, pain, disease, helplessness were elements, somehow, in the marvellous chemistry which expresses its results in happiness? "Therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore, and bindeth up:" trace the disease and the cure to the same great power; "he woundeth, and his hands make whole." These wounds are other than satanic; they were incidentally and secondarily inflicted by another hand; but taken in all their meaning, and in all their fulness, there cannot be evil in the city without the Lord having a hand in it, doing it by permission or directly,—a mystery not to be explained with lame words, mocking, self-convicting words, but to be felt as benedictions are felt, and as the sublimest philosophies compel the assent of the mind. "He shall deliver thee in six troubles:" will he stop there? Can he not go

beyond six?—"Yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee." These were bold words to be uttered to man who was lying flat on the ground, without being able to move a hand in his own deliverance. But it is just under such circumstances that gospels are seen to be what they are: it is in the darkness that we see the stars; it is when we are nothing that God is all: the cross without the sin would have been an irony not to be tolerated by reason or to be trusted by faith: "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us;" it was a propitiation, an answer to a reality, a medicament for a fatal disease.

Eliphaz numbers the foes that can assault men. He calls one Famine—"In famine he shall redeem thee from death, and in war from the power of the sword" (v. 20). He names a third Slander—"Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh" (v. 21). All nature shall be thy friend: "thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee" (v. 23). All nature is the friend of him who is the friend of God. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera, but the stones of the field, and the beasts thereof, were in league with the man who suffered with resignation, and accepted his chastisement even with some degree of suppressed thankfulness. Yes, there is a community of things; an organic federacy. Even the beasts of the field shall be quiet in the presence of the man who can really pray: he shall be known in the forest, he shall be recognised on the sea. He has not yet come but in one personality,—namely, the personality of the Son of God; but the time is coming when humanity, now redeemed, then educated by many a providence and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, shall trample upon the serpent and the adder, and hold the lion at bay. This shall be the result of things! Saints shall judge the world, and holy men shall be a little lower than God.

And Job was comforted with the assurance that his flocks and herds would be all right in the end:—

"And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin" (v. 24).

That is an extraordinary expression, but literally it is full of

beauty. It should be read thus : And thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt miss nothing : everything will be there, sons and daughters, and houses and lands, and flocks and possessions and riches : seek thou first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto thee, and thou shalt miss nothing. That is a figure under which sin is often represented in the Bible. Sin misses the mark. Sin aims but never hits. Using the word in its literal sense, therefore, Eliphaz says : Thou shalt visit thine habitation, and shalt miss nothing ; and then as to the end—" Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season " (v. 26). Oh ! he was poet as well as saint ; he was philosopher, and therefore comforter ; he had a great reserve of mental power, and therefore his fingers were tipped with delicacy, and what wound he touched he left without exasperation. " Like as a shock of corn cometh in,"—literally, Like as a shock of corn cometh up. The threshing-floors were on high, and the shocks of corn were taken up to the high threshing-floors, there to be used with a view to being turned into bread : so, Job, thou shalt come up to God's threshing-floor in due time. We must all die : the question is, How shall we die ? We cannot escape that fate. There is no discharge in that war. When the enemy has mocked us, taunted us at the altar, smitten us in the face, laughed at the Bible, scorned us with bitter scorning, what has he done ? He has left every great fact and tragedy of life untouched, unaccounted for. He cannot save us from the hour and article of death. It is, therefore, a serious question, How shall we meet that great event ? It cometh alike to all,—sometimes without notice, often suddenly : the Judge standeth at the door. Sad it will be after all if we have no answer to that black guest but the laugh of the mocker, and the jibe of him who made unseasonable merriment. Let me die the death of the righteous ; let my last end be like his. As a rational man, having seen somewhat of life, and read somewhat of history, and considered somewhat the ways of men, and having given a whole lifetime to the study of the Book of God, I wish to put it on record, here and now, that I know of no influence that can so sustain the spirit, so illumine the last darkness, as the presence of the Son of man, Immanuel, God with us !

## Chapters vi., vii.

### JOB'S ANSWER TO ELIPHAZ.

**T**HE speech of Eliphaz, which we have already considered, was not the kind of speech to be answered off-handedly.

We have been struck by its nobleness and sublimity, its fulness of wisdom ; and, indeed, we have not seen any reason, such as Job seems to have seen, for denying to that great speech the merit of sympathy. Why, then, does Job break out into these lamentations ? The reason appears to be obvious. We must come upon grief in one of two ways, and Job seems to have come upon grief in a way that is to be deprecated. He came upon it late in life. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." Observe how Job comes before us—a master, a chief, a very prince, a great flockmaster, and in possession of all comforts, privileges, and enjoyments usually accounted essential to solid prosperity and positive and genuine comfort. Grief must tell heavily whenever it comes upon a man in such a condition. This accounts for his lamentation, and whine, and long-drawn threnody. He was not accustomed to it. Some men have been born into trouble, and they have become acclimatised ; it has become to them a kind of native condition, and its utterances have been familiar as the tongue of nativity. Blessed are they who come upon grief in that method. Such a method appears to be the method of real mercy. Sad is it, or must it be, to begin life with both hands full, with estate upon estate, with luxury upon luxury, so that the poor little world can give nothing more ! When grief strikes a child born under the disadvantage of riches, it must make him quail—it must be hard upon him. Grief must come. The question would seem to be, When ? or, How ? Come it will. The devil allows no solitary life to pass upward into heaven without fighting its way at some point or other. It would seem to me as if the suggestion that

Job came upon grief late in life was a kind of key to many utterances of suffering, and many questions as to the reality and beneficence of God's government. Yet, what is to be done? No doubt there is a practical difficulty. Who can help being born into riches? Not the child. The responsibility, then, is with the father. What do you want with everything? When are you going to stop the self-disappointing process of acquisition? You think it kind to lay up whole thousands for the boy. In your cruel kindness you start him with velvet. Secretly or openly, you are proud of him as you see him clothed from head to foot, quite daintily, almost in an æsthetic style, without a sign on his little hands of ever having earned one solitary morsel of bread. You call him beautiful; you draw attention to his form and air and whole mien, and inwardly chuckle over the lad's prospects. Better he had been born in the workhouse! And you are to blame! *You* are the fool! But grief must come. You cannot roof it out with slates and tiles, nor keep it at bay with stone walls. Let us say, again and again, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth"; and you know it, because you bore the yoke in your youth. Your father, or grandfather, was quite in a small way of business: but oh, how you enjoyed the bread! You had to run an errand before breakfast, and came back with an appetite,—your boy comes down late, without any soul for his food; and you think him not well, and call in aid, and elicit neighbourly sympathy! Oh, how unwise! How untrue to the system of things which God has established in his universe! Make your acquaintance with a man who has seven sons, three daughters, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she asses, and a very great household; and you might well say, What a field there is for the devil to try temptation in! Yet how to obviate the difficulty is certainly a question not easily answered. We can but approach the possible solution of the problem little by little, ordering everything in a spirit of discipline, without ever touching the meanness of oppression. It is one thing to be Job, and another to read his book. We do not read it well. We read it as if it had all been done with in an hour or two; whereas the book ought to be spaced out almost like the first chapter of Genesis. We have had occasion to say



that the first chapter of Genesis would create less confusion if we inserted a millennium now and then—if we punctuated it with a myriad ages here and there. But we rush through it. Quite in a hot gallop we finish the Book of Job. Who can understand such a dramatic history so reading it? Why not remember that seven days and seven nights elapsed before a word was spoken by Eliphaz, after he had seen that the grief of Job was very great? Observe where the period of silence comes in; and consider the thought that it is possible that days and nights may have elapsed as between the various speeches, setting them back in time, giving them an opportunity for taking upon themselves the right atmosphere and colour, and affording the speakers also an opportunity of uttering their grief with appropriate gesture and accent. The speeches were punctuated with sobs. The sentences were never uttered flippantly, but were drawn out as is the manner of sorrow, or were ejected, thrown out, with a jerk and hurry characteristic of some moods of grief. Let us allow, then, that the speech of Eliphaz had been uttered, and had lain as it were some time in the mind of Job. Grief delights in monologue. Job seems scarcely to lay himself down mentally upon the line adopted by Eliphaz. It is most difficult to find the central line of Job's speech, and yet that very difficulty would seem to show the reality of his grief, the tumult of his ungovernable emotion. Too much logic would have spoiled the grief. Reasoning there is, but it comes and goes; it changes its tone—now hardly like reason in its logical form; now a wave, an outburst of heart-sorrow; and then coming firmly down upon realities it strikes the facts of life as the trained fingers of the player might strike a chord of music.

Note how interrogative is the tone of Job's speech, and found an argument upon its interrogativeness. More than twenty questions occur in Job's reply. He was great, as grief often is, in interrogation. What do these marks of interrogation mean? They almost illustrate the speech; for he who asks questions after this fashion is as a man groping his way in darkness. A blind man's staff is always asking questions. You never saw a blind man put out his hand but that hand was really in the form of an interrogation, saying, in its wavering and quest, Where

am I? What is this? What is my position now? Am I far from home? Do I come near a friend? The great speeches of Demosthenes have been noted for their interrogation; the marks of interrogation stand among the sentences like so many spears, swords, or implements of war; for there was battle in every question. It would appear as if grief, too, also took kindly to the interrogative form of eloquence. Job is asking, Are the old foundations still here? things have surely been changed in the night-time, for I am unaccustomed to what is now round about me: is the sky torn down? does the sun still rise? does the sun still set? is old sweet mother nature still busy getting the table ready for her hungry children? or has everything changed since I have passed into this trance of sorrow? All this is natural. It is not mere eloquence. It is eloquence coloured with grief; eloquence ennobled by pain. The great words might be read as a mere school exercise; whereas they ought to be read by shattered men, who can annotate every sentence by a corresponding record in their own experience. Is it not what men do just now in times of change and great stress and fear? They ask one another questions; they elevate commonplaces into highly-accentuated inquiries; things that have been perfectly familiar to them now startle them into questioning and wonder, because surely since they themselves have been so unbalanced, caught in so tremendous an uproar and tumult, things must have been decentrailed, or somehow thrown out of equipoise and shape.

Notice how many misunderstandings there are in this speech of the suffering man:—

“Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea” (vi. 2, 3).

Who ever thought that *his* grief was exactly comprehended by his friends? Job makes much of the grief with which a thousand other men had been familiar all their lives. When the rich man loses any money, what an outcry there is in his house! When the poor man loses something, he says—As usual! well, we must hope that to-morrow will be brighter than to-day! But let a great, prosperous, space-filling rich man lose any money, and he loses a whole night's sleep immediately after it; he says, “Oh

that my grief were thoroughly weighed!" He likes "thorough" work when the work is applied to sympathising with him. So we misunderstand our friends; then we misunderstand our pain:—

"Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort" (vi. 8-10).

We do not know that our pain is really working out for us, if we truly accept it, the highest estate and effect of spiritual education. No man can enjoy life who has not had at least one glimpse of death. What can enjoy food so keenly as hunger? Who knows the value of money so well as he who has none, or has to work hardily for every piece of money that he gains? Such is the mystery of pain in human education. Have not men sometimes said: It was worth while to be sick, so truly have we enjoyed health after the period of disablement and suffering? Pain cannot be judged during its own process. From some pictures we must stand at a certain distance in order to see them in proper focus, and get upon them interpreting and illuminating lights. It is sympathetically so with pain. The pain that tears us now like a sharp instrument, working agony in the flesh, will show its whole meaning to-morrow, or on the third day—God's resurrection day, and day of culmination and perfecting. "Let patience have her perfect work."

Job not only misunderstood his friends and misunderstood his pain, he misunderstood all men, and the whole system and scheme of things. He said:—

"My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and where-in the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish. The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them" (vi. 15-19).

That is to say, the caravan went in the direction of the old stream, and the drivers and owners of the caravan said, "We shall find water here: here we always pause to recover ourselves at the hospitable brook;" and, lo, the water is all dried up, and they

turn away with the bitter feeling of having been disappointed and mocked. So are all men coloured by their own immediate feelings. Given a state of personal happiness, real buoyancy of soul; and then even enemies take upon themselves some colour of friendship, or at least of lessened hostility. How easy it is for the buoyant and prosperous man to jibe the suffering and the weak, to rally them on their folly and unmanliness, and to call upon them to stand up and be men! Buoyancy is not always wisdom. A man must himself be in suffering really to sympathise with the suffering of other men. There are agonies out of which men cannot be rallied or laughed. There are experiences which suggest silence; and then prayer. We must study our case by itself, and adapt the medicament to the disease.

How suffering not rightly accepted, or not rightly understood, colours and perverts the whole thought and service of life! Job said:—

“Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling? As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work: so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me” (vii. 1-3).

Thus we begin to think life not worth living. It is such a little thing it is hardly worth our attention; there is not room enough in it for any great heaven. Assuming that God is willing to give us great blessings, we have not a vessel large enough to contain a mouthful of heaven's better rain: the whole scheme of life is a mistake, the grave is magnified and becomes the chief object visible upon the landscape which the traveller must pause over. So much depends upon our mental mood, or our spiritual condition: hence the need of our being braced up, fired, made strong; hence our need of such tonics as give us masculine energy, virule strength, pith that can bear the day's burden as if it were but a speck of dust. We are what we really are in our heart and mind. A man's life, in every sense, consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. What is his spirit? What is his uppermost feeling with regard to Time, Eternity, Truth, Destiny, Life, God? Keep the soul right, and it will rule the body. Keep the spirit pure and thankful, and

it will break the seven loaves into a feast for thousands, and will satisfy the desires of a great host. But if we are working for the outward, then shall we have bitterness and disappointment within; if we are working for the spiritual, and growing in grace—which means growing in identity with God and Christ; growing in the very spirit of knowledge, wisdom, purity, and truthfulness—then all the outward will be governed and controlled by the supreme astronomic force, as all the worlds are held in leash by the master-hand—the great central solar force.

So we return to our starting-point, that sorrow must come. It is difficult for the young to believe this. The young have had but a transient ache or pain, which could be laughed off, so superficial was it. So when preachers talk of days that are nights, and summers that are made cold by unforgotten or fast-approaching winters, the young suppose the preachers are always moaning, and the church is but a painted grave, and it is better to be in the lighted theatre and in the place of entertainment, where men laugh wildly by the hour and take hold of life with a light and easy touch. The preachers must bear that criticism, committing themselves to time for the confirmation of their words, which indicate the burden, stress, and the weariness of life. Life has been one continual grief. Death soon came into the house, and made havoc at the fireside. Poverty was a frequent visitor at the old homestead—lean, wrinkled, husky-voiced poverty, without a gleam of sunlight on its weird face, without a tone of music in its exhausted voice; want painted upon every feature, necessity embodied in every action and attitude: then every enterprise failed; the letter that was to have brought back the golden answer was either never received or never answered. Now the natural issue of sorrow is gloom, dejection, despair of life. To this end will sorrow bring every man who yields himself to it. Suffering will pluck every flower, destroy every sign of beauty, put back the dawn, and lengthen the black night. This is what sorrow, unblest, must always do. It will blind the eye with tears; it will suffocate the throat with sobs; it will enfeeble the very hand when it is put out to make another effort at self-restoration. But has it come to this, that sorrow must be so received and yielded to? Is there any way by which even

sorrow can be turned into joy? The Bible discloses such a way. The Bible never shrinks from telling us that there is grief in the world, and that that grief can be accounted for on moral principles. The Bible measures the grief: never lessens it, never makes light of it, never tells men to shake themselves from the touch and tyranny of grief by some merely human effort; the Bible says, The grief must be recognised: it is the black child of black sin; it is God's way of showing his displeasure; but even sorrow, whether it come in the form of penalty or come simply as a test, with a view to the chastening of the man's heart and life, can be sanctified and turned into a blessing. Any book which so speaks deserves the confidence of men who know the weight and bitterness of suffering. Look at the old family Bible, and observe where it is thumbed most. Have we not said before that we can almost tell the character of the household from the finger-marks upon the old family Bible? Did we not once say, Turn to the twenty-third Psalm, and see how that has been treated? Ah! there how well thumbed it is! There has been sorrow in this house. Turn to the fourteenth chapter of John, and see whether that chapter is written upon a page unstained by human touch; and behold how all the margin seems to be impressed as by fingers that were in quest of heaven's best consolations! Do not come to the Bible only for condolence and sympathy; come to it for instruction, inspiration, and then you may come to it for consolation, sympathy, tenderest comfort—for the very dew of the morning, for the very balm of heaven, for the very touch of Christ. We must not make a convenience of the Bible, coming to it only when we are in sore straits; we must make a friend of it—a great teacher. God's statutes should be our songs in the house of our pilgrimage, and if we are faithful at Sinai we shall be welcomed at the Mount of Beatitudes. If we have struggled well as faithful servants there will not be wanting at last the welcome which begins and means all the reward of heaven.

## Chapter viii.

### THE FIRST SPEECH OF BILDAD.

CONSIDERING the whole case, we must never forget the exact condition in which the three comforters found Job himself. This is not a merely speculative discussion, all the men being upon equal terms, and all enjoying the luxury of intellectual vitality, and the delight of talking over subjects which have no practical bearing: one of the men is hardly alive. What was his condition? Children all dead, flocks destroyed, camels carried away, servants slain by the edge of the sword, and Job smitten "with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes." A man in such circumstances is not likely to enjoy any exercise in merely intellectual gymnastics. The other men were simply lookers-on; they did not feel the pain. It is one thing to observe a sufferer, and quite another to be that sufferer himself. The words of the sufferer cause him suffering; they come a long way, they struggle forward from the very centre of the heart; they are coloured with blood; they are accentuated with agony. Keeping this fact in view, we must make large allowances for the kind of utterance in which Job indulged. Bildad had but to answer—Job had to suffer. They who view grief in the abstract, they who have only to lecture grief or account for it, are not themselves likely to speak as he will speak in whose soul the iron is far thrust. We may be tempted to lecture Job. The only thing that can ever make us understand the Book of Job is to be in something like the situation of Job himself. We cannot preach ourselves into the meaning: we must die into it.

Bildad charges Job with running off into mere talk:—

"How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?" (v. 2).

To Bildad it was mere rhetoric. To those who are not in keenest—that is to say, most vital—sympathy with the sufferer, all that the sufferer may say will be of the nature of mere talk—a rhetorical evaporation—a kind of suicide in eloquence. So it must ever be in all kinds of suffering. If a speaker be charged with a message which he must deliver, being perfectly aware that every word will bring back insult, sneer, disbelief, in proportion as he feels the pain of his mission will he be charged with being a mere verbal craftsman, having skill in vocal tricks, and pleasing himself with trope and image and appeal. The kind of man represented by Bildad lives in all ages, listens to all speakers, treats all occasions in the same high and uncondescending manner. What is Bildad wanting in? He is wanting in sympathy, wherever you find him. Not that he is without feeling. A man may have tears in his eyes, and yet have no sympathy in his heart, because the tears may relate to circumstances, accidents, transient phases of the event, and the soul may be all the while out of sympathy with the central meaning, the inner and divine suggestion.

Bildad copied Eliphaz. We find in him precisely the same lofty theological tone, the same design always to appeal to the justice of God—the immeasurable righteousness as against the measurable sufferer. The tone of the third verse is surely not without nobleness:—"Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" As much as to say, If he does so in this instance, it is the first time he ever did it. A man's words may be right, and yet the tone in which he speaks them may fail to carry the words to the mark to which they are addressed. We may even so challenge the righteousness of God as to make men feel its burdensomeness. We cannot hurl the whole of the righteousness of God against a man in one great thunder-shock without blowing out his feeble prayer and discouraging him in his prostrate attitude. Even righteousness must be accommodated to human weakness when the approach of it is intended to be not a threatening but a gospel. Then there are hours in which we cannot bear to hear about righteousness, law; the words themselves are tyrannous, overwhelming: we want to hear about pity, tenderness, hope; and, blessed be God, pity,



tenderness, and hope may be so preached as still to involve all that is grandest and most enduring in the divine righteousness. We are not preaching righteousness when we are exercising severity. Austerity is but one form of the law. When the law comes to be properly read by its writer, it will be so read as to discover in it mercy, and hope, and pity, and love.

Job's two comforters—for only two have spoken up to this point—find the difficulty of applying general principles to particular cases. But it is in the application of such principles to such cases that true spiritual skill is discovered. We should frighten the world by preaching righteousness only. We should discourage mankind by being too grandiloquent upon the unchangeableness of mere law. Bildad had seized the idea that God was righteous, God was just, whatever God did was beyond all challenge and criticism, and with this weapon he smote the prostrate patriarch. His principle was right; his application of it was defective. To tell the world that railway accidents are but as one to a million is to preach a very comfortable doctrine, but it is not at all comfortable to the friends of the one man who was killed. We must, therefore, be very careful how we apply general statistics to individual sufferers. Who would think of going to a family the head of which had been killed in a railway accident to preach the doctrine that after all such catastrophes occur very rarely, and that according to statistical authority they only occur as one to a million of the population? What a comforting doctrine to the family that has been bereaved! Better keep out of view the statistical phase. Better proceed upon another line altogether. Better say,—How sad the case is; how pitiful the whole position in which you as a bereaved family are placed! But let us see what we can of brightness even in this distress: the woe is very great; the loss is, humanly speaking, irreparable, but even here perhaps, by patient waiting, we may discover some alleviating circumstance, or some thought that leads in the direction of palliation and assuagement of the heart-pain. **A** tone of that kind may reach the bereaved heart, but some grand statistical demonstration that accidents occur but very seldom would only aggravate the suffering it was clumsily intended to mitigate.

Bildad will put the case with some discernment, but may perhaps lose himself in the very nicety of his discrimination. In the ministry of sympathy we must not be too discerning, discriminate, critical, and hair-splitting. Bildad ventures upon very delicate ground in the fourth verse:—

“If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression.”

Well, even there Bildad might shelter himself behind Job: for did not Job say in the first instance, and may he not have given some indication of it to his friends, that “it may be that my sons have sinned”? They were at all events taken away. Bildad assumes that they may have been taken away on account of their transgression. But, he would say, that is over; all that is past, and beyond recall: it may be as thou hast thought in thine heart that thy children have sinned, and that God has punished them in the very midst of their iniquity. Now he comes to lay the emphasis upon the word “thou,” in the fifth verse:—“If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes.” As a general rule, such a word as “thou” is rather to be slurred than pronounced with weight of emphasis or sharpness of accent. It is but a secondary word in a sentence, and is to be spoken trippingly by the tongue, and almost lost in the vocal exercise; but as spoken in the argument of Bildad, the word “thou” is the emphatic word in the sentence, and is meant to balance the word “children” in the first part of the argument: If thy children have sinned and been taken away, who can help it? The circumstance is beyond all amendment and reparation; but if thou—still a living man—if thou wouldest seek unto God, if thou wert pure and upright, the case might be wholly different. So Bildad fixes his eyes upon the point of hope. He says, perhaps not flippantly,—The children are gone, why mourn over their graves? Weeping cannot recall them; it is not in human power to recover those that are dead; therefore betake thyself to the point of hope; that point of hope is in thyself,—if thou wouldest seek unto God, if thou wert pure and upright;—it is from that point that the new departure must begin. Bildad’s speech is in these respects full of wisdom. He points Job in the right direction. “If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes.”

We always fall back upon God in grief. The word "God" comes easily into our speech in the dark and wintry night-time of desolation, bereavement, solitude. Even atheists negatively pray. There are hours when we are not afraid to speak the name of God. Men who would never mention it in business, or on the highways of life, who would never dream of uttering it whilst they were driving in the golden chariot of abundance and prosperity, may whine it out to doctor, or nurse, or ghostly ministrant, in the black night-time of conscious self-helplessness. Is God, then, not more than what is known as righteous? Are not his eyes full of tears? Is not the mighty hand capable of expressing itself in softest touch? If men have taken liberties with God, what if God himself may be partly accountable for this? If he had struck the universe with a lightning-rod every time it sinned, the universe might not have trifled with him; if for every iniquity there had been an instantaneous and everlasting hell, creation might have been held upon its good behaviour. But good behaviour founded upon a philosophy of fear is only vice in a fit of dejection.

Bildad instructs Job in the right tone. In the fifth verse he uses the word "supplication." That English word does not give the full meaning of the speaker. In the word which Bildad used there was a red line of blood,—there was a cry for mercy, there was a confession of error, there was a music of contrition. Job was not called to write out a legal document, to go into court and take his stand upon it, and to argue his case before the bar of the Almighty, with the dignity of an injured man, and with the eloquence of one who was in a righteous passion; he was called upon to fall down, to fasten his eyes in the earth, to be the publican of the gospel before the time, to say, God be merciful to me a sinner! Thus, it is not enough to come in the right direction—namely, to God—we must come in the right tone, with the right quality of words; we must bring with us not argument, defence, and the spirit of exultation, but weakness, self-renunciation, self-helplessness, and trust in the living God. He is merciful as well as just.

Bildad then assures Job of a grand issue:—If thou wilt do

this, "though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase" (v. 7). All beginnings are small. When does God ever begin at the supreme end or at the point of culmination? The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. The coming of the day is a little whitening of the east, but that little dawn means that the whole arch of heaven shall presently be bright with ineffable glory. Do not judge by the beginning. Rather have fear of any beginning that is large, overwhelming. Better begin low, and proceed little by little, to the whole height of God's generous purpose.

Now in his further speech Bildad is philosophical and strong:—

"For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (for we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow;) shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart?" (vv. 8-10).

This argument has often been misunderstood. It has been supposed that in the ninth verse Bildad was showing the emptiness and worthlessness of all human knowledge; the word "we" has been supposed to include the whole of the human race; then the text would read: For all men—whenever they have lived, whoever they may be—all men are but of yesterday, and know nothing. That may be in a sense true, but it was not the truth spoken by Bildad. The speaker was meaning that the men who were then waiting upon Job in a visit of sympathy were but moderns, contemporaries, children of yesterday; whatever they might say would have upon it the weakness of novelty. Bildad therefore says, Take no account of us, we are hardly born; but search back in history, a century, ten centuries; get back as far as you can, and let the days that are venerable teach thee. It is marvellous how much store has been set on antiquity by the greatest thinkers, whether Christian or pagan. Aristotle says, "The more ancient a witness is the more creditable and the more credible." Aristotle was not a Bible prophet, and therefore his name may be quoted with some effect to those who think that all men out of the Bible were necessarily great men. A Latin judge has said, "Nothing can be more ancient to me." What did he mean by the word "ancient" in such a case as that? He

meant nothing could be more trustworthy, reputable, respectable. The farther you go back in history the farther you get away from the refinements of a technical civilisation—from that miserable casuistry which can make the worse appear the better cause—from that skill in dialectics whose business it is to twist meanings and pervert purposes and discolour all that appeals to the senses. But is there not a meaning still deeper than that? Certainly. In all this wish to go back, and to have antiquity on one's side, lies the sublime doctrine that out of eternity must come the rule and proper direction of time. Why do we not amplify all instincts, and all solid reasonings, and all well-tested arguments, and give them their highest aspect and their completest force? We are accustomed to consult the antiquary upon certain difficult questions. The most learned judge asks, Is there a precedent? The most profoundly philosophical student in law, in history, in philosophy, is delighted to find that a thousand years ago—yea, five thousand years since—judgment was pronounced upon this very case, whatever it may be. Nothing will satisfy the truly scholarly and disciplined mind but getting right back to origins. Such a mind must have a Book of Genesis in its literature. This is supposed to be right, and we are not disposed to question its rectitude; but what is the true interpretation of this? Why this love of antiquity? Why this searching back from precedent to precedent? Why this quest of origin? The meaning is that we want to hear what eternity has to say. When allusion is made to our sin, we cannot be contented with modern instances, and novel discourses and theories; we must be taken back to Adam, beyond him: what waits us there in that deep depth of eternity? This, that the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the earth; in other words, the atonement wrought out by Christ, for the redemption of men and the forgiveness of sins, was not a point in history; it was the very centre and supreme thought of eternity. It is only because truth is eternal that it can accommodate itself to passing phases and immediate experiences. Truth did not come into the world at a given point in history; it is the expression of eternity; it is an Incarnation of Godhead; it is a visitant from the upper spaces. This is the reason why men cannot get rid of it. If it were the latest invention, it might

be superseded; if it were the discovery of a single mind, some greater mind might arise that would overthrow it; but truth comes up from eternity, fills the little day to overflow, and passes on from age to age, the contemporary of every century, because the expression of eternity.

Now Bildad resorts to the final point of Eliphaz. He concludes his discourse with words of promise. Having thrown a proverb or two at the head of Job; as, for example, "Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water?" having discoursed, it may be, in a satirical vein, upon water-plants, showing that they are only green and flourishing so long as they are full of water, and that when the water ceases their greenness fades; and having told him, needlessly, that "the hypocrite's hope shall perish," for there was no hypocrisy in Job; having touched upon the frail tenement of the spider as a type of the refuge of men who tell lies, he refers to one who "is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden," a heart that is rooted in God, a soul that lives in eternity, so that, come winter, come summer, come famine of food, or thirst of water, come what may, this heart looks on to the stone-house, the rock that cannot be shaken; and having wrought himself up into this noble ecstasy Bildad concludes his speech with words of comfort:—

"Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others grow. Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers: till he fill thy mouth with laughing, and thy lips with rejoicing. They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame; and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought" (vv. 19-22.)

Bildad began with criticism, he ended with sympathy. Who could do otherwise? The sight was heart-rending. He who would have taken his stand upon eternal principles was forced down into pity and thoughtfulness and human consideration, when he saw the man smitten all over with sore boils, without one healthy spot upon his whole flesh;\* robbed by thieves without name; smitten, crushed, forsaken, an offence to those nearest and dearest to him. Sometimes we are thus forced into sympathy. Sometimes there is more strength in our argument than in our

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\* See note on next page.

sympathy, yet we cannot withdraw without some words of promise. This is not so with Jesus Christ, who comes to us in our distress and helplessness and uttermost misery. He does not speak words only; he dies to redeem us. Himself bare our sins, carried our iniquities; yea, he took to himself our diseases, he was loaded with our putridity, our deathfulness, he took it all. That was sympathy! Not to talk to your grief, but to absorb it; not to enumerate your diseases, but to transfer them to himself. This is a great mystery; but a mystery falls becomingly into the whole history of Christ. It is a mystery not of darkness but of light; a mystery not as indicating a difficulty of the intellect, but as pointing to a supreme effort of the heart,—how to die, and yet to live; how to take the iniquities and diseases of the world, and to bear them away. Ask us to explain it, and we say we have no words. Speech dies at that point. Ask us if we feel it, and we say, radiantly, gratefully, Yes, we feel it all, and know it to be true.

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#### NOTE.

**JOB'S DISEASE.**—The opinion that the malady under which Job suffered was elephantiasis, or black leprosy, is so ancient, that it is found, according to Origen's *Hexapla*, in the rendering which one of the Greek versions has made of ch. ii. 7. It was also entertained by Abulfeda (*Hist. Antisl.*, p. 26); and in modern times by the best scholars generally. The passages which are considered to indicate this disease are found in the description of his skin burning from head to foot, so that he took a potsherd to scrape himself (ii. 7, 8); in its being covered with putrefaction and crusts of earth, and being at one time stiff and hard, while at another it cracked and discharged fluid (vii. 5); in the offensive breath which drove away the kindness of attendants (xix. 17); in the restless nights, which were either sleepless or scared with frightful dreams (vii. 13, 14; xxx. 17); in general emaciation (xvi. 8); and in so intense a loathing of the burden of life, that strangling and death were preferable to it (vii. 15).

In this picture of Job's sufferings, the state of the skin is not so distinctly described as to enable us to identify the disease with elephantiasis in a rigorous sense. The difficulty is also increased by the fact that שֶׁחִין (*shechin*) is generally rendered "boils." But that word, according to its radical sense, only means *burning, inflammation*—a hot sense of pain, which, although it attends boils and abscesses, is common to other cutaneous irritations. Moreover, the fact that Job scraped himself with a potsherd is irreconcilable with the notion that his body was covered with boils or open sores, but agrees very well with the thickened state of the skin which characterises this disease.

In this, as in most other Biblical diseases, there is too little distinct description of the symptoms to enable us to determine the precise malady intended. But the general character of the complaint under which Job suffered bears a greater resemblance to elephantiasis than to any other disease.—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

## Chapters ix., x.

### JOB'S ANSWER TO BILDAD.

#### I.

**I**T is supposed by some that there is a tone of satire in the opening words of Job's reply to Bildad. Those opening words are, "I know it is so of a truth." The words may be so read as to exclude the satire, but those who have looked most deeply into these things have discovered in these terms a tone of sarcasm, the interpretation being—I know that it is so of a truth; so obviously true that even *you*, blind comforters, have actually seen it; the justice of God is so patent that even *you* could not pass by without observing it! Whether Job is satirical here or not, we know that Job could be satirical, and the probability is that he began thus early to jeer the men who misunderstood him.

Bildad had made a grand appeal in one point; he said to Job, Take no notice of what we say: we are but of yesterday, and know nothing: judge us to be right in so far as we represent the consolidated wisdom of the ages; go back to the fathers; consult ancient history: see how from day to day, and from century to century, experience has gone in one direction, and do not despise the voice of time. That was a wonderful thing to say so far back in history as the period at which Bildad lived. We now call Bildad and his friends part of the ancients, but Bildad at his time referred Job to the centuries then gone; and so far his argument was rational, sound, and conclusive. Men ought not to despise history. The judgments of God are written in the records of time. There is an external Bible, or a Bible external to the Book which claims that high name—a Bible of Providence, of conscious guidance of life, of obvious shaping of events, and a leading forth



of history to certain issues and effects, the reality and the beneficence of which cannot be questioned. But Job, accepting this view, calls the attention of his friends to a deeper truth than they had yet perceived: "How should man be just with God?" (ix. 2). The emphasis of that inquiry is in the first word—"how": relate the method, tell the plan, produce the key of this mysterious lock: it is easy for you to preach about the justice and the uprightness of God, and easy for you to chide me for want of integrity, but will you tell me how man should be just with God? This is a question which God himself alone can answer. And this is the difficulty—"If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand" (ix. 3). The meaning is this: I am right enough in many points; I know, says Job, that I am an upright man, as the world judges uprightness; not one of my contemporaries can bring a single charge against me, or stand before me for one moment in fair criticism of conduct: when I turn to God with that argument, even if he were to admit it, so far as I present the case, he would startle me, he would madden me, by pointing out a thousand instances in which I had utterly failed to obey the law of truth and walk by the light of wisdom. So Job takes up this strong position, saying of himself: I know I am respectable; I am well aware how I have guided my family; I know that my house is a house of prayer; I could stand up with the whitest and best of you, and if the judgment lay between ourselves possibly you would vote me to the primacy; but the question does not lie between you and me, as who should say, Who is the better of two men? The question is, "How should a man be just with God?" for God is omniscient. Take a beautiful action to him, and he will thus handle it, saying, Outwardly it is comely enough; it is well coloured, it is excellently shaped; it would pass muster before any tribunal ever constructed by human wisdom—but, see! Then opening the action he would show that every motive is perverted, or corrupt, or at least partially wrong; and he would so handle and analyse our very lowliest prayer that we should burn with shame to think we had ever uttered it at his altar. Job thus continues, if we may paraphrase his argument: You take a narrow view of life; you talk about circumstances, actions, respectableness, respectability; but since I have been thus afflicted,

and have been looking round and round within myself for causes, I have come to see that if I would contend with God, I could not answer him one of a thousand: before I had this affliction I thought I was faultless, but these distresses have revealed me to myself: up to this time I had taken a wrong view, because a narrow or superficial view, but now I see that I must get at realities, essences, innermost motives, springs and impulses, and conduct the judgment not in the market-place but in the sanctuary. It is a great deal that Job should have thus learned the profoundest of all lessons. This is the lesson which the world has yet to learn. The world will continue to victimise itself by its own respectability to the very end. The world will not discuss motives. The best of men would say, We must let motives alone. Whereas everything depends upon the motive. Not the action but the motive determines the quality of life, the issue and the destiny of existence. But, so pressed, who can stand now? Herein is the meaning of the woeful declaration, "There is none righteous, no, not one." If there could be one righteous, the whole world might become righteous, and Jesus Christ might come to be understood as unnecessary, or he might be superseded. If there could be one good man, in God's sense of that term, the cross of Christ would be a mistake—a blunder. Only affliction can drive men into this analysis of motives. It is so easy to get credit for good actions, transient courtesies, inexpensive civilities, outsides that cost nothing; and it is harder than dying to force the mind to self-analysis, and bind the heart down to self-judgment. The heart is afraid of itself. No man could see himself and live. Where, then, is help to be found? Hear the words of the Lord through the mouth of his prophet—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help."

What a noble view of God Job is enabled to present; Eliphaz and Bildad have spoken highly of the Deity, but when Job comes to speak of him there is an addition of tenderness to sublimity; in other words, Job does not discourse as a mere dialectician, of man of eloquence; he makes his words rich with unction, precious with pathos; he lifts human speech to new levels and new dignities. From the first verse to the twelfth of the ninth chapter we have Job's description of God, a description which

no man could have spoken so eloquently if the very life of him had not been crushed out by divine judgment, and by all the discipline which tests life at every point. Job makes his knowledge contribute to the expression of his theology:—the mountains are moved by God, and they know not, they cannot account for their trembling; they vibrate, they shiver, as if in pain, and cannot tell why they are startled from their old decorum: they are overturned in his anger, and they cannot account for their removal or their destruction. The earth is shaken out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; the sun is ordered about like an inferior servant, and the stars are sealed with the black seal of thunderous clouds, so that they cannot shine—Arcturus, the great northern bear that has attracted the attention of the ages; Orion, a symbol of the chained Lucifer who rebelled in heaven, and who is now held in leash to be looked at and wondered about; Pleiades, too numerous to be named, and the chambers of the south—a general phrase by which he indicates the undiscovered astronomical territory, the great south, rich with unnamed stars, wealthy with innumerable planets,—chambers of mystery, chambers of majesty. This is the God to whom Job has to justify himself: nor is he wrong in making natural theology the basis of divine judgment as to conscience and action: for is not God critical in nature? Does he not sharpen the least point upon the grass-blade as if he had spent eternity in perfecting the completeness of that point? Has not the microscope revealed God as the minutest critic as well as an infinite builder? The argument is that if God is so particular, definite, critical, in all these natural appointments, who can go before him, and say, Lo, this is my conduct: is it not good? He will judge it by his own workmanship, and we “cannot answer him one of a thousand.” The greater he is the less we are; the wiser the God the more terrific and destructive his criticism, if we seek to impose upon him by presenting the outward as a veritable image of the inward. Surely Job's affliction is beginning to tell well already. He is getting among the deeper truths. He is not a hastening reader, merely glancing at title pages, and running through them as if he had something better to do. He is going quite profoundly into things. What if at the end he should prove to be a well-

schooled scholar, and should come out of this black affliction medalled all over, and crowned as God's choicest student? We must wait.

Now another view is presented. Supposing the argument or controversy to be between men and God, what shall the upshot be? Reduce life to a controversy between the divine and the human, and what will it come to? It will come to this:

"For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause. He will not suffer me to take my breath, but filleth me with bitterness. If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong: and if of judgment, who shall set me a time to plead? If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life" (ix, 17-21).

We cannot successfully battle with God. The only thing to be done when God arises to judgment is to fall into his hands, speechlessly, trustingly, lovingly, and when we come to the point where we may speak, to say—God be merciful to me a sinner! It is useless to oppose our little strength to God's, for our strength is the strength of a rush, and God's strength is almightiness. If we come to self-justification he can excel us in criticism, he can point out our errors, he can show us how our whitest and most beautiful deed is full of corruption and rottenness; and if we were to attempt to justify ourselves, we could not believe ourselves, that is to say, we should give ourselves the lie when we had rounded off every period of argument, and wrought up to a grand culmination our rhetorical defence. An awful power is that which is within us! It would seem as if God's vicar were resident within every man,—that terrible conscience which makes cowards of us all; that quality so like divinity; that voice so much other than human; that ghost which makes us tremble at midday as if it were midnight. This is the presence of God in the soul. We may endeavour to pervert it, corrupt it, bribe it, affright it, but it comes up out of the depths, and menaces us with dignity and calmness.

Then what would the controversy come to morally? It would come to confusion and error:

"This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the

innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he?" (ix. 22-24).

That is what spiritual controversy comes to when a man tries to argue out the whole case within the range of his own wisdom and skill; in other words, he makes continual blunders; he does not discriminate between right and wrong, between the right hand and the left; he is misled by particulars, he is victimised by details, he is befooled by accidents; he does not grasp the situation with the genius which is befitting the highest spiritual education. But what of self-help?—

"If I say, I will forget my complaint, I will leave off my heaviness, and comfort myself: I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent. If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain? If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" (ix. 27-31).

It will come to nothing. See how Job's education is being completed. He will be almost an evangelical preacher before he is done. He has got hold of God by the right end. He is no longer moving to and fro in uncertainty, but has got such a grip of three or four fundamental truths that he will become almost a Paul, a John, before he finishes this tragical education. No man can cleanse himself so as to be fit to appear before God. All our invented catharisms, our chemical cleansings, and little scientific venturings, in the direction of self-preparation, must come to nothing: if I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean with potash, with lye, yet wilt thou plunge me in the ditch, and when I come up out of the ditch my own clothes will run away from me, my own clothes shall abhor me; the coat I put off in order that I might cleanse myself will after thou hast plunged me in the ditch disown me, and ask to be worn by some better man. To these conclusions we must come if the gospel is to be any use to us. Until we know what corruption is we cannot know the meaning of God's offer of holiness. It is useless for any man who imagines he can recover his respectability to come to church. If he persist stubbornly in that conviction everything will be lost upon him; noble prayer, noble music, reading of the word divine, exposition, expostulation, entreaty tender enough for tears,—all will be lost

like rain upon the barren sand. The first condition, therefore, is that we should be in a right relation to God, and that right relation is one of conscious guilt, conscious self-helplessness, and perfect willingness to be instructed, as if we were little children, in the way of God's salvation.

Job is the man to come upon ulterior truths, without knowing the full range of what he is saying. In the thirty-third verse, for example, Job exclaims, "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that night lay his hand upon us both." We need not force this word daysman, or umpire, into full evangelical significance; at the same time there is no need why we should pass it by as if it had no special meaning. Job has come to this position, that he feels that if he is to be understood by God, or if God is to be understood by him, or if ever the controversy is to be ended, there must be a middle man. Job says in effect, I can say no more: I have used all my best words and all my ripest arguments; I have moaned and I have prayed, I have expostulated and I have gone well-nigh to defiance, and I have almost charged God with injustice in his inscrutable dealing with me; now I am tired—I can add no more; if ever this tumult is to be calmed an arbiter must arise who can lay one hand upon God and another hand upon myself, and speak to us both, and make us understand the common message. Are we to dismiss such words as a mere trope? Or are we to accept them in the light of what we now know—the fuller providence, and the fuller disclosure of God's will towards the human race? We are not to insist that Job foresaw the evangelical light, and felt in all its fulness the evangelical meaning of the gospel, but there are strugglings upward, there are dumb instincts, there are conjectures that come very near to revelations, there are gropings that mean prayer; and surely he is the wise man who sees in all the way of human education the germs of things, their beginnings, their first indications, and who watches them advancing like an ascending sun. Thus viewed, we have no hesitation in declaring that there is now a daysman between God and us. There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The controversy was proceeding idly on our part, and was resulting in great moral confusion and tumult, when, lo, there came

amongst us one like unto the Son of man—a mysterious man,—now almost a little child, now almost a woman for very tenderness and tearfulness,—now a giant for strength, now a God for wisdom. His name is Jesus of Nazareth. He is able to save unto the uttermost, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. If we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is able to lay a wounded hand upon God, and a wounded hand upon man, and to bring God and man together in righteous and eternal reconciliation. The poorest man may engage this advocate. His eloquence is free to all. He takes up the least prayer, the soul's first effort in supplication, and enlarges it into a prevailing plea. The weakest believer that hangs upon him hangs upon the rock of ages. Cease to plead for yourselves; cease to justify your own life; cease to believe in the moral value of respectability as before God, and like little children, broken-hearted prodigals, self-renouncing criminals, come and say to Jesus Christ, Plead for me; take up my poor lost soul; guide me altogether, and make me silent whilst thou dost speak. This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. This man still repels the scribe, the Pharisee, the zealot, the bigot, and welcomes all fallen ones, who cannot fly to him, or walk, or crawl, but only—look!

## Chapters ix., x.

### JOB'S ANSWER TO BILDAD.

#### II.

**W**E must remember, if we would understand Job's mournful and noble complaint and eloquence, that Job himself is utterly unaware of the circumstances under which he is suffering. Unfortunately for ourselves as readers, we know all that the historian or dramatist can tell us about the case; but Job knew only his suffering. A *Why?* almost indignant came from his lips again and again. And no wonder. It is one thing, we have seen, to read the Book of Job, and another to be Job himself. A pitiful thing if we can only annotate the Book of Job, an excellent if we can comment upon it through our experience and our sympathy. Consider the case well, then:—

There has been an interview between God and the devil: the subject of that interview was Job's integrity and steadfastness: the devil challenged Job's position, and said that he was but circumstantially pious; he had everything heart could wish; a hedge was round about him on every side, and if such a man were not pious the more shame be his: take away, said the enemy, the hedge, the security, the prosperity, and this praying saint will curse thee to thy face. Job knew nothing about this. There is an unconscious influence in life—a mysterious ghostly discipline, an unexplained drill; a sorrow anonymous, and lacking explanation. Job understood that he was a servant of the living God, a diligent student of the divine law, a patient follower of the divine statutes and commandments; he was to his own consciousness a good man; certainly inspired by noble aspirations, sentiments, and impulses; good to the poor, and helpful to those who needed all kinds of assistance; and, therefore, why he should have been struck by these tremendous thunderbursts was



an inquiry to which he had no answer. But consider, on the other hand, that the whole pith of the story and meaning of the trial must be found in the very fact that Job had no notion whatever of the circumstances under which he was suffering.

Had Job known that he was to be an example, that a great battle was being fought over him, that the worlds were gathered around him to see how he would take the loss of his children, his property, and his health, the circumstances would have been vitiated, and the trial would have been a mere abortion: under such conditions Job might have strung himself up to an heroic effort, saying, if it has come to this—if God is only withdrawing himself from me for a moment, and is looking upon me from behind a cloud, what care I if seven hells should burn me, and all the legions of the pit should sweep down upon me in one terrific assault? this is but for a moment: God has made his boast of me; I am God's specimen man, God's exemplary saint; he is pointing to me, saying, See in Job what I myself am; behold in him my grace magnified and my providence vindicated. This would have been no lesson to the ages. We must often suffer, and not know the reason why: we must often rise from our knees to fight a battle, when we intended to enjoy a long repose: things must slip out of our hands unaccountably, and loss must befall our estate after we have well tended all that belongs to it, after we have securely locked every gate, and done the utmost that lies within the range of human sagacity and strength to protect our property. These are the trials that we must accept. If everything were plain and straightforward, everything would be proportionately easy and proportionately worthless. It is after we have prayed our noblest prayer, and brought back from heaven's garden all the flowers we asked for, that we must be treated as if we were wicked, and overthrown as if we had defied the spirit of justice. So must our education proceed. Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials and persecutions and tests: all these things are meant for the culture of your strength, the perfecting of your patience, the consolidation of your hope and love. Thus we should interpret history. God will not explain the causes of our

affliction to us, any more than he explained the causes of Job's affliction to the patriarch. But history comes to do what God himself refrains from doing: all history says that never is a good man tried without the trial being meant to answer some question of the devil, or to test some quality of the man. God does not send trials merely for the sake of sending them; he is not arbitrary, capricious, governing his universe by whims and fancies and changeable moods. But seeing that he made us, as Job here contends, and knows us altogether, we must accept the trials of life as part of the education of life.

What course does Job say he will take? A point of departure is marked in the tenth chapter. Hitherto Job has more or less answered the men who have spoken to him; now he turns away from them, and says—I will speak straight up to heaven. He determines to be frank. “I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.” That is right. Let us hear what the soul has to say. Let us make room for pale, haggard grief, that she may tell her harrowing tale. Men are sickened by luxury. Men are sated with mere delights. Life would be poor but for the wealth of agonised experience, and dull but for the music of sanctified desolation. Job has begun well in saying he will speak right out to God. It soothes poor misery “hearkening to her tale.” If a man could once assure himself that he was speaking as it were face to face with God, the greatness of the auditor would lift up the speech to a worthy level, and the very interview with one divine would help our human nature up to the very divinity to whose radiance it has been admitted.

Do not let us speak our misery downwards; otherwise our tears will soak into the dust, and there will be no answer in flowers. Let us venture to lift up our heads even in the time of grief and misery and loss and loneliness, and speak all we feel right into the ear of God. He will not be angry with us. He will make room for our speech. He framed us; he knows our composition; he understands us altogether, and blessed be his name and his love, he knows that a little weeping would ease our hearts, and that long talk with himself would end in a mitigation of our grief. Do not be harsh with men who speak with some

measure of indignation in the time of sorrow. Sorrow is not likely to soothe our feelings, and to pick out for us the very daintiest words in our mother-tongue. We are chafed and fretted and vexed by the things which befall our life. It is not easy to put the coffin-lid upon the one little child's face; it is not easy to surrender the last crust of bread that was meant to satisfy our hunger; it is not pleasant to look into the well-head and find the water gone at the spring. Yet, in our very frankness, we should strive at least to speak in chastened tones, and with that mystic spirit of hopefulness which, even in the very agony of fear, whispers to the soul, Perhaps, even now, at the very last, God may be gracious unto me. Have we thus turned our sorrows into spiritual controversies with God? or have we degraded them into mere criticisms upon his providence, and turned them to stinging reproaches upon the doctrine which teaches that all things work together for good to them that love God? Let us go alone, shut the door of the chamber, and spend all day with God, and all night; for even in talking over our grief, sentence by sentence, and letter by letter, in the presence and hearing of the King, without his personally saying one word to us, we may feel that much of the burden has been lifted, and that light is preparing to dawn upon an experience which we had considered to be doomed to enduring and unrelieved darkness.

Job says he will ask for a reason. "I will say unto God, do not condemn me; show me wherefore thou contendest with me" (x. 2). I cannot tell why; I am not conscious of any reason; the last time we met it was in prayer, in loving fellowship; the last interview I had with heaven was the pleasantest I can remember; lo, I was at the altar offering sacrifices for my children, when the great gloom fell upon my life, and the whole range of my outlook was clothed with thunder-clouds—oh, tell me why! We need not ask whether these words actually escaped Job's lips, because we know they are the only words which he could have uttered, or that this is the only spirit in which he could have expressed himself; he would have been God, not man, if under all the conditions of the case he had expressed himself in terms less agonising, and in wonder less distracting.

Job will also appeal to the divine conscience, if the expression may be allowed:—

“Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou'st oldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?” (x. 3).

“Is it good,”—is it in harmony with the fitness of things; is it part of the music of divine justice? How will this incident be interpreted by those who are looking on? Art thou not doing more mischief by this experiment than good? There are men who are observing me, who knew that I was a man of prayer, a man of spiritual fame, and they will say, If thus God treats the good, is it not better to be wicked? And there are wicked men looking on who are saying, It has come out just as we expected; all this religious sentiment ends in spiritual reaction, and God is not to be worshipped as Job has worshipped him. O living, loving, saving God, Shepherd of the universe, consider this, and answer me! Once shake a man's confidence in right, and he could no longer go to the altar of the God whom he could charge with wrong; once let a man feel that good may come to nothing, and prayer is wasted breath, and that the balances of justice are in unsteady hands, and all religious lectures are properly lost upon him, and all pious appeals are but so much wasted breath. We must have confidence in the goodness of God. We must be able to say to ourselves, The lot is dark, the road is crooked, the hill is steep; I cannot tell why these trials should have come upon me, but see me to-morrow, or the third day, and I shall have an answer from heaven, the enigma shall be solved, and the solution shall be the best music my soul ever listened to.

Job then pleads himself—his very physiology, his constitution:—

“Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again? Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews” (x. 8-11.)

I am made by thee; didst thou make me to destroy me? Art thou so fickle? Art thou a potter that fashions a beautiful vase, and then dashes it to the ground? I am all thine,

from the embryo—for that is the reference made in the tenth verse: “Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?” I am thine from the very embryo, the very germ; there is nothing about me that I have done myself; I am the work of thine own hands; art thou a fantastic maker, creating toys that thou mayest have the delight of crushing them between the palms of thine hands? A very pathetic inquiry is this—“Thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?”—is this the law of evolution? is this the science or philosophy of development? is all life simply a little beginning, rising out of itself, and returning to itself? and is “dust” the only word appropriate to man? is life a journey from dust to dust, from ashes to ashes, from nothing to nothing? Consider this, O loving Creator! Job says he will reason otherwise. God, who has made so much out of nothing, means to make more out of so much: the very creation means the redemption and salvation and coronation of the thing that was created in the divine image and likeness. Creation does not end in itself: it is a pledge, a token, a sign—yea, a sure symbol, equal in moral value to an oath, that God’s meaning is progress unto the measure of perfection. This is how we discover the grand doctrine of the immortality of the soul, even in the Old Testament—even in the Book of Genesis and in the Book of Job. What was it that lay so heavily upon Adam and upon Job? It was the limitation of their existence; it was the possible thought that they could see finalities, that they could touch the mean boundary of their heart’s throb and vital palpitation. When men can take up the whole theatre of being and opportunity and destiny, and say, This is the shape of it, and this is the weight, this is the measure, this is the beginning, and this is the end, then do they weary of life, and they come to despise it with bitterness; but when they cannot do these things, but, contrariwise, when they begin to see that there is a Beyond, something farther on, voices other than human, mystic appearances and revelations, then they say, This life as we see it is not all; it is an alphabet which has to be shaped into a literature, and a literature which has to end in music. The conscious immortality of the soul, as that soul was fashioned in the purpose of God, has kept the race from despair.

Job said if this were all that we see, he would like to be extinguished. He would rather go out of being than live under a sense of injustice :

“Oh that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me ! I should have been as though I had not been ; I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. Are not my days few ? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death ; a land of darkness, as darkness itself ; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness ” (x. 18-22).

Thus he exhausts the Hebrew tongue in piling image upon image by which to signify the everlasting extinction and eternal darkness. Yet he would choose extinction rather than life under a galling sense of injustice. It is so with individual men. It is so with nations of men. There comes a time when the sense of injustice becomes intolerable. Anarchy, the sufferers say, is better ; and as for darkness, it is to be chosen in preference to light which is only used for the perpetration of iniquity. “My soul is weary of my life.” Is that a solitary expression ? We have heard Rebekah say the same words—she would die. We have heard David say, “Oh that I had wings like a dove ! for then would I fly away,”—a term which indicates distance without measure—“and be at rest.” We have heard great Elijah—royal, lion-like, terrible Elijah—say, “Let me die”—give me release from life. What wonder if other men have uttered the same expression. It is, let us say again and again, the natural and necessary expression, except there be hidden in the heart the hope of immortality. Thus Paul triumphed : “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen : but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Eternity must help time, or time will be the grave of its own creations and aspirations. What hold have we upon eternity ? Is our citizenship in heaven ? From what fountain do we drink ? If from the fountains of eternity, then we shall be satisfied for ever, and labour will be but a preparation for the enjoyment of rest, and rest shall bring back the energy which we shall rejoice to spend in service. Are we

trusting to the tricks, the chances, the revolutions of some mere wheel of fortune? or are we living in the living God? Are we crucified with Christ, yet have we risen with him? are we living in him, and is he living in us? Is the life we now live in the flesh a life of faith in the Son of God? Then, come weal, come woe, at the end there shall be festival, celestial Sabbath, infinite liberty, unspeakable joy. We fearlessly preach the doctrine that all things are done by God. We cannot recognise any devil that eclipses the omnipotence of the Almighty. Boldly would we say, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Do we suppose there are two rival powers in the universe, and that one endeavours to overreach the other, to be before the other, in the culture or the destruction of human nature? That is not a Christian doctrine as we understand the teaching of Holy Scripture. "The Lord reigneth." The devil is a chained enemy: "beyond his chain he cannot go." When he wants a new link added to it he has to ask the Omnipotent to lengthen his tether by one short inch. All things are in the hands of God. All earthquakes, and tumults, and revolutions, all national uprisings, all political upheavals, all the mysterious, tragic, awful process of development, we must find in the hand and under the government of God. Therefore will we not be afraid; we will say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;" though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, the throne of the Eternal is left untouched, and the government of the Everlasting is left unimpaired. We will hide ourselves in the Sanctuary of our Father until all calamities be overpast. Out of the agony and the throes of individual experience, and national convulsions, there shall come a creation fair as the noonday, quiet as the silent but radiant stars!

## Chapter xi.

### THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.

#### I.

COMMENTATORS have not much to say of Zophar that can be considered favourable. By what seems an inexplicable consent they seem to have agreed to condemn Zophar as irascible, contemptuous, supercilious, and the like. We hardly feel that the condemnation is just. The speech is before us, and every man can form his own opinion about it, but our contention will be that within the four corners of this speech there is really no reason to pour contempt upon the speaker. We have been told that Eliphaz was a seer, a man who saw sights in the darkness, a man of wondrous intuition ; that Bildad was great in tradition, in ancient literature, and fortified himself by the consolidated wisdom of the ages ; and of Zophar it is said that he represented the commonplace thought or the popular orthodoxy of his day. It is easy to say this, and it would seem that the temptation to some minds is too strong to be resisted when there is an opportunity to condemn some one. There is a cant that prides itself in running down what it calls the commonplace orthodoxy of the day. Even assuming Zophar to occupy that point of view, and to repeat with some distinctness and almost positiveness the dogmas which had been established in his time, we must remember that a man is not necessarily a genius because he is a heretic. If it were so, the world would die of genius. There are so many heretics, little heretics and great heretics, and heretics of every degree between the two points ; so that if heresy were a sign of genius who could bear the splendour of its blaze ? It would consume an earth some eight thousand miles through it. And if all this were significant of independence of mind, where would be society, common esteem, mutual trust and regard ? What, therefore, if we venture to put in one word



for orthodoxy, and not to gather up all the conclusions of long centuries, and turn them out with contempt as though they had been encumbering the ground, or hindering the education of the world? Narrow interpretations of them may have been doing so, petty sectarian limitations of them can do nothing but mischief; but then there is a right interpretation of orthodoxy as well as a narrow and imperfect one. Our steady contention has been that all the great thoughts that have ever influenced the world for good belong to the evangelical line of thinking, when that line is properly discerned, measured, and applied: unhappily, knavish hands have been laid upon it, and minds unequal to the occasion have endeavoured to deal with it, and therefore an unworthy reputation has been attached to it, an unworthy reputation amounting to a positive stigma. Still, we must be just. We cannot gratefully forget our best ancestors. We ought not to be the men who are put away from our old standpoints simply by the wave of some man's hand, when we are not sure that there is anything in the hand but its power of waving. Let us, therefore, stand by Zophar, so far at least as to examine what he says, carefully and patiently, and if we find it to be such very vile commonplace let us say so, and join the majority; if, on the other hand, we find the man to be a clear thinker, and a good, strong, terse, pointed speaker, let us say so, and weigh well what he has declared.

It has been supposed that Zophar was young; certainly the youngest of the three comforters, because in Oriental lands great deference was paid to age, and certainly juvenility would not speak until a multitude of days had declared itself. Probably, therefore, Zophar was comparatively young. He was supposed to be coarse. Truly he did speak to Job in a tone to which Job himself had not been accustomed. But what is coarseness? Is there any one handy and final definition even of that term? Is not even that word a relative one? and may there not be a moral indignation hardly distinguishable from what some men call coarseness? Surely there may be a time in human controversy and in religious conflict when men may speak words that are somewhat wanting in mere decoration and ornament, and they may come down too squarely and positively upon what

they believe to be realities. But it is not the part of refinement to talk much about the coarseness of other men. It will probably be found, that the more a man is a gentleman the more gentlemen he discovers round about him. Do not be terrified by the criticism that calls a man from whom it differs a man of coarse and violent speeches. "Zophar"—perhaps there may be an explanation in his name. If a certain line of etymology be chosen, we shall find that Zophar means "the yellow one." And all yellow men are impulsive, hopeful, radiant; they are going to leap over the hills; and as for the rivers, they will dry them up by the ardour of their enthusiasm. Men ought not to be blamed for being yellow-haired and yellow-skinned: for they had no choice in the matter. We must have some yellow ones amongst us—bright, impulsive, daring, enterprising men. They cannot all be black. The world owes a good deal to its yellow sons, its men of fire, its men who speak first and think afterwards: its leaping men who bound on, if haply it be only to come back again and say, There is no road down there. Let us be gentle, considerate, just: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. One colour cannot understand another. There are colours that shrink away from one another, saying, We have nothing in common; do not mix us, or you will be affrighted by the hideous result. One man can hardly understand another; yet the less he understands him the more prone he may be to condemn him. All men are God's children. We are all parts of the great family in heaven and on earth. The Eliphaz who sees visions, the Bildad who remembers history, the Zophar who is enterprising, adventurous, daring, almost to imprudence, all belong to the great household presided over by the living God; and it must not be the part of one brother to exclude or condemn another. There is an unfortunateness even in the matter of natural spirits. It is surely no little weight to carry to see in every man something bright, in every darkness some shining star, and to hear in every wind some whispered gospel. The very buoyancy of some men becomes to them in periods of reaction a great suffering. Then Zophar was a "Naamathite." That word means "pleasantness," land of the sunshine, country of the morning; a fair genial soil that caught the earliest rays of the orient. So we have a man of highly-

strung spirit ; bright, dashing, enthusiastic, full of sunshine ; a man who had lived on sunlight all his days : what wonder if with some brusqueness he clears his way to the centre, and says with considerable definiteness that Job is too great a talker to be much of a reasoner ? All these things are matters of inference. Certainly in the ancient times names were significant of character ; it may be, therefore, that the explanation of what is condemned in Zophar may be really constitutional.

But let us hear the speech, and judge by its manner and its reasoning :

“Should not the multitude [torrent] of words be answered ? and should a man full of talk be justified ?” (v. 2).

What justification had Zophar for describing Job's speech as a torrent—a very cataract of words ? He had some justification. Certainly the astounding eloquence of Job was likely to bring upon him some criticism of this kind. Let us take our English Bible as a help towards verbal measurements. Bildad had made a speech which occupies twenty-two verses of the English Bible ; Job returned an answer which occupies fifty-seven verses of the same book, and many of the verses are longer. Job seemed to become all words in this marvellous response. Then consider how an impatient man measures a speech. An impulsive hearer measures a speaker by his own impulsiveness. He wants the speaker to sit down that he himself may have a chance of standing up. There are men who could listen for hours, and think the speaker too short ; they would have him proceed with his argument and complete it like an edifice designed in exquisite proportions, and coloured so as to express the highest meanings. There are other men who cannot sit still. The most of men are lacking in that power : they are anticipating the speaker, answering an argument before they hear it, multiplying the words by their own impatience, so that even when a reasonably long speech is concluded they call it “a torrent of words.” There are some men who have made no little mark in their country's progress who have been condemned on the ground of “verbosity.” “And should a man full of talk be justified ?” Rather, “And should a man of lips be justified ?” A Hebraism suggesting that Job was “all lips,” had lost every feature but his “lips,” and all

round about him he was "lips,"—simply a talking and word-multiplying machine. No doubt this kind of characterisation of Job's eloquence is the explanation of the severity with which Zophar has been treated by his critics. But honesty sometimes takes short cuts to the end it proposes to reach. Zophar may have been terse and honest. Yet Zophar is philosophically correct. If a man runs out in words only, he is enfeebling himself, contracting his own capacity, occupying a wrong standpoint in relation to all the mysteries and energies of the universe. Silence is often, if not always, golden.

"Should thy lies [*rather*, boasting] make men hold their peace?" (v. 3).

The word is not "lies," in the sense of charging Job with speaking direct and known falsehoods; but Job is boasting, defending himself, holding up his own virtue, and saying, Look at it: it is like a piece of pure porcelain, without flaw or rent or hair's-breadth of inferiority. Job has been making toys, and exhibiting all these toys to his three visitors, and Zophar has become impatient with the exhibition. "And when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?" We have seen that there was a tone of mockery in Job's reply to Bildad? We remember that in the ninth chapter, verse 2, wherein Job exclaims, "I know it is so of a truth," we found that to be a latent sarcasm; not at all evident in English as it stands before us, but a hidden mockery and jibe, as who should say, Of course, ye wise men, I perfectly understand what ye are talking about: you want to display your wisdom, whereas I know that your wisdom is folly. Zophar did not like mockery; and his resentment of it was all the better because it was not himself who was mocked. Up to this time he has not spoken; when, therefore, he charges Job with mockery he really defends his own companions in this visit of condolence, for it was their speech which elicited the mockery of the patriarch.

What, then, was Zophar's point of view? Precisely that of the former speaker. We see no difference between the introduction of Zophar's speech and the introduction of Bildad's. Bildad said (viii. 2), "How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?"

Zophar said, "should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be justified?" Why, then, shall Bildad be reckoned with the philosophers, and Zophar reckoned with impertinent men? Up to this time they have had nothing but words to answer, and yet the words have been absolutely and flatly contradicted by the very facts which Job represented. This was the position the men occupied; they said, The words of Job are one thing, and the condition in which Job is living is another, and there is no harmony or consistency between the two. When words are not borne out by facts it is right to characterise them by such terms as "a strong wind." If the men had met for talk only—if they had said, Let us appoint a meeting for the sake of speaking to one another as much as we possibly can, Job would have been *facile princeps*. Who could talk like Job? What other man had such command of dignified speech and illustration? But there was no meeting for mere talking: the men had come together to address themselves to a particular set of circumstances, and Job was not speaking to these, but speaking miles above them, and might have delivered precisely the same speeches if he himself had been in flourishing and prosperous circumstances.

The reply of Zophar, therefore, was not wanting in justice. Take instances which will at once illustrate this position. When a man who is a bankrupt prates about financial skill, declares that he could occupy with advantage the position of chief financial director of the country, when he delivers long lectures upon the political economy of nations, who can forget that he is a bankrupt, and is therefore, by so much, without being coarse, a liar? Consider the case well: the man is telling all the country how its finances ought to be managed; he is finding flaws in every statement, exposing the errors of every statistical demonstration: he is an incarnate pence-table. What a Chancellor of the Exchequer he would make! How by some baton he would wave all tumult into harmony and music! But the painful thought recurs that he is himself a bankrupt. That must tell against him. He will come to be regarded as a man full of talk; his speech will be considered as "a strong wind," his eloquence will be described as "a torrent of words,"—why? Because his speech and his

condition do not accord the one with the other. Yet he may possibly be the genius he claims to be. So singularly are we constituted, that there is hardly a man anywhere who is able to manage, at least in words, the finances of his country, who could pay his own personal obligations. Take another instance. If you find a man who is prepared to teach people how to speak—how to speak their native tongue with clearness, precision, daintiness, finely-toned emphasis, exquisite effect; if all this be upon his prospectus, and when you go to see the teacher you find him a mumbling man, who cannot pronounce any one word in his mother-tongue as it ought to be pronounced, the facts will be somewhat against him; you will say, This is mere talk, mere boasting, mere pretence: should thy boastings make men hold their peace? Zophar was in presence of exactly such conditions. Job was boasting of his integrity and his virtue; yet all the while he was lying on the ground, as it were, covered with sores, wholly dismantled, unmanned, lacerated as by the whip of heaven; and Zophar, feeling that God was a God of justice, had in his heart at least the thought—If this man had not somehow sinned, he would not have been lying in exactly these circumstances. Zophar's education upon this point might indeed have been incomplete: probably we shall find that to be the case; but a man who lives in one century cannot be rich with the wisdom of the century that is to come: he must be the contemporary of himself as well as the contemporary of other men, and can only walk according to the light of the day in which he lives. Zophar's theory was: If men do good, God will keep them in security and in honour; if men do evil, God will cast them out of the castle of his providence, the sanctuary of his benediction, and they shall be left to bear the rough winds of heaven without a roof to cover them. He found Job in this kind of condition, and reasoned inwardly, if not outwardly, that Job must have been committing some secret and unexplained iniquity. What do we say when a diseased man lectures his friends upon the subject of health? When, sitting up with somewhat of a cripple's gait, he says you ought to rise at such an hour in the morning, or keep such a programme of daily culture and discipline, obey the laws which he will enumerate that you may the better recollect them, and then promises that you will be healthy, strong, robust, radiant,

and happy,—who can resist casting just a side-glance at least at the lecturer, and who can hinder his heart from saying, “Physician, heal thyself”? Now it was exactly in such circumstances that Job appeared at least to his three comforters. He was lecturing upon integrity, and virtue, and perfectness of character, and right relations to heaven, and if the men did now and then wonder why he should have been smitten thus, they were but human in their reasoning. On the other hand, all these men—the great financier, the imperfect speaker, the diseased lecturer upon health—may have a distinct function, characterised by high utility: if they will make themselves warnings, and not examples, they will accept the intimations of providence and be faithful to the purpose of God. Let a man who himself has failed say, “Look at me, and beware: I will tell you where I got wrong; I began at the wrong point, I took hold of everything by the wrong end; I will deliver you a short address upon my blunders, not upon my excellences—for I have few—that by hearing me recite my errors you may at least have the chance of avoiding them. Then infirmest men have a place in human education, unfortunate lives have something to say to us, unsuccessful baffled men may come and claim to speak to us all, and we should listen with both ears, and with our whole heart, because we may even now, though life is far advanced, be enabled to turn right round and begin again; and the young, if wise, will accept the monitions of history, and profit by the failures of other men.

One closing word of application. May we not have argued about providences when we ought to have prayed respecting them? May we not sometimes have betaken ourselves to defences of personal conduct, when we ought to have betaken ourselves to searching scrutiny into motive and thought and purpose? The question is not what defence we have before men, but what answer we have to the living God. Job has already discovered this, and has not kept back the truth. We have heard him say, if man will contend with God, man cannot answer God one of a thousand: in other words, God has not only a solitary case against us, an individual lapse, a particular and namable iniquity, saying to each man, You have got wrong only once, and these are the facts; the charge which God has

against man is a charge of total collapse, so that when we have concluded one defence we must enter upon another; we no sooner bring to a period our most resonant defences than another impeachment is hurled upon us, and we have to reply to the still larger accusation. There is none righteous, no, not one; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. We can deal with the case after one of two methods: we can make it a matter of words, trying to build ourselves round with a wall of expression, rhetoric, eloquence; or we can throw ourselves down before the living One, saying—God be merciful to me a sinner: I do not see everything; thou seest things as they really are: I am conscious of infirmity, incompleteness, irresoluteness, and I know myself too well to begin a plea of self-justification—God pity me; Christ save me; Spirit of the living God, do not abandon me!

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#### NOTES.

**BILDAD** ("son of contention," if Gesenius' derivation be correct), the second of Job's three friends. He is called "the Shuhite," which implies both his family and nation. Shuah was the name of a son of Abraham and Keturah, and of an Arabian tribe sprung from him, when he had been sent eastward by his father. Bildad takes a share in each of the three controversies with Job (viii., xviii., xxv). He follows in the train of Eliphaz, but with more violent declamation, less argument, and keener invective. His address is abrupt and untender, and in his very first speech he cruelly attributes the death of Job's children to their own transgressions, and loudly calls on Job to repent of his supposed crimes.

**ELIPHAZ**, the chief of the three friends of Job. He is called "the Temanite;" hence it is naturally inferred that he was a descendant of Teman (the son of the first Eliphaz), from whom a portion of Arabia Petraea took its name, and whose name is used as a poetical parallel to Edom in Jer. xlix. 20. On him falls the main burden of the argument, that God's retribution in this world is perfect and certain, and that consequently suffering must be a proof of previous sin (Job iv., v., xv., xxii). His words are distinguished from those of Bildad and Zophar by greater calmness and elaboration, and in the first instance by greater gentleness towards Job, although he ventures afterwards, apparently from conjecture, to impute to him special sins. The great truth brought out by him is the unapproachable majesty and purity of God (iv. 12-21, xv. 12-16). But still, with the other two friends, he is condemned for having, in defence of God's providence, spoken of him, "the thing that was not right," *i.e.*, by refusing to recognise the facts of human life, and by contenting himself with an imperfect retribution as worthy to set forth the righteousness of God. On sacrifice and the intercession of Job all three are pardoned.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.



## Chapter xi.

### THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.

#### II.

"For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes"  
(v. 4).

THIS is both right and wrong. Everything depends upon the relations in which we set the statement which is now made. Job had made this whole affair into a question of words—the larger words and better called in the fourth verse "doctrine," a word which comes from a root which signifies "to receive." Job had received certain teaching, certain theories of the universe and of human life, and in spite of all contradictory facts he declared that his doctrine was pure, and that he himself was clean in God's eye. Yet it was wrong to make this controversy a personal question at all. What is any one man, though great as Job, that he should set himself up against the whole scheme of things as it has been interpreted for ages? The three comforters represented old time, historic teaching, actual human experience, and they brought all that they knew of human history to bear upon a solitary instance; and their reasoning was: The whole scheme of things cannot give way before a particular instance: after all, Job represents but one set of facts: somehow or other he has come into very unhappy relations with other things; but we must not break up the universe, and reconstruct it, in order to harmonize all things with Job's experience. Job never leaves the personal aspect of the case. Nor was this to be wondered at. He suffered so deeply and so largely, not only as to himself but as to his family and to his property; it was natural, therefore, that he should make a very highly personal matter of the whole thing. Yet, if he could have taken the larger view, he would have seen what never discloses itself to merely personal suffering and individual

experience ; he would have caught a glimpse of the largeness of things ; and if he had set up his personal grief against the woe which moans at the heart of the universe, he would have felt that his sorrow after all was not so large and important as he had at one time supposed it to be. The instruction of the narrative is that we must enlarge our view. Even in personal suffering we must take the social or universal conception of things ; we must bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the things of the passing moment : in a word, we must govern time—little, dying, misleading time—by solemn, grand eternity.

Zophar's reply was, therefore, fearlessly critical ; then it became deeply religious. " But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee ! " We three have spoken, but our words seem to have produced no effect. Human words come back to human speakers ; human controversy swings round a very little sphere : oh that God would join this solemn talk, and speak to thee from high heaven ! God is in this matter somewhere : up to this point, so far as we know, he has been silent,—oh that he would just utter one sentence ! it would be brighter than the morning light, it would be larger than the whole firmament as to its meaning : we wrestle, and endeavour to explain ; we attempt to sympathise, but all our efforts are futile. There comes a time in human experience when we say, with great meaning in our voice, God must take up this thing ; Eliphaz the seer has spoken, Bildad the traditionalist and historian has spoken, Zophar the fearless and orthodox critic has spoken, and we make no progress in the cultivation of this desert,—oh that God would begin the work ! That same point occurs in individual training, in family experience, in national affairs ; we are brought round again and again to the vital point, at which there is startled out of us some cry for religious illumination and comfort. Zophar would therefore refer Job to God. " And that he would show thee the secrets of wisdom,"—the inner causes, the hidden springs, the vital lines. Wisdom is always secret, but there becomes an aggravated secret in wisdom when we think we have answered the first mystery. Wisdom is all difficult ; it is inter-  
volved, complicated, wrought into itself with curious working

so that one part belongs to another, and the whole constitutes a revelation. Wisdom is not a thing to be snatched at. We do not acquire wisdom by simply opening our eyes, and walking abroad, and returning to our usual occupations and enjoyments; wisdom is as hidden silver that must be dug for; yea, we must search for it, we must begin early, and work long, and tarry whilst the light lingers: my son, get wisdom, get understanding; with all thy gettings get understanding: she is to be run after, sought after, suffered for; she comes after long wooing,—yea, after fullest sacrifice and devotion. Have no faith in superficial wisdom, in ready answers, in off-handed deliverances from immediate evil. Get on the vital line; connect yourselves with the Well-head of the universe; live and move and have your begin in God. Many have the letter of wisdom who have not its spirit. Zophar points Job to the secrets of wisdom, the little, minute, hidden beginning of things; he would bring him back to germs, and molecules, and the very plasm of wisdom. Knowledge is less than wisdom: wisdom is ennobled, sanctified, and rightly-directed knowledge; yea, it is more than this; it cannot explain itself, but it is justified of its children; it comes up again and again in a thousand forms and hues, and time confirms with willing endorsement all its predictions and all its principles. Then Zophar would have Job shown that the secrets of wisdom “are double to that which is.” An extraordinary expression in English. The meaning is, that he would have Job see that the secrets of wisdom are fold upon fold; not simplex—that which is on the surface, one only, to be taken up and laid down with ease, a work that a child might do; but complex, one fold upon another, one fold passing through another,—manifoldness, as the Revised Version has it, “manifold in effectual working”; that is, not superficial, not lineal, not comprehensible at a glance, but a matter of interpenetration, mutual balancing, a mysterious, continuous, beneficent working together. Zophar said, therefore, in effect—Oh that God would show thee how rich wisdom is in holy secrets, and how more than double everything is! What an intertangled and complicated creation we live in! What an amazing labyrinth! Yet he who has the clue can thread all its mazes and find his way to God. This is not the man to be condemned by commentators, as they have

condemned Zophar. He seems now to have laid hold of the centre and reality of things. There may have been something exasperating in his tone, or the commentators could not have been so hard upon him; but the exasperation was only vocal: surely here is a soul that grapples with vital difficulties, and that hands heaven's own key to the man who stands perplexed before a gate which he cannot open. We should think much about this complication of affairs. All things work together for good to them that love God. Life is not a long, straight, monotonous path, from the beginning of which we can see the end: nature is engaged in a marvellous chemistry; she is very particular, too, that we should compound our elements and constituents aright, not only that we should have the right things, but the right proportions of them; otherwise that benign Alma Mater will see that the result comes out wrong, and afflict us with keen disappointment. Everything in nature is working together with some other thing; yea, who shall say whether all things are not coherent, mutually related, the whole body knit and "compacted by that which every joint supplies"? Better, therefore, often be quiet. Blessed is the man who can stand still and say, God must work out the residue of this process, for I can do nothing further: I will look on, I will pray for keen eyes that I may see somewhat of God's method, for he only can perfect that which is begun in wisdom. Let us stand there. Do not believe in any superficial theory of life. Distrust anything that comes before you with a bald simplicity. Life is not a series of unrelated pebbles; it is not a mere proximity of atoms; it is a coherent, massive, united temple, whose pinnacles glitter in the smile of God. Put away from you every teacher who gives you to feel that life is but a varied flippancy, and that the most frivolous mind can comprehend any portion of the ways of God.

Zophar, having been fearlessly critical, and deeply religious, now turns and becomes morally just. Hear what he says at the end of the sixth verse: "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth." The meaning would seem to be this: Job, thou hast occupied thine own point of view long enough, now endeavour to take God's point of view, and

look at all circumstances from that high altitude. This we are bound to do, if we would be just even towards God. We see only our own personality, we feel only our own suffering; we do not set ourselves at the head and spring of things, and observe how all the universe is affected by what is known as coming under the term sin or iniquity,—yea, we have gone so far as to say that the sinner hurts only himself; we say of some poor wanderers, After all, they do but injure themselves; the drunkard injures himself. Nothing of the kind. No man liveth unto himself—in any sense. No sin can be committed without a shadow passing over the face of the whole universe. We have trifled with sin; and because we have lost the right conception of sin we have lost the right conception of grace. Zophar takes the right ground; he says, Whatever suffering any man endures, he endures less than God might in justice inflict upon him. That is a grave and solemn doctrine. If that is true it should itself be to us a great comfort. If we have anything left of life or hope, God has not inflicted upon us all the punishment which one sin deserves. We must not take our own definition of sin, as if we had been present in eternity and foreseen the whole structure of the universe, all its processes and its destiny: what sin is must be revealed to us: another voice, not our own, must tell us what sin really means. One solitary rebellion has in the heart of it this meaning, namely, God must be dethroned. Is that the meaning of one lie? Yes. Is that the signification of one self-willed thought? It is. Not on the surface. We seem to have run into the easy but culpable method of considering that only one sin has been done. There is no sin that is only one sin. Every sin belongs to an innumerable progeny and ancestry and association. The great lesson, therefore, which Zophar teaches is, that however much we may be suffering, if God were to be really just in inflicting upon us an adequate punishment we should be crushed out of existence. Let us, then, take God's standpoint. Do not limit the field of inquiry. Do not suppose that there is only one party to the great controversy which rends human life. How if it should turn out at last that our very punishment has been meted to us in mercy? What if at the end it should be found that adversity was a veiled evangel sent from heaven to bring us home?

Now see how grand a conception Zophar has of the nature of the living God :

"Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (vv. 7-9).

We have come to the same conclusion even with regard to inferior quantities and forces. We are able to confirm the testimony of Zophar. Take space. How glibly we speak about it! We lay a measuring-line upon it, and say, This line is five hundred thousand millions of miles long! Is there any continuation of that line? Yes. What is the whole sum, O thou arithmetician, man of numbers? The arithmetician says—I cannot tell; the mathematician may tell. What is the sum-total of space, O mathematician, the glorified arithmetician, the arithmetician with wings? Tell us, thou adventurous calculator. And the mathematician hands down to us a symbol. We ask him what is the meaning of this symbol, and he says it stands for infinity. Is that all thou canst tell us about space? Yes. When we have gone through a certain number of miles we pause, and say, The rest is infinite. You say that about space? Yes. Not about a life, or a theology, or a mysterious doctrine, but about plain space—the thing we ourselves occupy? And the mathematician answers Yes: measurement expires in infinity, so be it. Take time: we count our days by thousands; we speak about "ancient history," and we speak also, eloquently, about "future ages"; now tell us, how many are there of them? And the answer is—a negative. We can speak of millions of years multiplied by millions of years; yea, taking a very huge figure we can cube it—will that express the duration of time? The answer is—a negative. Then how shall we represent the proper duration of time? The answer is, by this expression, namely—For ever and ever. Poor arithmeticians, miserable calculators! We sent you out to bring back the whole thing scheduled and put down before us in plain figures, and see you have come pantingly back, and say, Space runs off into infinity; time expands into for ever and ever. Is that all you can tell us? That is all! Why, then, if this be so about space and time, what about life, the duration of sentient existence, the continuity of all that we mean by the

higher faculties of man? Tell us, thou biologist; thou wilt be able to speak with a clearer tongue than the mathematician, or the man who philosophises about time; thou art a more severely scientific man:—What is life? hast thou seen it?—No. Touched it?—indirectly. Measured it?—never. Space runs into infinity, time runs into eternity, life runs into GOD! Who, then, are the fanatics, the enthusiasts? Not they who take a solemn view of the universe; not the men who reason by analogy, saying, If space can but be represented by infinity, and time by eternity, it is at least possible that life can only be truly represented by the term God, the all, the infinite, the eternal, as applied to sentiency, to all the mystery of life. Here, then, we take our stand. We believe in these holy principles. They elevate us; they ennoble us; they save us from all the mistakes of flippancy; they humble us; they chasten us; they make us pray.

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#### SELECTED NOTE.

ZOPHAR, one of Job's three friends and opponents in argument (Job ii. 11, xi. 1, xx. 1, xlii. 9). He is called a Naamathite, or inhabitant of Naamah, a place whose situation is unknown, as it could not be the Naamah mentioned in Josh. xv. 41. Wemyss, in his *Job and his Times* (p. 111), well characterises this interlocutor: "Zophar exceeds the other two, if possible, in severity of censure; he is the most inveterate of the accusers, and speaks without feeling or pity. He does little more than repeat and exaggerate the arguments of Bildad. He unfeelingly alludes (xi. 15) to the effects of Job's disease as appearing in his countenance. This is cruel and invidious. Yet in the same discourse how nobly does he treat of the divine attributes, showing that any inquiry into them is far beyond the grasp of the human mind, and though the hortatory part of the first discourse bears some resemblance to that of Eliphaz, yet it is diversified by the fine imagery which he employs. He seems to have had a full conviction of the providence of God, as regulating and controlling the actions of men; but he limits all his reasonings to a present life, and makes no reference to a future world. This circumstance alone accounts for the weakness and fallacy of these men's judgments. In his second discourse there is much poetical beauty in the selection of images, and the general doctrine is founded in truth; its fallacy lies in its application to Job's peculiar case. The whole indicates great warmth of temper, inflamed by misapprehension of its object and by mistaken zeal."

## PRAYER.

**ALMIGHTY God**, if thou wilt hear us, in Jesus Christ thy Son, thy hearing shall be as an answer. It is good to speak unto the Lord; our souls are enlarged and ennobled as they look up from the cross to seek the Father that is in heaven. We have found thee in Christ; he has told us thy will and thy purpose, and somewhat of thy method, and we are now enabled to say, Thou hast done all things well. All things become more beautiful and greater and tenderer as we associate them with thy name and strength; they are sacred when we know that they are thine. The grass of the field is thine, though to-day it is, and to-morrow it is cast into the oven and is forgotten. Still, even a day is part of thine eternity, and a grass-blade is part of thy property. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father. Thou dost notice all things, our downsitting and our uprising; thou dost beset us behind and before, and lay thine hand upon us, and take an account of all our ways. Surely when thou art seeking for us thou art seeking for thyself: how else could thy love be so great, so burning, so free, so universal? Are we not made in the image and likeness of God? Is not the seal of divinity upon us even in our weakness? Are we not conscious that we are more than ourselves? Truly we have felt in our hearts uprisings and throbbings which have told of things that are infinite in mystery and in glory. We understand nothing, but how much we feel, what we know by our hearts, what understanding we have through our love; these are the ways by which thou dost come into our spirits, and by which thou dost set up thy kingdom within us. We know how poor we are, and weak and foolish, yea, how sinful, how criminality is written upon all we are and do; and yet below all, and round about all, and higher than all, there are signs of divine regard and infinite possibility, and amid all the garments of sin we feel the beating and pulsing of immortality. We bless thee for these feelings, though they are not daily, though they come but now and then yet in their very coming they show us that they would come more frequently, and that one day, if we live in Christ and Christ live in us, we shall be free of all hindrances and limitations, and shall serve in heaven, in the freedom of the blessed, without weariness, without sense of failure, and with ever-increasing joy, and thankfulness, and rest. Pity all hearts that need thy tenderest ministry. Some hearts are broken, some spirits are wounded, some lives are but a gathering up of disappointment and anxiety: come thou whose delight it is to heal, and restore gladness to the soul that is in distress. Work, thou Mighty One; control and rule and reign thou only, for thy right it is; and give us all to feel, through the cross of Jesus Christ, the blessed Son of God, how sweet a delight is obedience, how gracious a life is led when it is led in the Spirit of the Cross. Amen.



## Chapter xi.

## THE FIRST SPEECH OF ZOPHAR.

## III.

THERE is a vital expression in the fourth verse, "For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure." We have come upon an age which cares little for doctrine. We are, in fact, somewhat afraid of that antiquated term. We prefer anecdote to doctrine, and concrete instances to elaborate spiritual demonstrations. An anecdote will be remembered and rehearsed when the finest argument ever invented by human genius, and ever supported by human eloquence, is utterly forgotten. "'T is true : and pity 't is 't is true." For what is life without doctrine ;—that is to say, without teaching, without sound intellectual conviction, without high moral purpose, without that solid and dignified reason which is at once the crown and glory of human life ? Why this contempt as regards doctrine, when every action ought to be an embodied philosophy ? Every attitude we take upon every question ought to express an inward and spiritual conviction. Where the doctrine is wrong the life cannot be right. We are not now speaking of purely metaphysical doctrine, but of that vital teaching which affects all thought and the outgoing of all life : and if a man is operating upon wrong philosophies, wrong principles, mistaken convictions, all the issue of his life is but an elaborate and mischievous mistake. In this instance, however, Zophar corrected Job because he understood that Job was making the whole case only a matter of words. If by "doctrine" you understand nothing but words, then any contempt you may award to it may be justly bestowed. Zophar thought that Job was refining too much, balancing words, inventing and colouring sentences, and making a kind of verbal rainbow round about himself : therefore he took to a severe chastisement of the patriarch. Zophar was mistaken ; Job was really basing his argument on those sound and eternal principles which give security to life and hope to all futurity.

Then in the twelfth verse we come upon a still stranger expression :

'For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.'

Nobody has explained these words to any other person's satisfaction. Each commentator has a view of his own. The one which seems to be supported by the strongest reasoning is that which represents Zophar as saying : Man is born low down ; still, there is something in him that kindles at the very word Wisdom : he is like a wild ass's colt by nature ; he is made up of a strange mystery of passion and selfishness, ignorance and philosophy, but all the time there is something in him that says : Go forward, climb higher ; even yet the lower nature may be vanquished, and the higher nature may be assumed and possessed and enjoyed. It is something to have amongst us men who speak words of hope. It would be dreary living if our prophets were to take simply to upbraiding us because of the lowliness of our origin ; they would be children of night, they would belong to the school of darkness, who kept harping upon the fact that we were born like a wild ass's colt, and there is no hope of our ever becoming anything else. Blessed be those brighter-minded men who come amongst us, saying : However low-born you were, you may become a prince ; however humble your origin, you may stand among the crowned ones in light ; however poor your beginning—a beginning in orphanage and poverty and lowliness—you may become wealthy in thought, in purest feeling, and in philanthropic devotion. Listen to these voices : they come from above ; they confirm the divinity of their message by the very tenderness of their humanity.

Now Zophar, the much condemned, follows the example of Eliphaz, and concludes his speech by a very noble appeal. He writes what we may call a spiritual directory. He preaches to one man, and so preaches that every word is marked by gravity, sympathy, and wisdom ; therefore he was a great preacher. They are poor preachers who can only address a thousand people at once. Sometimes it is said—by persons who would say better if they knew better—that an audience of ten thousand men is enough to inspire any speaker. Nothing of the kind. He is the great preacher who sees the one man. He who sees one man aright sees all men, and he is a hireling and a left-handed labourer who can never rise to the dignity of the occasion **except** when inflamed by numerical appearances. See Zophar :

how his voice deepens and sharpens, how his eye kindles, how he comes a pace nearer the patriarch when he begins to preach to him! What a discourse it was! Not one waste word in it all. What a gift of terseness! How Zophar could strike without wounding, be precise without being severe, and preach a gospel such as the poor, beclouded, fear-driven heart needed to hear. Therefore, to return to the point from which we started, we cannot join the nearly universal condemnation which has been poured upon Zophar; we rather draw towards him as if with some sense of old kinship. We somewhat like even his sword. Wherever he strikes he cuts the object right in two; there is no mangling, no mere wounding, no half-done work: it was a scimitar that cut off whatever it aimed at. Then how tender he could become, how philosophical, how gracious, how sympathetic! We have seen how he looked up to God, and described him in terms that have never been surpassed for graphic vividness and spiritual grandeur. Few men could turn from that upward look, and fasten their eyes pityingly upon human suffering, and address that suffering as Zophar addressed the patriarch. Let us regard this concluding part of his speech as what we have termed a spiritual directory; then we shall see what we ought to do in similar circumstances.

“If thou prepare thine heart” (v. 13).

That is vital talk. This man is not playing with the occasion. He says in effect: All great questions turn upon the condition of the heart: these are not circumstances in which men may be wordy, opinionative, justifying themselves by long-continued arguments that have nothing in them of really sound sense: the heart must be prepared. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” He may never tell what is in his heart. The heart has wondrous power of self-involution and impenetrable secrecy: it looks out of the eyes, yet no man may see it; it observes, but is not observed; it whispers to itself in a tone so low that no one else can hear it; it dreams, it invents, it creates little heavens for its own enjoyment; it reconstructs the universe in imagination that it may luxuriate in it, and even in silence it may be holding festival, and when nothing seems to be going on the heart may be holding high revel. A marvellous, mysterious,

impenetrable thing is that awful human heart! Zophar took his stand upon these convictions, and said, "If thou prepare thine heart," and then he adds—the prepared heart will have an effect upon the hands—"and stretch out thine hands toward him"—make even a mute appeal. In Oriental lands the outstretched hands were a sign of prayer; though not one word was spoken, yet the opened palms meant an appeal, the uplifted hands meant human need of divine help. A very graphic image; a most suggestive attitude. What have we in this double exercise—a heart prepared, hands stretched out? Zophar says, If thou canst assume these two positions, certain consequences will follow, and none can prevent their issue.

"If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away" (v. 14).

Zophar insists upon both hands being open. He will not have one hand outstretched towards heaven, and the other doubled in miserlike grip upon some idolised sin; he will have both hands up, both hands open, all the fingers spread out, so that no jugglery shall be able to conceal even the shadow of a sin. Zophar was in very deed a practical preacher. He did not seek to please his audience, but to profit those who listened. He would speak directly, pithily, clearly, vitally. There was no escaping that man; he burned with earnestness. But Job might assume the attitude of a man whose heart was prepared, and whose hands were ready to receive blessing, and whose hand was not concealing iniquity, and yet he might have left his little idols all at home. Zophar knew that, and therefore he went home with Job and said—"Let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles:" clean out the corners: sweep out the recesses: tear out every secret thing: turn all upside down. What wonder if some of the commentators have disliked this young speaker—yellow-haired, radiant man, flaming prophet of the soul? What age could stand such preaching as Zophar's? There is nothing pleasant in it. It is wholly destitute of anecdote. It is all direct appeal. Zophar never takes his eyes from Job; he leaves Job under no false impression as to *his* purpose, and the meaning of that one solemn interview.

Having complied with all these conditions, what is the issue according to Zophar?

"For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear" (v. 15).

And by no other process could that consequence be realised. It is in vain to daub the wall with untempered mortar; it is worse than vain to call, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. The only way to get rid of fear is by the consolidation and continual increase of faith; where such increase takes place, love concurrently grows, and perfect love casteth out fear. Observe the attitude of the good man: his face is lifted up, without spot, without stain, without blush, without one sign of servility; he has become right with God, and, therefore, he lifts up his face, without sign of trepidation or apprehension or misgiving. A wonderful blessedness this to be without fear! Who has attained that wealth? Who does not look down as if he were afraid to look up, as if the heavens might burn him with scorching fire did he but turn an eye to their exceeding height? Who is altogether without fear? Find in fear a sign of inferiority, conscious weakness, or conscious sin; or sign of inadequate or failing physical constitution. Do not regard all fear as meaning that God is judge, and that his whole look towards the life is a look of condemnation. Nothing of the kind. Some men are born children of fear. They are not to be blamed; the fear is constitutional; is to be explained by physical causes and influences: wherever such a man is to be found he is to be cheered, encouraged, lovingly stimulated; he is to be told that the body is fighting against the mind, and he is to be called upon to see that the mind goes forth to the battle conscious that it can put down the body even in its most passionate clamour. Without such discrimination great harm will be done. Men who are constitutionally dull, fearful, apprehensive will be discouraged, and will turn away from the sanctuary, and will seek at forbidden altars the recruitment and renering of their depressed system. On the other hand, where the fear is really spiritual, and comes out of conscious sin, let there be no mistake about the matter; then Zophar must talk; his words must be like sharp swords, and his appeals must be accentuated as if with flame. Let every man judge himself.

About the misery that is historical, what has Zophar to say?

He makes a beautiful reference. He becomes a poet when he touches the days of vanished grief—

“Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away” (v. 16).

Is it not true that there is something in us which enables us soon to forget misery? One fair disclosure of sunlight makes us forget all the darkness of the past. Who can remember Night when he stands amid the whitening and glorious Morning? The two things cannot be present together in the memory. Wherever there is true light there is no darkness. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Walk as children of the light, walk in God; and as for the night of misery, we may have it recorded for the sake of our chastening in times of high prosperity, but as an active, energetic, and hindering influence it is forgotten, and has no more any power against us. But do not men delight to recall the days of misery? Is it not a peculiarity of human nature that we like to tell what sorrows we have had, to enumerate them in painful detail, as if there were a kind of joy in their very recollection and re-statement? If we were right with God we should talk much about mercies, deliverances, happy providences, times of sunlight, days of festival, hours of reunion, and should have no memory for miseries that afflicted us long ago. Let us grow towards thankfulness, appreciation; and there is only one way of growing towards these high realisations, and that is by the way described by Zophar—a preparation of the heart, an outstretching of the hands, a putting away of iniquity from the palms, and a cleansing of the tabernacle of all wickedness.

Then he tells Job about the future:

“And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning” (v. 17).

In other words, Thou shalt never be an old man: however many thy years, thy lightness of heart, thy buoyancy of spirit, thy conscious union with God, will make thee forget the burden of the days, and thou shalt be young for ever: at eventide there shall be ample light. “And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy

rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee" (vv. 18, 19). Why, this was the gospel before the time! What has Paul ever said more than this? In kindred eloquence he has told us that all things are ours, that all triumphs over life, death, principalities, powers, things present, things to come; but in no degree does he excel the lofty altitude which was attained by Zophar the Naamathite. But all this preaching on the part of Zophar and of Paul puts a tremendous responsibility upon us. What if we who profess the religion of Jesus Christ are as fear-driven as the men who hold the cross of Christ in contempt? What if we, who profess to be seeking a country out of sight, are in reality anxious about the country that now is and about building upon foundations in the dust? What if we who appear to be sandalled for a journey are willing to tarry at any wayside inn that will give us meat and drink free of cost? What if we perpetrate the irony of attempting to look to heaven whilst in reality we are looking all the time at the earth? If these consequences are to flow from this spiritual condition, and if we have not realised in some degree these effects, do we not cause a tremendous suspicion to rest upon the reality of our Christian profession?

Now all the men have spoken; we are now, therefore, in a position to look at the case as if it were in some measure complete. Job has spoken, and spoken much; Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar have spoken; but they are up to this point every one of them in the dark. As to the reality of the case with which they are dealing, they know nothing. The case has never been explained to Job; the three comforters know nothing about the reality of the conditions which they are attempting to discuss: they are all inflamed with some measure of unfriendliness to Job, because they believe that he has sinned in secret, and is therefore reaping the black harvest of the seed which he has sown. And what do we at any time understand about the reality of our own condition? We speak of our trials: who can account for their origin? Who knows what God may have said to the enemy of souls about us? Who can tell what scheme, proposed in hell and for the moment sanctioned in heaven, is taking effect in relation to our faith and our integrity?

The Lord said unto Satan : Job will withstand thee ; thou canst not destroy his faith : all will be well in the long run. The devil said : I will break him up ; I can shatter that man : take away from him his wealth, his family, and all his happy circumstances, —break up the environment—and he will curse thee to thy face. The Lord said—No : life is not a question of environment in its largest aspects ; take away everything he has, but leave his life, and Job will conquer. About this Job knew nothing, the three friends knew nothing ; the great controversy was proceeding whilst these men were all in ignorance as to its origin and purpose. The same holds good in regard to ourselves. We understand nothing. We can explain nothing. We ought to throw ourselves back upon history, and ask to be instructed and sobered by the monitions of the past. This view we might take : Job was being tried without Job knowing why ; it may be that we are being tried also, that by the constancy of our faith we may disappoint the devil, and inflict upon him the humiliation of a noble and consistent contradiction. Take that view of your circumstances ; take that view of your trials. The Lord has laid great responsibilities upon us, and he has said of us, My people will yet conquer ; they may be tempted and sorely tried and impoverished ; they may be orphaned and desolated and left without friends, but at the last they will stand up a conquering host. Blessed be God, he seems even now, by some mysterious exercise of his grace, to have faith in us : he will not believe the devil ; he will say of us, They will yet conquer. This is the true method of education. Stimulate your scholars ; place faith in them ; say to the boy when he goes forth to the day's battle : You will conquer, you will win, you will come back at night full of joy ; hold up your head, and you will return like a hero, bringing with you the spoils of war. Never send the child out under a cold cloud, under a threat, or under the feeling that you expect to be disappointed ; rather cheer him with the thought that you expect him to come back with his shield—or on it ; not a wound in his back ; if slain, slain in the front, facing the foe. It would seem as if God were now so trying us, and looking upon us, and as if he had pledged his word that at the last the soul of his Son shall be satisfied.



## Chapters xii.-xiv.

### JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.

#### I.

"And Job answered and said, No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" (xii. 1, 2).

THIS was unkind ; but very human ! Perhaps it was provoked : for we think we have discovered a tone of taunting in the three eloquent speeches which have been addressed to the patriarch. Was it worthy of Job to return taunt for taunt ? Was it worthy of Elijah to mock the idolatrous worshippers ? We must not separate ourselves from the human race, and stand back in the dignity of untouched critics, and say what was worthy, or what was not worthy ; we must rather identify ourselves with the broad currents of human experience, and take other men as very largely representing what we would have done under the same circumstances. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Criticism may be the supreme vice. Job represents ourselves in this quick and indignant introduction. He will get better as he warms to his subject. Indeed, all the speakers have done this, straight through the story, as we have clearly seen. They began snappishly, peevishly, mockingly ; but somehow a mysterious influence operated upon them, and every man concluded his speech in most noble terms. Better this than the other way. Do not some men always begin well and end ill ? Are not some lives like inverted pyramids ? Happy is the man who, however beefly he may begin the tale of his life, grows in his subject—expands, warms, radiates—until all that was little and mean in the beginning is forgotten in the splendour and magnificence of the consummation. Still, Job does begin sharply. He lifts his hand, and by a circular movement strikes every man of the three in the face, and leaves them smarting under the blow for a little while.

Job accuses the three men of being guilty of narrow criticism. Narrow criticism spoils everything. It also provokes contempt. That which is out of proportion always elicits a sneering criticism : it is too high, too low ; it is exaggerated in one dimension, it is out of square, and out of keeping with the harmony and the fitness of things, so that a half-blind man could almost see how the whole thing is out of true geometry. Whatever is so is pointed at, and is remarked upon, either with flippancy or with contempt. When did the bowing wall ever attract to itself the respect of the passer-by ? When did ever that which is one-sided, obviously out of plumb, draw to itself the commendation of any sensible critic ? Job said : So far as you have gone you are right enough : who knoweth not such things as these ? Your criticism lacks breadth ; you are like a point rather than an edge ; you see one or two things most clearly, but you do not take in the whole horizon : your minds are intense rather than comprehensive. This is the fault of the world ! It is peculiarly and incurably the fault of some men. They see single points with an intensity indescribable, and you cannot get them to see any other point, and complete the survey of the whole. They are men of prejudice, stubborn men ; they imagine that they are faithful, when they are only obstinate ; they suppose themselves to be real, when they are only incapable. It is illustrated on every hand. Narrow criticisms have driven men away from the Church who ought to have been its pillars and its luminaries. We must, therefore, take in more field. There is what may be called a sense of proportion in man. Not only has man an ear by which to try words, and a palate by which to test foods, but he has in him a sense of proportion : he seems to know without a schoolmaster when a thing is the right length, the right shape ; whether there is enough, or too much of it. Ask him to define this feeling in words, or justify it by canons of art, and he cannot do so. But there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. The untaught man stops before a house that is ridiculously low, and points it out. Why should he do so ? What is it that moves him but that inscrutable and undefinable sense of proportion, which would seem to be in every man ? So with a house that is disproportionately high. Though in haste, the man draws up to look at

it, to point it out; or if he be without companion he remembers the disproportionate thing, and relates at home what he has seen on the road. Why may not men build as they please without criticism? Simply because there is a common sentiment, a common opinion, an inborn sense of proportion and right; and men cannot be exaggeratedly individual without provoking criticism for their offence against the established customs and conclusions of the world. The three friends of Job, we now begin to see, had but a very short view of life, it was a very high one, and it went in the right direction; they were all religious men, but narrowly religious. They would have been more religious if they had been more human. They would have better represented God if they had broken down in tears, hung upon Job's neck, and said—Oh, brother, the hand is hard upon thee, and to us it is a mystery that tests our faith in God. But they were too sternly and squarely theological: they knew where God began and ended, what circuit he swept; and they judged everything by a narrow and unworthy standard. It is not enough to be right in points; it is not enough to have excellent traits of character: the whole character must be moulded symmetrically, and the whole man must be taken in before any one point of him can be understood. So it is with the living God: we are not to take out individual instances and dwell upon them in their separateness: we are to take in the whole horizon, and judge of every star in the firmament by every other star that shares the great honour of lighting the universe.

Then, again, Job points out that there is always another view to be taken than the one which is represented:—

“I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you” (xii. 3).

We always omit to take in the opinion of the other man. That is papal infallibility; and it lives in every country under heaven. We forget that there is another man in the house who has not yet spoken, and until he has spoken the whole truth has not been declared. There is a child crying, and until we understand through what gamut its cry passes we cannot comprehend the whole situation of things. The dying man is as essential a witness in this great evidence, concerning God and providence, as is the

testimony of the most robust and energetic witness. The truth is not with any three men. No three points can represent the circle. And God always works in circles, he knows nothing about any other geometrical figure. It seem to occur here and there, no doubt; but when taken into relation with all other things, the universe is a globe, a sphere, an infinite dewdrop. Who, then, stands up and says, Behold, this is the whole truth of God, and beside it there is nothing to be said? A man who should utter such words should be excommunicated from the altar, until he has learned that he knows nothing, and is but part of an immeasurable totality. Job insists upon being heard; he says, There are not three in this company, but four; and four is an even number, and the even number must be heard. There must be no triangular constituency in the great moral universe. Each man sees something which no other man sees; and until we have got the other man's testimony we are operating upon a broken witness. Every man in the church should pray. When the last little child has uttered his sentence, when the poorest, frailest woman has breathed her wordless sigh into the great supplication, then heaven will have before it the whole prayer of humanity. But are there not men who are instructed in theology? The worse for the world if their instruction has led them to narrowness and to finality! Theology is not a profession; it is the whole human heart, touched, kindled with a passion that seeks God. We must hear the patient as well as the doctor; we must hear the sufferer as well as the comforter; we must listen to Job as well as to his three friends.

Then Job cannot get away from what wicked men say:—

“I am as one mocked of his neighbour, who calleth upon God, and he answereth him: the just upright man is laughed to scorn” (xii. 4).

Everything seems to favour this view. Said Job, Look at me; my neighbours who were wont to consult me now mock me; they who knew that I have called upon God say, God has answered him in sore boils, and has thrown him to the dust that he may know how great is his hypocrisy: these many years I have maintained a character as a just upright man, now I am laughed to scorn: what else can I do? Look at me: what an answer I am to their sarcasm! I cannot touch myself at any

point without inflicting wounds upon my flesh with my own fingers ; I am a stranger to my nearest and dearest friends : how can I claim that God hears and answers prayer ? When they mock, I know they can justify their taunt ; when they laugh me to scorn, I know that there is reason in the malignant laughter. So Job, too, swings down to the dark point ; so Job also becomes as narrow as his critics. But there is some palliation for the narrowness which Job takes to, for he is under pain, the thong has cut to the bone ; he has nobody to speak to that can understand a word that he says : if he was narrow, it was most excusable in him. Job says :—

“He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease” (xii. 5).

An apparently unintelligible statement. The Revised Version says—“In the thought of him that is at ease there is contempt for misfortune.” Take the figure of the lamp. The idea would then be that of a long dark road ; a man has passed through it safely, he is in the house of security, and when he hears of some poor traveller struggling along the same road, and afraid his light will be blown out, he cares nothing for him ; he himself being at ease at home “despises” the man who is struggling along the dark road with a lamp that threatens to be blown out before the journey is completed. Take the other idea, which is in substance the same,—namely, that ill-regulated or unsanctified prosperity leads to the contempt of other men less fortunate—other men to whom prosperity is denied. A sad effect indeed, contempt for misfortune, reviling men and saying, They ought to have done better, they have themselves to blame for all this : look at me ; I have no misfortune ; I have lost nothing, I miss nothing, whatever I touch becomes gold, and wherever I look upon the earth a flower acknowledges the blessing of my glance. Such is the boast of impious prosperity, unsanctified and irrational success. This is the necessity of the case, unless there be a vivid realisation of the providence of God in human life. Every night when the good man adds up his book he must write at the foot of the page, “What hast thou that thou hast not received ?” Then the more he has the better. He will never say Look at me ; he will say, Look at God : how kind his bounties are, and large ! His mercy

endureth for ever : the Lord my God teacheth me to get wealth ; I must spend my wealth to the honour and glory of him who has taught my hands their skill, and gifted my mind with its peculiar and gracious faculty. When Job came into misfortune he heard the laughter of the mocker. He understood the rough merriment but too well ; he said—It is always so : “ he that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease ” ; the men who are now laughing at me are men who have shared my bounty in brighter days. Alas, poor human nature ! I am now laughed to scorn by the men who once would have been made happy by the touch of my hand.

Then Job becomes his better self. He goes out, and he takes a broad and a right view of human nature—a medicine always to be recommended to diseased minds. “ Canst thou minister to a mind diseased ? ” Yes, by taking the sufferer up the mountain, down the river, across the sea ; bringing him into close identity with the spirit of nature, the healing spirit, the spirit of benediction, the spirit of sleep. Job stands up like a great natural theologian, and preaches thus :—

“ But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee : and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee : or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee : and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this ? in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind ” (xii. 7-10).

He who talks so will surely live again ! He is very low down now, but he will come up, because the spirit of wisdom has not deserted him. He will reason upwards. He will make himself acquainted with all the nature that is accessible to him. So we say to all men, Make the most of scientific inquiry : have telescopes and microscopes, and go to day-schools and night-schools : study every little insect that lives that you can bring under your criticism : acquaint yourselves with the habits of fowls and fishes, and animals of every name, and plants of every genera : go into all departments of nature ; and depend upon it you are on the stairway which if followed will bring you up into the higher air and the broader light. Never believe there are two Gods in the universe—the God of nature and the God of the Bible. There is but one God. There are two aspects of his

revelation. Every pebble belongs to God. You cannot lose a pebble. The thief cannot run away without running into the very arms of the God he seeks to fly from. You cannot steal a single insect out of the museum of nature. You cannot take up one little grain of sand, and escape with it. All our felonies are little vulgar larcenies; they are all on the surface; we can mete out to them adequate punishment: but no man can steal from God in the sense of losing out of the creation anything which God has put into it. And everywhere God has written his name in large letters. The microscope is one of the doors into heaven; the telescope is another—a thousand doors all in one, and all falling back on their golden hinges to let the worshippers through in millions. Who ever introduced into the Church the most horrible heresy that nature is not God's, or that contempt for nature is the only appropriate attitude in relation to it, or the only right feeling regarding it? God is the gardener. He knows all the roses. You cannot steal a rose-leaf without his eye being upon you, and without his voice saying to the conscience, That rose-leaf is mine. You cannot shake a dewdrop off a flower without God knowing that the position of the dewdrop has been changed. There is not a little creature whose heart requires a microscope of the greatest power to see it that has not been, in one way or another—do not bewilder yourselves as to methods—created by the power and wisdom of God. We must, too, remember that there are two classes of workers. Some of our brethren are studying, according to Job's direction, "the beasts," "the fowls," "the earth," "the fishes of the sea." They are still our brethren; they are not to be despised. Others are studying the greater things of God,—that is to say, studying somewhat of his thought, purpose, love. They are the higher students, but they are still members of the same glorious academy. When the theologian says that the naturalist is contemptible, he is guilty of falsehood; when the naturalist says that the theologian is fanatical, he is guilty of falsehood: the two should be brothers, living together in amity and charity.

Job lays down a great doctrine which seems to have been forgotten:—

"Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?" (xii. 11).

What is the meaning of the inquiry? Evidently this—that there is a verifying faculty in man: the ear knows when the sentence has reached the point of music; the ear knows not only words, but, figuratively, understands reasoning; and the ear, taken as the type of the understanding, being the door through which information goes, says, Yes, that is right; No, that is wrong. Doth not the mouth taste meat, has not man a palate? The palate pronounces judgment upon everything that is eaten, saying, That is sweet, that is bitter; this is good, wholesome; that is poisonous and utterly to be rejected. What is that wondrous thing called the palate? It is not merely an animal appendage, but it is a critical faculty; it is something in the mouth that says, This may be taken, but not that. Now Job argues: As certainly as the ear tries words, and the mouth tastes meat, there is a spirit in man which says, That is true, and that is false; that is right, and that is wrong: has God given man an ear and a palate for the trying of words and the tasting of foods, and left him without understanding? The appeal is to the inward witness, the individual conscience, the inextinguishable light, or a light that can only be extinguished by the destruction of everything that makes a man. Here is the great power of Christ over all his hearers. He knows there is an answering voice. Once there stood a scribe, or other man of letters and wisdom, who said, when Christ answered a question wisely, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth." A man knows when he hears the truth. He may not know it to-day, and under this light, and within a certain number of instances; but there comes a time when every man is judge, gifted with the spirit of penetration; and by so much as he exercises that spirit of penetration will he become wise unto salvation, and in proportion as he distrusts it will he either grieve the Spirit or quench the Holy Ghost.

So Job will not be satisfied with Bildad's tradition or with the broad generalisations of Eliphaz; he will try the words, put them to the test of spiritual experience, and pronounce upon them as he may be guided by the Spirit of the living God. That is all any Christian teacher should desire. He must find his authority in his hearers. They must begin with him wherever



they can. There may be times when the hearers will separate themselves from the teachers, saying, We cannot follow you there; we have not been up so high, we have not been so far afield; we know nothing about what you are now saying, but you have said a thousand things we do know, a thousand things we have tasted and felt and handled, and we will stand there altogether, hoping that by-and-by we may ascend to higher heights, and take in the wider magnitudes: then there shall be between teacher and taught a spirit of masonry, of true love, of mutual trust; the taught shall say, Teacher sent from God, pray on, go higher and higher, but remember that we cannot go so quickly, and that at present we are upon a lower level; and the teacher should say—O fellow-students, let us pray together, and go a step at a time, and wait for the very last scholar, and where there is most infirmity let there be most love, where there is truest doubt let there be largest sympathy, and in all things let there be loving communion in Christ Jesus. Men animated by that spirit can never get far wrong. They may have a thousand misconceptions, so far as mere opinions and words are concerned, but they are right in the substance of their being, right in the purpose of their nature, right in their motive and intention, and at the last they shall stand in the light, and thank the God who did not desert them when the midnight was very dark, and the winter was intolerably cold.

## Chapters xii.-xiv.

### JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.

#### II.

**I**N the latter part of the twelfth chapter Job shows that he has a fuller and grander conception of God than any of his three comforters have. He is not behind them in the instinct or in the enjoyment of divine worship. When he speaks of God he lifts up our thought to a new and sublime level: "With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding" (xii. 13). Regarded metaphysically or spiritually, God is the great mystery of all things; he covers all the range appropriate to counsel, wisdom, and understanding: he is spiritually incomprehensible. Then actively—

"Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth" (xii. 14, 15).

What can man do? He cannot bring a single rain-cloud into the dry sky with promise of refreshment and fertility for the barren and languishing earth; he cannot make the sun rise one moment sooner than he is appointed by law astronomical to rise. Poor man! He can but stand in presence of natural phenomena with note-book in hand, putting down what he calls memoranda, looking these very carefully and critically over, and turning them into classical utterances which the vulgar cannot understand. But he is kept outside; he is not allowed to go to the other side of the door on which is marked the word *Private*. And as for God's actions amongst the great and the mighty of the earth, they are as grasshoppers before him:—

"He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle" (xii. 17, 18)

He takes off their glittering diamond band, and replaces it with

a slave's girdle. "He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty" (xii. 19). Yet the mighty boast themselves: they live in palace, and in castle, and in strong tower; they indulge in jeering and jibing at those who have no such security. What are they in the sight of God? God is no respecter of persons: God looks upon character—the very substance of life, its best and enduring quality; and where he finds right character he crowns it, he makes it better still by added blessing. But are there not those who set up their own enigmas and riddles as philosophies and revelations?

"He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty" (xii. 20, 21).

When did God pour contempt upon the poor, those who have no helper, and those for whom there is no man to speak? When was he hard with the afflicted and the infirm? So Job magnifies what he himself has seen of the providence and grace of God, and makes himself as it were a solitary exception to the great sovereignty of the heavens; yet now and again he says, in effect—almost in words—it shall not always be so: he who has bowed me down shall straighten me again, and I shall yet live to praise him. Now and again he stands up almost a poet and a prophet, for by anticipation he enjoys the deliverance and the triumph which he is sure must supervene.

Having spoken to the comforters, therefore, in their own theological language, and showed that he was a greater theologian than any of them, he gives them to understand that in their argument they have somehow missed something:—

"What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you. Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God" (xiii. 2, 3).

He turns away from the three talkers, practically saying, Let me continue this controversy with heaven, and not with earth: you vex me, you fret me; you do not touch the reality of the case; yours are all words, clever and beautiful words, but you never come near my wound: away! Let me speak directly to the condescending heavens: though judgment has fallen upon me, yet mercy will come from the same quarter. Job, therefore,

feels that the three friends have missed something. He gropes after God. He says, The answer must come whence the mystery has come : you did not afflict me, and you cannot heal me : this is a matter of original application, of direct appeal to heaven : he who began must finish ; you have nothing to do with it. How happy we should often feel ourselves if we could shake our souls free from uninformed sympathisers, and from people who offer us keys which were never meant to open the lock of God's mystery ! This is what Job does. He says in effect—I have listened to you, your words have passed over me, the ear has heard them, and rejected them ; now give me opportunity of talking with God.

“ But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value ” (xiii. 4).

What is it that feels this to be the case in our human education ? We listen to men, and say—So far, good : there is sense in what you say ; you are not without mental penetration ; unquestionably your appeals are marked by ability : but somehow the soul knows that there is something wanting. The soul cannot always tell what it is, but there is a spirit in man which says—The statement to which you have just listened is one-sided, imperfect, incomplete ; it wants rounding into perfectness. Surely there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. Wise men come before us, and say, Here is the world : what more do you want ? A beautiful little world, a mere speck of light no doubt, still, there is room enough in the world to live in : we may cultivate the earth and rejoice in all its productions, flower and fruit alike : what more do you want ? We listen, and say, That is a good argument : certainly the world is here, and a world that gives fruits and flowers, and has in it birds of its own, birds that cannot fly beyond its atmosphere, birds made to sing in this cage, and to make the children of men glad. But we no sooner consent to the solidity of the argument than a voice within us says—O fool, and slow of heart ! You are bigger than any world God ever made, greater than the universe on which he seems to have lavished an infinity of wisdom and strength : in this poor little fluttering heart lies a divinity that mocks all space, and defies all time, and tramples upon all the challenges

and offers of the material universe. Then men say, Be learned, be wise; science is the providence of life, submit to it; there are certain known measurable laws, accept them, and live within them: roof yourself well in with laws and proved generalisations, and be content. No sooner have we admitted that the appeal is good and strong, certainly up to a given point unquestionably so, than the same voice within us says, Have they ever told you what life is? and you live! Not what life is beyond the stars, but what your own life is? Have they ever seen it, measured it, weighed it, revealed it to your sight? Why, sir, you live! That is a mystery next to the fact that God lives. What is life? As well ask you to be content with your garments and pay no attention to your physical condition, as ask you to be content with things that are outside your mind and neglect the mind itself. So with many a criticism passed upon the Christian religion; we feel that the criticism is clever, sharp, pungent, acute; if it were a question of mere criticism we should say, It is admirably done; but when the critic has ceased, this mysterious voice, this inner self, this impalpable, invisible thing called the soul, or the spirit, says, The statement is incomplete: it is wanting in vitality; the men who have made that statement are conscious themselves that they have not touched the limit of things. So Job felt. He said, "What ye know, the same do I know also; I am not inferior unto you." Up to a given point we go step for step, and say, The reasoning is perfectly good, but after that what remains? What after death, what after visible facts; what about will, motive, passion, love, and all the mysterious spiritual forces that throw man into tumult or gladden him with sacred joy? About these things you seem to have nothing to say.

Job therefore directs them to keep their tongues quiet, saying, "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! And it should be your wisdom" (xiii. 5). That is not mere mockery; that is solid philosophy. In presence of some mysteries we must simply be silent. He who can be reverently silent in the presence of such mysteries is a great scholar in the school of God; he has courage to say, I do not know. He is along the line, he is eloquent at many a point, but he suddenly comes to

points in the line which confuse him and defy him, and there he closes his lips: but his silence is prayer, his speechlessness is religion; this is not the dumbness of opposition, it is the silence of adoration.

Now Job asks a question or two, the principle of which applies to all ages:—"Will ye speak wickedly for God?" (xiii. 7). What an extraordinary combination of terms! If a man speak about God, can he do so "wickedly"? The answer is a melancholy Yes. Some of the things we shall have most deeply to repent of may be our sermons respecting God. We have created our sermons, and tried to force God into them, and to make him a consenting partner in our evil deed. Who will arise to speak righteously about God, and call him Father? To what evil treatment has he been subjected! How cruel have men been with God! First of all they conceive a certain theory of the Almighty, and then they bend everything into the lines which they have laid down. There are those who would overpower conscience by sovereignty. This is never to be allowed. God never comes into conflict with the human conscience. From the beginning he has been careful to keep himself, so to say, in harmony with the self which he has given to man, in the sense of being a spirit which could discern good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, partiality and impartiality. There are those who have said that God has damned some portions of the human race. Who ever said so is a liar! He "speaks wickedly for God." Whoever says to the human conscience, Sit down: you have no right to ask about this appearance of partiality on the part of God, speaks deceitfully for the most high. "God is love"; "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Who can challenge great speeches like that? These are the appeals that make the whole world kin. There you find no show of favour or partiality or selection. Whenever God goes beyond what we believe to be the letter of the law, it is never to exclude but always to include men whom we thought were for ever to be kept outside. He says to the Jew, What if I go after the Gentile? I made the Gentile as certainly as I made the Jew. And what said the most

stubborn of Jews? At a certain time of spiritual revelation he said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." There you have a philosophy that will stand the wear and tear of life; there you have a gospel that you can stand up and preach to the living and the dead. Alas! it is possible to have an immoral theology; in other words, it is possible to "speak wickedly for God." We are to stand upon great principles, eternal truths, the sweet and proved realities of grace. There you are strong, with all the strength of personal experience; there you are gracious, with all the tenderness of real human sympathy. There is a God preached by some men that ought never to be believed in. Such men have no authority for their preaching in Holy Scripture. If they quote texts, they misquote them; if they point to chapter and verse, they never point to context. The providence of God must always illustrate the grace of God, and God "is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil"; "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust": "God is love." He must be spoken of in loving language; he must be revealed in all the attributes which indicate passion, mercy, tenderness, pity, clemency, care for the infirm, the feeble, the desolate, and the lost. In doing so, do we forget the righteousness of God? Certainly not, but it is the glory of righteousness to be compassionate; it is the glory of justice to flower out into charity. There is no unrighteousness in God. But partiality would be unrighteousness. First to give man a conscience, and then to insult and dishonour it, would be unrighteous. To teach that God has chosen one man to go to heaven and another man to go to hell, is to perpetrate a direr blasphemy than was done by the hand of Iscariot. This great evangelical doctrine must be declared in all its fulness and gravity, in all its argumentative nobleness, and in all its sympathetic tenderness, if the world is to be affected profoundly and savingly. The world is never affected by an argument which it cannot understand: men are moved by passions, impulses, instincts, intuitions,—by something coming to them which has a correspondence in their own nature, and to which that which is in them answers as an echo to a voice.

Now let us take our stand on these great principles, and the world will not wish us to withdraw our ministry. When we thus magnify God we unite the human race; we do not break it up and distribute it, classify it and mark it off for monopolies and primacies and selfish sovereignties: we unite the human heart in all lands and climes, in all ages and under all circumstances. Nothing may be so impious as piety. Nothing may be so irreligious as religion. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Job having thus rebuked his friends makes what he terms a "declaration":—

"Hear diligently my speech, and my declaration with your ears" (xiii. 17).

Then he begins to say that all things are done by God; he says, Whatever is, God rules, and overrules; it is therefore not to be judged by the moment, or by some limited line, or newly-invented standard. God must have time, as well as nature. You say you must give nature time; you must remember that the seasons are four in number, and that they come and go in regular march and harmony. What you accord to nature you ought not to deny to God. It has pleased him so to make the world that not only is there in it one day, but there is a Tomorrow, and there is a third day: on the third day he perfects his Son. We must await the issue, and then we shall be called upon to judge the process. Now we see so little; we know next to nothing; we spend our lives in correcting our own mistakes: by-and-by the process will be consummated, and then we shall be asked to pronounce a judgment upon it; and in heaven's clear light, and in the long day of eternity, we shall see just what God has done in the human race, and why he has done it. Oh for patience!—that mysterious power of waiting which is a kind of genius; the silence that holds its tongue under the assurance that at any moment it may be called upon to break into song, and testimony, and thanksgiving. Silence is part of true religion. He is not ignorant who says, I do not know. He may be truly wise; he may be but indicating that up to a given point he feels sure and strong and clear, and he is waiting at a door fastened on the other side until those who are within open it and bid him



advance. Be it ours to be close to the door, for it may open at any moment, and we may be called to advance into larger spaces and fuller liberties.

Job is not afraid to say that "the deceiver and the deceived" are both in the hands of God. Job is not afraid to say that all affliction is sent of heaven, and that no affliction springs out of the dust. Job is represented, in the English version, as saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." But that is not what Job did say. He said he *will* slay. It would be beautiful to retain the English just as we find it, but justice of a grammatical kind will not allow it. Job says: He will slay me, but I will still call his attention to great principles: in the very agony of death I will hold up before him that which he himself has told me. So Job, by a gracious and happy self-contradiction, says he will be slain, and yet he will contend; he will fall, and yet from the dust he will plead. Surely in the man's heart was hidden a promise which he dare not divulge in words, but which was all the time warning him, comforting him, inspiring him, and making his weakness the very best and purest of his power.

## Chapters xii.-xiv.

### JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.

#### III.

WE have often had occasion to rejoice when Bible speakers have come down to a line with which we are ourselves familiar. Upon that line we could judge them correctly, as to their wisdom and understanding of human affairs. It is the peculiar distinction of Bible speakers and writers that now and again they ascend to heights we cannot climb: what they are uttering upon these sunlit elevations we cannot always tell; the great men are out of sight, often out of sound; we hear but reports of what they are declaring, and they themselves are more echoes than voices; they cannot tell what they have seen, or heard, or spoken; they have been but instruments in the hands of God. But, ever and anon, they come down to the common earth, and talk in our mother-tongue, and look us steadfastly in the face: then we can form some true judgment of the value of their thinking, of the scope of their imagination, and of the practical energy of their understanding. An instance of that kind occurs in the fourteenth chapter. Job begins to talk about "Man." So long as he talked about himself there was a secret behind his speech which we could not penetrate. There is, indeed, a secret of that kind behind every man's speech. No man says all he knows; no man can say all he means: behind the most elaborate declarations there are mysteries of motive and thought and purpose, which the man himself can never represent in adequate words. But now Job will speak about man in general; that is to say, about the human race; and when he begins so to speak, we can subject his words to practical tests, and assign them their precise value in historical criticism.

What does Job say about man? Is it true that man is a creature whose existence is measurable by days? What are

"days"—mere fleeting shadows of time, hardly symbols of duration, going whilst they are coming, evaporating whilst we are remarking upon their presence? How long is it between sunrise and sunset? To the busy man it is nothing. To the idle man it is, and ought to be, a long time: but to the energetic servant, busy about his Lord's work, what is the day?—A little rent in the sky, a little gleam of light shining through a great immeasurable darkness. Is it true, then, that man's existence, as we know it, is measurable by days? Are his days but a handful at the most? Are the days of our years statable in clear numbers? Does human existence humble itself to be settled by the law of averages? Has that mysterious quantity, that awful secret, human life, been dragged to the table of the arithmetician and made to accommodate itself to some form of statistics, so that whatever A or B may do, the common man, the medial quantity, will live to forty years, or fifty, and the whole stock of the human population may be struck down at that figure? Calculate upon that: offer them prices at that: write out their policies at that figure. Is it so, that man who can dream poems and temples and creations can be scheduled as probably finishing his dream at midnight or at the crowing of the cock? Are we so frail? Is life so attenuated a thing, that at any moment it may snap, and our best and dearest may vanish for ever from our eyes? Job was either correct or incorrect when he said that: every man can judge the patriarch at this point. Is man like a flower which cometh forth, and is cut down? Is he no stronger than that? Beautiful indeed: a child of the sun, a spot of loveliness in a desert of desolation,—a comely child: but may he die in the cradle: may his cradle become his coffin? May he never learn to walk, to talk, to love? It is so, or it is not so? There is no need to expend many words about this. Job is now talking about facts, and if the facts can be produced as against him here, we may dismiss him when he takes wing and flies away to horizons that lie beyond our ken.

But Job may be right here, and if he here talk soberly, truly, with wise sadness, he may be right when he comes to discuss problems with which we are unfamiliar. Is man "full of trouble"? Does any man need to go to the lexicon to know what "trouble" means? Is that word an etymological mystery? Do people

know trouble by going to school? or do they know it by feeling it? Does the heart keep school on its own account? Do men know grief at first sight, and accost it as if they were familiar with it, and had kept long companionship with it in existences not earthly? The patriarch says "full" of trouble. That is a broad statement to make, and it is open to the test of practical observation and experience. What does "full of trouble" literally mean in the language which the patriarch employed? It means, satiated with trouble; steeped, soaked in trouble; so that the tears could be wrung out of him as if he had been purposely filled with these waters of sorrow. Is that true? Is man full of trouble,—in other words, may trouble come into his life by a thousand different gates? Is it impossible to calculate, on awakening in the morning, how trouble will come into the heart—through the gate of business, through personal health, through family circumstances? Will the letter-carrier bring a lapful of trouble to the man's breakfast-table? Is man full of trouble, sated with sorrow, soaked and steeped in the brine of grief? We can tell: here we need no learned annotator with ponderous books and far-reaching traces of words: the heart knoweth its own bitterness. Who has ever stumbled at the first and second verses of the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Job, saying, These verses are not true? Nay, who has not gone to them in the dark and cloudy time and the day of desperate sorrow, and said, These words express the common experience of the race? Then Job says, man "fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Is this true, or is the word "shadow" a rhetorical expression? Is not our life more like a stable rock? Is not our existence firm like a mountain? Can we not say positively that we shall go into such and such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, sell, and get gain? Has the Lord not allowed us to use the one little word "year" as if we had a right to it? Were we speaking about a long lifetime or an eternity then modesty might restrain our speech; but does the Lord say we are not to lay claim to one year for residence in a foreign city for commercial purposes, but that even in a promise for a year we must say, "if the Lord will"? Let this question be settled by facts. Do not be led away by words, however many and vital, but say, Has Job thus far laid his hand upon the realities of human experience? Is he

but indulging in flights of imagination, and painting pictures which have no reference to the realities of life?

Assuming Job to be right, the question comes, How to account for this? Surely man, as we know him, cannot be made to be a creature of "days," the subject of "trouble,"—a "flower" for transitoriness of existence, or a "shadow" for evanescence? "Man" is the first word in the chapter, and it is a larger word than "days," "trouble," "fear," "shadow"; to use the word in the old English sense, these terms do not equivocate with the word "man." There is something more than we see: there is the argument of consciousness,—an argument without words; that great terrible argument of sentiency, inward knowledge, instinct, intuition, call it what you may: there is something in "man" that will say to "fear" and "shadow," You do but represent one little section of my existence: I am more than you are: I am not a daisy which an ox can crush; I am not a shadow which can be chased away from the wall: in some respects I am weak enough—a mere child of days; my breath is in my nostrils, I know, but I know also that there is something within all the enfoldings and complications of this mysterious condition of life which says it will not die. Left to construct an argument in words, that argument might be borne down by a greater fury of words; but how to deal with the divinity that stirs within us! After all our arguing is done, that mysterious spirit says it lives still; that mysterious Galileo says, when the inquisitorial argument and the torture process are all concluded, I still live: I cannot, will not die; only one power can crush me, and that is the power that made me. Yes, there is an argument of consciousness, after all controversy in words has had its windy way.

Now Job comes to the fixed realities of life. He says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one"—(xiv. 4). There he would seem to be philosophical in the modern sense of the term: he would appear to have fixed his reasoning upon what we call the law of cause and effect. He speaks like a wise man. The proposition which he lays down here is one which is open to immediate and exhaustive scrutiny. But he proceeds: "Seeing his days are determined, the number

of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (xiv. 5). Is all that true? Do we live an "appointed" time on the earth? Are our days meted out to us one by one, and is a record kept by the Divine Economist, and can we not beg just one more day, to finish the marble column, or to put one last touch to the temple whose pinnacles are already glistening in the sun? Is all settled? Have we only liberty to obey? Let facts declare themselves. Job's appeal to heaven, based upon these supposed facts, is full of pathos. You find the appeal in the sixth verse—"Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish as an hireling his day." In other words, Do not look at him, O God; but let him do his little day's work, and go to his beast's refuge in the ground. Or in other words, The discrepancy between thy look and his fate would drive man mad: spare him thy glance: if thou hast made him to be but a superior beast of burden, oh! do not look at him; he would misunderstand thy look,—it would seem to touch somewhat of kinship in his soul, and thy look might give him a hope which thou hast determined to blight;—Lord of mercy, do not look at the man thou hast doomed to die; let him run through his little tale of work, and bury himself in the eternal night. Job already begins to feel a movement of the soul which cannot be content with words of a negative kind. Why should man be so affected by the look of God? No beast prays to be released from the overruling observation of God. What is this masonry that understands the signs of the heavens? What is it within us that answers to an appeal made from the highest places? There we come upon the line of mystery: and my affirmation is that nowhere do we find answers direct, clear, simple, complete, and grand to all the hunger of the soul as we find in the Book of God—a Book which covers the whole space, answers the inquiry, turns the question into exultation and praise.

Job reasons, and reasons wrongly. The reasoning is good, but the application is inadequate and fallacious, thus:—

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant" (xiv. 7-9).

Beautiful! fact turned into poetry: the tree blossoms under

the touch of Job's reasoning. But what does he make of it? We shall see presently. Meanwhile, Job says "there is hope of a tree." If there is hope of anything, there must be hope of man. If you can find anywhere in nature a point at which hope begins, you have seized the key of the whole situation. If anything can die, and live again, you have secured the whole revelation of God's purpose concerning man. We only need to find it anywhere. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed: after the mustard seed has been given the rest is but a commonplace: the trunk, the branches, the singing birds,—what are these but mere sequences that cannot help themselves? the miracle is in the seed itself—the first thought, the first word. Given an alphabet, and you have given a literature; given one thought, and you have given companionship to God. Job admitted the whole case the moment he got so far in his reasoning as to say "there is hope of a tree." Job did not at once see what his reasoning led to. It was enough, however, to have a good beginning.

Now see how he drops where he ought to have risen. The contrast begins in the tenth verse—"But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost." Does Job end there? Job cannot give up the case yet; even when he is denying a thing he asks questions which call it back again for consideration; he cannot release his hand upon the great possibility: he lets it go so far, even an arm's length, and then he asks a question, and the subject turns back, and says, You are not done with me yet; we must have larger speech than we have yet had: come, let us continue together in sweet and hopeful fellowship, for out of discussion, contemplation, and prayer light may break, morning may dawn. Therefore Job having declared that "man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost," ends with—"and where is he?" He does not say—"and is nowhere," "and is not," "and cannot be found any more." Sometimes the very asking of a question is like the offering of a prayer; sometimes a question may be so put as to involve its own answer. Do not scorn men who gather around the Bible and ask questions concerning it; do not wonder that men cannot get at the meaning if the whole Bible all at once, and become completed saints at

one day's sitting over the sacred oracles ; Jesus Christ encouraged the asking of great questions ; he believed that the very asking of great questions was itself a process of education. So Job says, "Where is he ?" "As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up : so man lieth down, and riseth not" (xiv. 11, 12) : is that a full-stop ? No ; Job cannot come to a period yet ; he is at a colon, the very next stop to a full one, but not a full one—"So man lieth down, and riseth not : till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." Words difficult for us to understand, but still, read in the spirit of Job's hopefulness when he put the question, they may be made to meet a secret hope that there is coming a time in which man's resurrection shall contrast with nature's dissolution. Who can tell ? Nay, the very word "sleep" has in it somewhat of hope—"They shall not awake," are they then but slumbering ? It may be. "Raised out of their sleep,"—are they, then, but recruiting their energy in a night's rest ? So it may be. We believe it. Life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel ; and, bringing Christ's preaching to bear upon the Book of Job, we see that many a dark place is lighted up. This is not a *post hoc* ? We are not bringing back history upon history as a mere controversial resort ; this is the right and philosophical method of reading life—to bring the third day to bear upon the first day to explain all its mystery and illumine all its darkness. Jesus Christ thus reasoned, and we are prepared to follow him in all his argument. Job should have reasoned the other way : but who is always right ? Who is always equal to the occasion ? It is easier to lie down than to stand up ; it is easier to go down a hill than to struggle against a steep. We cannot blame the patriarch. He might have reasoned—"There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground ; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant," and if a common vegetable can do this, how much more shall man respond to the touch divine, and abolish death, and be like the golden wheat, springing up out of corruption, sixtyfold, an hundredfold, in answer to the sower's care ! But we are not always equal to



ourselves. In one man the "selves" are many. Sometimes the man is almost an angel; sometimes he is a mighty reasoner, and can hold his work clear up to the midday sun, and defy that bright critic to show a flaw in all the process, yet that selfsame man is often tired, worn down, overborne by the long-lasting fatigues of life, so that he can hardly utter his own prayers, or crown them with an energetic Amen. Do not, therefore, rush in upon a man at his weakest moment, and say, This is what he believes: see what a palpable hypocrisy, what an ill-concealed weakness of the soul. That is not the man. Meet him tomorrow, and the vitality will be back in his eye, and the thunder will have returned to his voice. Address yourself to a man at his highest point, as God does: God answers our ideal prayers, and interprets our ideal selves, and thus sees in us more than we can for the moment see in our own nature. How we sometimes miss the parable of the growing world! All nature teaches resurrection: the trees do but sleep; the earth itself does but gather around her the coverlet of snow, and say, like a tired mother, Let me sleep awhile. All nature is a Bible written with the finger of God upon the one subject of resurrection. There is a rising again; there is a return to the paths of life; there is a perpetual urgency of nature towards larger growth. Sometimes the summer is so rich, so warm, so fecundant, that it would seem as if winter could never come back, as if the earth had entered upon the days and the delights of Paradise.

One thing is certain: we have yet to die; we have yet to be, so far as the body is concerned, like water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up, we have yet to yield up the spirit into the hands of him who created it. A right beautiful thing to do when we get into the right state of mind! Then there is no dying: there is a falling asleep, there is an ascension, there is a "languishing into life," there is a process of passing into the bosom of God. O thou bright little dewdrop, thou dost not tremble with pain when the sun comes to call thee up to set thee in the rainbow! O poor shrinking heart of man, trembling flesh, misgiving, doubtful spirit, when thy Lord comes thou shalt not know that thy feet are in the river: he will kiss thee into peace, and life, and heaven!

## Chapters xii.-xiv.

### JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.

#### IV.

A VERY curious specimen of the black and white art of colouring is this whole speech of Job. Sometimes it appears to be all blackness, and then it is suddenly and tenderly relieved by whiteness, like the radiance of a large, soft planet. We must not, therefore, put our finger down upon any one point and say, This is the speech. The speech has a million points, and they belong to one another, and can only be understood in their relation and their unity. We have seen Job half in the grave; yea, more than half—nothing out of it but his head: but, blessed be God, so long as the head is out of the tomb we hear eloquent speech about life, and death, and trouble, and hope. And was not the heart out of the grave as well as the head,—that is to say, all the affectional sentiments, all the moral impulses, all that makes a man more than a mere genius? Truly so.

Job now opens a new source of consolation:—

“Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (xiv. 15).

What artist likes to throw away his own painting? Critics do not like it: they are perfectly ingenious in discovering flaws in it; but the artist himself says: I painted that picture with my heart. We have heard of the unwillingness of a preacher to throw away his own discourses. Said one to me—a gentle soul, now with the gentle angels, a man whose mind was all beauty, and whose heart was all love—“The critics have been hard upon my sermons, but I know what fire and life and force I spent upon them.” They represented the man’s best power; he had embodied his very soul in the living sentences of these

discourses : how could he cut them up, and scatter the fragments, as if they had cost him nothing ? We have heard the mother say, when the sword was in mid-air to divide the child, "O my lord, give her the living child." It was a mother's cry, and Solomon detected the maternal tone in the agony. What mother likes to abandon her own child ? and is not a father represented as being pitiful to his children ?—"like as a father pitieth his children." That would seem to be the argument of Job in this fifteenth verse—"Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands : " thou wilt not let cold cruel death break up thy child, cover him up with dust, and stamp him with the seal of annihilation and oblivion. Thus God has set many teachers within us ; all our affections, emotions, impulses, everything that connects us one with another in social confidence and mutual honour,—all these forces and ministries are meant to teach us that he himself is the same as we are, multiplied by infinity. Why not ? God created man in his own image : in the image of God created he him. He is a little God, but he belongs to the divine family ; he boasts not of royal blood, but of blood divine : when he stumbles, he falls like a son of God ; when he breaks away from altar and sanctuary and oath, he seems to tear the heavens, so large does he become in God's estimation, so greatly does he bulk amid the material things that are round about him and above him : what a gap, what a vacancy, what a loss ! No darkness clouds the blue heaven when the beast dies, but when man dies who knows what pain quivers at the heart of things ? A beautiful thought it was for Job to realise that man was the work of God's hands. What is it that distinguishes one life from another,—say, one voice from another, one hand from another ? Are not all human hands alike ? Cannot all men paint with equal skill ? They have the same canvas, the same colours, the same brushes ; now let them proceed one by one, and the signature of the one in colour will be equal to the signature of the other. But such is not the fact : the higher artist says to the younger and lower, What your picture wants is this touch. It lives ! That one touch has separated the former picture from the present by the length of infinity. So all things are the work of God's hands—the beast and the angel : but who can measure the distance between the two ? Thus this word

“desire”—yearning—is the right word,—a wringing of the heart, a drawing out of the soul in exquisite solicitude tenderly tender, as if God would touch without harming, lift up and set down without leaving any marks of violence upon his child. All this is helpful, not because it is ancient in history, but because it concurs with our own desire and experience. The love we bestow upon anything is the value of it: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” We measure all things by the love we assign them. Applying that same standard to God, how much must he love the world who, in any sense, died for it!

Then Job alters his tone:—

“For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin?”  
(xiv. 16).

Let us take it (though there is no little difficulty about the mere grammar of the passage) that Job is arguing from providence to morals. He proceeds in his reasoning from “steps” to “sin.” He would seem to trace the same criticism—“for now thou numberest my steps”: therefore, as thou art so particular and critical about my steps, dost thou let my sin go past without observation? The passage has been rendered variously, but this would seem to be a meaning which inheres in the thought, because it is certainly true to our present conception of God’s rule. Let us be strong on the point of providence first. Have no fear of the ultimate condition of any man’s mind when that mind is perfectly certain as to the reality of a superintending providence. Deism may end in Christianity. Everything will depend upon its spirit: if it is haughty, intolerant, self-idolatrous, it will end in nothing but vanity; but if it can say, reverently, Up to this point I am clear; here I can stand, and think, and pray, and hope, be sure that the issue will be right. Is there, then, a providence in life? Do not think of some other man’s life only, but think of your own life when you are called upon to reply to this inquiry. Now go back, begin at the very first page of your own life: how unconnected the sentences, how almost incoherent the style; what a singular want of relation as between one part and another! So it is.

Unquestionably it is rough reading at the first. Now turn over a page. Has no light come? You answer, Yes, a little light has begun to dawn. Go on to the next page: add one day to another: let the events settle down into proportion; and presently you will begin to see that even your life has been as it were the darling of God. You have to deny yourself before you can deny divine providence. The matter is no longer theoretical, or you could easily dismiss it; but when a man is bound first to commit suicide before he can cease to believe, then God has wrought in him a gracious and blessed miracle. Job thus reasons: My steps are watched; I am an observed man; what I thought was a belt of cloud is a belt of omnipotence, and I cannot get through it; what I considered to be but a thin mist in the air is the very throne of God: I can do nothing without leave; I live by permission. Up to this point Job might have said: I am perfectly clear. But if so, what more? Does God pay so much attention to that which is without, and no attention to that which is within? Is he careful to measure a man's steps, and oblivious of man's transgression? This is the great reasoning, the fearless logic, that goes forward from point to point, and forces the soul to face the consequences of facts.

That Job is sure that his sin is watched is evident from the next verse:—

“My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity” (xiv. 17).

Job was acquainted with Oriental customs; he knew that the judge wore a scrip or a pouch, and that in this scrip were put all the documents which related to the particular case: the judge took them out of the scrip one by one. But there was something more than the general scrip or receptacle of the documentary evidence—“Thou sewest up mine iniquity”: not only had the Oriental judge or accuser an open pouch in which he kept documents needful for the establishment of his case, but he had an inward and lesser compartment, carefully sewn up, in which were the special proofs that the general impeachment was sound. In the scrip there were two compartments—one in which was the general accusation against the man, and the other in which

there were the special and critical proofs cited to establish the charge. This is what Job saw when he looked upon God. Said he : I see the scrip, the full pouch ; I see the documents that are written against me ; and behind them all are proofs I cannot deny ; the case is well ordered and set forth with masterly skill ; not a point will be overlooked, and where I am strongest in denial God will be strongest in evidence. Job's conception of the divine providence in its moral relations was not that of a general oversight, or of a loose-handed indictment as against any man or number of men ; Job said in effect : Men make mistakes about this matter ; they confuse their documents and their references ; sometimes they lose papers which are essential to their case, and sometimes they cannot read all their own hands have written ; and therefore even the wicked man will escape a just judgment : but when God undertakes to be judge, there is the scrip, there is the general accusation, there are the particular proofs, day and date down to hour and moment, and locality down to a footprint, and there is no reply to omniscience.

Now the patriarch turns, as has been his recent wont, to nature—

“And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. The waters wear the stones : thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth ; and thou destroyest the hope of man” (xiv. 18, 19).

Nature is terrible as well as gracious. What is so monotonous as sunshine ? What is so mocking as the fixed stars ? We cannot change their temper ; we can work no miracle upon their image ; there they shine, from century to century, from millennium to millennium. Praise the sun who may, and that he is worthy of praise who will deny, but his is a monotonous friendship. If the clouds did not come to help us we could not bear the sun's fierce love. What if we owe as much to the clouds as to the sun ? What if the attempering atmosphere has made the heavens possible as a source of enjoyment ? Is there not a great principle of mediation even in nature ? Does the sun shine straight upon the earth without anything between ? Woe betide the earth then ! The poor little handful of soil we call the earth could not live for a moment · it would stagger under the fierce blaze : but

there is scattered between the sun and the earth a great intermediary ministry, a mollifying and attempering influence. And is there not a daysman between God and humanity? Is there not what answers to an atmosphere between the Essential Glory and this poor time-space and flesh-life, this mystery of body and soul chained together for one tumultuous hour? Job saw the mountain falling. Mountains do not fall in our country. True: but they do fall in volcanic regions; they fall where earthquakes are almost familiar: there "the rock is removed out of his place." We do not learn everything in our own little land; we must go the world over to learn something of God's method. Here the mountains are firm; yonder they are thrown up as if they were toys in the mighty hands of some player, who trifled with them and made them spin in the air. Here the rocks are emblems of solidity, but where earthquakes are known they are torn out of their places and hurled miles away. And even where there is no violent action of nature, there is a continual process of decay or ruin—"the waters wear the stones." All nature is wearing. Nature is killing, as well as making alive, every moment. The little, gentle, beautiful, soft, plashing water is wearing away the great rocks; the continual dropping of water will wear the stone. What we think gracious is often severe, and what we think severe is often gracious. But Job has fixed his mind upon this great fact—that mountains cannot be relied upon, rocks cannot be built upon, strong stones cannot be depended upon if there is water near—flowing, active water. Water will get the better of any rock. That which seems to be nothing in comparison will wear the other out, and send the rock flowing down the stream. Job, therefore, gets sight of the severe aspect of nature, and he reasons upward from mountain, and rock, and stone, and things growing out of the dust to man, and says, "Thou destroyest the hope of man": here you have volcanic action, earthquakes tearing out rocks, waters wearing stones, beautiful growths washed away, and a sudden, strange, awful blight falling in blackness upon the hope of the soul. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

What is the meaning of all this as applied to man? The meaning is perpetual overthrow—"Thou prevailest for ever

against him." It is man who always goes down; it is the creature who is bowed under the hand of the Creator. O vain man, know this! What canst thou do against God? Why bruise thy poor fingers in thumping upon the eternal granite? Why dare Omnipotence to battle? "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace"; "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"; lay down the arms of rebellion, and cry for quarter from the heavens: thou canst not prevail. Let the tumbling mountain teach thee, and the falling rock be an analogy for thy guidance; yea, let the stones perishing under the water teach thee, and see as the roots are washed out of the earth by the very rains that might have nourished them how terrible may be the providence of God. Say—It is useless to fight against heaven; heaven's weapons are stronger than mine, so are heaven's hands; all the resources of infinity are with God, and I am nothing but a child of dust, and my breath is in my nostrils: I will look unto the hills whence cometh my help, and I will pray to him whom I have too long defied. That would be a wise man's speech made tender by the tears of penitence. Man is always loser when he fights against God. Even when he seems to excel he excites but curiosity. If a man live a hundred years, he is pointed out as a curiosity in nature; attention is drawn to him as one who may have been forgotten as the angels were calling up the population of earth to heaven: he is questioned by curiosity; he is looked at by curiosity; he is written about as a curiosity. Why, ought he not to be set up as one who has defied God, and succeeded? There is a spirit in man which says, This is no triumph against eternal law, this is a curious instance, a rather striking exception: look at him very quickly, for to-morrow he may be gone! There is no successful warring against heaven. "Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away." There is a displacement of the first image. We say—How changed from what he was when I saw him last! Then there was fire in his eye, there was military dominance in his voice; then he had but to speak, and it was done, within the circle in which he was lord: and now look how decrepit he is: how he falters, how he apologises for every request he makes, how dependent he is upon the meanest of those who are round about him! If he stoop, he cannot raise himself up again; being



raised, he cannot stoop without danger. Poor man! how withered in complexion, how deathlike in aspect, how frail altogether! And he once was strong and bright and genial! Nor is this exceptional; this is universal. Such is the lot of every man. About the strongest giant will be said some day: He will never rise again; his life is now a question of moments; the great towering man is laid low, and cannot lift himself into his original attitude. Not only is there a displacement of the first image, but the vanity of family promotion is dead within him. He cares not what becomes of any one. "His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not." He asks his own sons what their names are; he looks upon his own children with the vacancy of absent ignorance; he asks his own child where he lives now; he asks the younger if he is not the elder, and he mistakes the elder for the younger; and when he is told that his child is now high in society, he asks a question about him upside down, and inflicts upon his honour the stigma of an unconscious irony. "And they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not." He is not even aware that their moral character has gone down; when they use profane language, he cannot discern between such language and the speech of prayer, all language has lost all meaning for him. And all dress and culture and station and name, whether high or low, he cannot tell. And this is man! No, says nature, this is not man: this is but a phase of man; this is but one chapter in the tragedy of man: the issue is not yet. Even while man's flesh has pain, "his soul within him shall mourn." There is hope in that very word "mourn." Why mourn? Because all the instincts say, What is to become of us? All the passions of man's nature say, Are we to die? The marvellous power within man that prayed and sang and lived cannot die without protesting against its own murder. Read the soul of man, if you would believe in the immortality of man. Even when man longs to sleep he longs to wake again; even when he says he shall be but as one of the common lot and go down to the ground, he says, Shall I not live again? The very question is an argument; the very inquiry is part of a great process of reasoning: to be able to ask the question is to be able to answer it affirmatively.

## Chapters xii.-xiv.

### JOB'S REPLY TO HIS THREE FRIENDS.

#### V.

**N**OW that the case in some measure of completeness is before us, we may profitably consider the history on a larger scale than its merely personal aspect. We have elements enough, in these fourteen chapters, for the construction of a world. We have the good man; the spirit of evil; the whole story of affliction and loss, pain and fear; and we have three comforters, coming from various points, with hardly various messages to be addressed to a desolate heart. Now if we look upon the instance as typical rather than personal, we shall really grasp the personal view in its deepest meanings. Let us, then, enlarge the scene in all its incidents and proportions; then instead of one man, Job, we shall have the entire human race, instead of one accuser we shall have the whole spirit of evil which works so darkly and ruinously in the affairs of men, and instead of the three comforters we shall have the whole scheme of consolatory philosophy and theology, as popularly understood, and as applied without utility. So, then, we have not the one-Job, but the whole world-Job: the personal patriarch is regarded but as the typical man; behind him stand the human ranks of every age and land.

We have little to do with the merely historical letter of the Book of Genesis: we want to go further; we want to know what man was in the thought and purpose of God. The moment we come to printed letters, we are lost. No man can understand letters, except in some half-way, some dim, intermediate sense, which quite as often confuses as explains realities. Yet we cannot do without letters: they are helps—little, uncertain, yet

not wholly inconvenient auxiliaries. We want to know what God meant before he spoke a single word. The moment he said, "Let us make man in our image," we lost the solemnity of the occasion,—that is to say, the higher, diviner solemnity. If it had been possible for us to have seen the thought without hearing, when it was a pure thought, without even the embodiment of words,—the unspoken, eternal purpose of God,—then we should understand what is to be the issue of this tragedy which we call Life. It was in eternity that God created man: he only showed man in time, or gave man a chance of seeing his own little imperfect nature. Man is a child of eternity. Unless we get that view of the occasion, we shall be fretted with all kinds of details; our eyes will be pierced and divided as to their vision by ten thousand little things that are without focus or centre: we must from eternity look upon the little battlefield of time, and across that battlefield once more into the calm eternity; then we shall see things in their right proportions, distances, colours, and relations, and out of the whole will come a peace which the world never gave and which the world cannot take away. Hear the great Creator in the sanctuary of eternity; his words are these—"My word shall not return unto me void." What is his "word"? This: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Is that word not to return void to the speaker? That is certainly the decree and oath of the Bible. But how long it takes to work out this sacred issue! Certainly: because the work is great. Learn how great in the idea of God is humanity from the circumstance that it takes long ages to shape and mould and inspire a man with the image and likeness and force of God. The great process is going on; God's word is to be verified and fulfilled; at the last there is to stand up a humanity, faultless, pure, majestic, worthy, through God, to share God's eternity.

Now, as a matter of fact, some men are farther on in this divine line than others are. We have seen the purpose: it is to make a perfect man and an upright; a man that fears God and eschews evil and lives in God; and, as a matter of fact, let us repeat, some men are farther along that ideal line than other men are. As a simple matter of experience, we are ready to testify that there are Jobs, honestly good men, honourable persons,

upright souls : men that say concerning every perplexity in life, What is the right thing to be done ? what is good, true, honest, lovely, and of good report ?—men who ask moral questions before entering into the engagements, the conflicts, and the business of life. And, as a matter of fact, these Jobs do develop or reveal or make manifest the spirit of evil : they bring up what devil there is in the universe, and make the universe see the dark and terrible image. But for these holy men we should know nothing about the spirit of evil. Wherever the sons of God come together we see the devil most patently. We are educated by contrasts, or we are helped in our understanding of difficulties by things which contrast one another : we know the day because we know the night, and we know the night because we know the day. We are set between extremes ; we look upon the one and upon the other, and wonder, and calculate, and average, and then make positive and workable conclusions. Why fight about "devil" ? There is a far greater word than that about which there is no controversy. Why then fret the soul by asking speculative questions about a personality that cannot be defined and apprehended by the mortal imagination, when there lies before our sight the greater word "evil" ? If there had been any reason to doubt the evil, we should have made short work of all controversy respecting the devil. It is the evil which surrounds us like a black cordon that makes the devil possible. In a world in which we ourselves have seen and experienced in many ways impureness, folly, crime, hypocrisy, selfishness, all manner of twisted and perverted motive, why should we trouble ourselves to connect all these things with a personality, speculative or revealed ? There are the dark birds of night—the black, the ghastly facts : so long as they press themselves eagerly upon our attention, and put us to all manner of expense, inconvenience, and suffering, surely there is ground enough to go upon, and there is ground enough to accept the existence of any number of evil spirits—a number that might darken the horizon and put out the very sun by their blackness. We might discredit the mystery if we could get rid of the fact. So far, then, we have the purpose of God, the ideal man, the spirit of evil arising to counteract his purposes and test his quality ; then we have the whole spirit of consolatory philosophy and theology as represented

by Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar. Let us hear what that whole system has to give us:—

Three things, with varieties and sub-sections; but substantially three things. First, Fate. Philosophy has not scrupled to utter that short, sharp, cruel word. Things happen because they must happen: you are high or low, bad or good, fortunate or unfortunate, because there is an operation called Fatalism—severe, tyrannous, oppressive, inexorable. So one comforter comes to tell you that what you are suffering cannot be helped; you must bear it stoically: tears are useless, prayer is wasted breath; as for resignation, you may sentimentalise about it, but as a matter of fact, you must submit. One comforter talks this dark language: he points to what he calls facts; he says, Look at all history, and you will find that men have to sup sorrow, or drink wine out of golden goblets, according to the operation of a law which has not yet been apprehended or authoritatively defined: life is a complicated necessity; the grindstone is turned round, and you must lay yourselves upon it, and suffer all its will—a blind, unintelligent will; a contradiction in terms if you like; a will that never gives any account of itself, but grinds on, and grinds small. That comforter makes his speech, and the suffering world says—No: thou art a miserable comforter: oh that I could state my case as I feel it! continues that suffering world—then all thy talk would be so much vanity, or worthless wind: thou braggart, thou stoic, thou man of the iron heart, eat thine own comfort if thou canst digest steel, and feed upon thy philosophy if thou canst crush into food the stones of the wilderness: thy comfort is a miserable condolence.

Then some other comforter says: The word "Fate" is not the right word; it is cold, lifeless, very bitter; the real word is Sovereignty—intelligent, personal sovereignty. Certainly that is a great rise upon the former theory. If we have come into the region of life, we may come into the region of righteousness. Explain to me, thou Bildad, what is the meaning of Sovereignty: I am in sorrow, my eyes run away in rivers of tears, and I am overwhelmed with bitterest distress,—what meanest thou by Sovereignty? I like the word because of its vitality; I rejected the other speaker who talked of Fate because I felt within me

that he was wrong, although I could not answer him in words ; but Sovereignty—tell me about that. And the answer is : It means that there is a great Sovereign on the throne of the universe ; lofty, majestic, throned above all hierarchies, prince-doms, powers ; an infinite Ruler ; a Governor most exalted, giving to none an account of his way, always carrying out his own purposes whatever man may suffer ; he moves with his head aloft ; he cares not what life his feet tread upon, what existences he destroys by his onward march : his name is God, Sovereign, Ruler, Governor, King, Tyrant. And the suffering world-Job says, No : there may be a Sovereign, but that is not his character ; if that were his character he would be no sovereign : the very word sovereign, when rightly interpreted, means a relation that exists by laws and operations of sympathy, trust, responsibility, stewardship, account, rewards, punishments : be he whom he may who walks from star to star, he is no tyrant : I could stop him on his course and bring him to tears by the sight of a flower ; I could constrain him to marvel at his own tenderness : I have seen enough of life to know that it is not a tyrannised life, that it does not live under continual terror ; often there is a dark cloud above it and around it, but every now and then it breaks into prayer and quivers into song : No ! Miserable comforter art thou, preacher of sovereignty ; not so miserable as the apostle of Fate, but if thou hast ventured to call God Tyrant, there is something within me, even the heart-throb, which tells me that thou hast not yet touched the reality, the mystery of this case.

Then another man—Zophar he may be called—says, Not “ Fate,” not “ Sovereignty ” as just defined by Bildad, but Penalty, —that is the meaning of thy suffering, O world : thou art a criminal world, thou art a thief, a liar, oft-convicted ; thou hast broken every commandment of God, thou hast sinned away the morning and the midday, yea, and at eventide thou hast been far from true and good : world, thou art suffering pains at thine heart, and they are sharp pains ; they are God’s testimony to thine ill-behaviour ; a well-conducted world would have swung for ever and ever in cloudless sunshine ; thou hast run away from God, thou art a prodigal world, thou art in a far country in the

time of famine, and God has sent hunger to punish thee for thy wantonness and iniquity. And the world-Job says—No: miserable comforters are ye all! There seems to be a little truth even in what the first speaker said, a good deal of truth in what the second speaker revealed to me about sovereignty, and there is an unquestionable truth in what Zophar has said about penalty: I know I have done wrong, and I feel that God has smitten me for my wrong-doing; but I also feel this, that not one of you has touched the reality of the case: I cannot tell you what the reality is yet, but you have left the ground uncovered, you are the victims of your own philosophy, and your own imperfect theology; I rise and at least convict you of half-truths: you have not touched my wound with a skilled hand.

This is the condition of the Book of Job up to this moment; that is to say, within the four corners of the first fourteen chapters—Job the ideal man; Job developing the spirit of evil by his very truth and goodness; men coming from different points with little creeds and little dogmas, and imperfect philosophies and theologies, pelting him with maxims and with truisms and commonplaces; and the man says, "Miserable comforters are ye all": I know what ye have said, I have seen all that long ago; but you have not touched the heart of the case, its innermost mystery and reality; your ladder does not reach to heaven; you are clever and well-skilled in words up to a given point, but you double back upon yourselves, and do not carry your reasoning forward to its final issue. That is so. Now we understand this book up to the fourteenth chapter. We were not surprised to find a Job in the world, a really honest, upright, good man, reputed for his integrity and trusted for his wisdom; that did not surprise us: we were not surprised that such a man should be assaulted, attacked by the spirit of evil, for even we ourselves, in our imperfect quality of goodness, know that there is a breath from beneath, a blast from hell, that hinders the ascent of our truest prayers. And we can believe well in all these comforters as realities; they are not dramatic men, they are seers and traditionalists and lovers of maxims, persons who assail the world's sorrow with all kinds of commonplaces, and incomplete and self-contradictory nostrums and assertions: and we feel that Job is

right when he says—I cannot take your comfort; the meat you give me I cannot eat, the water you supply me with is poison: leave me! Oh that I could come face to face with God! He would tell me—and he will yet tell me—the meaning of it all. We need not pause here, because we have the larger history before us, and we know the secret of all. What is it? What was hidden from Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar? What was it these men did not see? They did not see the meaning of chastening, chastisement, purification by sorrow, trial by grief; they did not know that Love is the highest sovereignty, and that all things work together for good to them that love God; that loss is gain, poverty is wealth, that affliction is the beginning of real robustness of soul, when rightly apprehended and fearlessly and reverently applied: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”; “Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations”; “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” That is the real meaning of all the sorrow, allowing such portion of truth to the theory of Sovereignty and Penalty, which undoubtedly inheres in each and both of them. But God means to train us, to apply a principle and process of cultivation to us. He will try us as gold is tried: but he is the Refiner, he sits over the furnace; and as soon as God can discover his own image in us he will take us away from the fire, and make us what he in the far eternity meant to make us when he said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” How all this process of chastening becomes necessary is obvious enough, if we go back into our own hearts, and run our eye over the whole line of our own experience. If we have true light in us we shall have no doubt as to the necessity of this chastening and its meaning. Even God to reach his own ideal had himself to suffer. Is God simply a watching Sovereign, saying, These men must suffer a little more; the fire must be made hotter, the trial must be made intenser: I will watch them in perfect equanimity; my calm shall never be disturbed; the suffering shall be theirs, not mine; I will simply operate upon them mechanically and distantly? That is not the Bible conception of God. This is the Bible conception,—namely, that in



working out the ideal manhood, God himself suffers more than it is possible for man to suffer, because of the larger capacity—the infinite capacity of woe. Now we seem to be coming into better ground. How much does God suffer for his human children? We know that he has wept over them, yearned after them, proposed to send his Son to save them, has in reality sent his Son in the fulness of time, born of a woman, born under the law; we know that the Bible declares that the Son of God did give himself up for us all, the just for the unjust, and that Christ, the God-man, is the apostle of the universe; his text is Sacrifice, his offer is Pardon. How much did God suffer? The sublimest answer to that inquiry is—Behold the cross of Christ. If you would know whether God's heart was broken over our moral condition, look at the cross of Christ; if you would understand that God is bent on some gracious and glorious purpose of man-making, behold the cross of Christ. It will not explain itself in words, but it is possible for us to wait there, to watch there, until we involuntarily exclaim, This is no man; this is no malefactor: who is he? Watch on, wait on; read yourself in the light of his agony, and at last you will say, "Truly this man was the Son of God." What is he doing there? Redeeming the world. What is his purpose? To make man in God's image and God's likeness. Then is the process long-continued, stretching over the ages? Yes: he who is from everlasting to everlasting takes great breadths of time for the revelation of his fatherhood and the realisation of all the purposes of his love.

## Chapter xv.

### THE SECOND SPEECH OF ELIPHAZ.

LET us recall our position. Job had repelled the common theories of life and government which his three friends had elaborately argued. He said in effect : No, you have not touched the reality of the case ; I have heard all your words, well selected as words, uttered clearly and sharply, now and again perhaps a little cruel, but you know nothing of my case : I do not know much about it myself ; not one of us has yet come upon the mystery ; all the commonplaces you have spoken, all the maxims you have set in order before me, I have known as long as I can remember anything, and in their own places, and at proper times, no fault is to be found with them,—but oh that God himself would speak to me ! I could understand him better than I understand you ; you are trying to reach me, and cannot, and I am plagued and fretted by your inadequate effort ; you are straining yourselves, but really doing nothing ; you have told me of fate, and my conscience rejects it ; you have preached the doctrine of sovereignty, a very noble doctrine, capable of majestic expression, but that is not it ; you have not spared me in remarking upon the sure and certain law by which punishment follows sin, but I have done no sin ; you are addressing the wrong man ; I have served God, loved God, and lived for God and defied the devil : I decline your theories ; you have not touched my wounded heart. Job, as we have seen, felt there was something more. Mark that word “felt” Who has dealt with it ? How vigorous we have been about the word “know” ! How we have turned it, and coloured it, and twisted it, and lengthened it : but where is the tongue eloquent enough and gentle enough to touch the word “felt”—feeling ? We know many things because we “feel” them. And we know many lies in the same way. It would not be courteous always to tell a man bluntly that we feel how much

he has missed the statement of truth in what he has said, but we feel that the man is false. A wonderful faculty, if we may so call it, is that of feeling! Christ was all feeling; he said, "Who touched me?" "Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?"—the question is preposterous; people cannot help touching thee. They knew not there was touching *and* touching—the masonic touch, the look full of meaning, the attitude that was a prayer. When Jesus went into the synagogue he knew at once there was a man there with a withered hand. How did he know? He "felt." He knew all harmonies, and proportions, and balances, and consistencies: he knew when this little earth staggered in its course; every motion seemed to send a vibration to his very heart. We know something of the mystery of this power. Job knew it well after he had listened to the vain eloquence of his comforters. He felt there was something more, and yet could not put it into words. "Words"—what can they express? They may express a little when the man himself is present to give them vitality, complexion, accent, by his own personality; but when he has gone, and men are left to pronounce the words according to their own conception of their meaning, how often the meaning is gone, and we know not where they have laid it! Job was thus in a crisis. He represented a great intellectual and moral agony. He was between two lands: he had left the old land, and had not yet arrived at the new one; his mind was in a transition state; he said, Almost to-day the light may shine, and I may be able to tell you all about it; at any moment now the cloud may break, and the angel may descend. Yet that happy revelation had not come. When a man is waiting for the revelation, assured that it will come; when all circumstances and appearances are dead against him; when his own wife does not know him; when his children are dead; when his familiar acquaintances have abandoned him; and he still *feels* that the angel is nearer than ever but has not yet manifested himself,—that is the agonistic point in life. We cannot tell all we know. Eliphaz said, "Is there any secret thing with thee?" Some secret with thee? There is with every man. How foolish are they who say, Tell all you know! Who can do that, if the word "know" is rightly interpreted? Who can empty an intellect? who can turn a heart

upside down, and pour its contents before the gaze of the public? Blessed are those teachers who always know more than they say: what they do not say has an effect upon what they do say—sends out upon it a singular ghostly colouring and hint of things unspeakable and infinite. Eliphaz could tell all *he* knew. Any man can repeat the alphabet, and make an end of it: but oh! when it combines itself, when it passes into marvellous permutations, and into poetry, philosophy, history, science, and then says: I want to say ten thousand other things, but ye cannot bear them now,—then it is we find and feel the difference between the literary man and the seer, between talent and genius, between great knowledge and inexpressible emotion.

It will be interesting to see how Eliphaz approaches Job now that he has delivered himself in the manner which we have already analyzed and considered. First of all, Eliphaz says: Here is a great waste of mental energy, a great deal of unprofitable talk; here are speeches wherewith he can do no good. It is difficult to preach to such men,—and it is still more difficult to hear them preach! They have such a conception of profitable-ness and edification; they are so final, so geometric; they begin, and they end; they have no apocalypse; they have a ceiling, not a sky,—a ringed fence, not a horizon: so when they hear Job preach they say, This is a great waste of intellectual power; all this comes to nothingness and unprofitableness; these are words only, wherewith no good can be done: here is a man who wants to force the mystery of heaven: here is a poor creature of days battering with his fevered hand upon the door of the everlasting,—as if any beating of his could ever elicit a reply: this is unprofitable, this is worthless; Job, this is vanity. Eliphaz spoke to the best of his ability. He was an Arab, by relation if not by direct descent, and he spoke all he knew by the book; but he had no book-producing power in his own mind and heart: he was a great reader; he was full of information, such as his day supplied, but he had not that mysterious touch, which every soul that is not dead can feel, but which no mind can fully explain.

Then Eliphaz accused Job of self-contradiction. **That is the great weapon of the enemy. Hear him:—**

"For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity . . . thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I : yea, thine own lips testify against thee" (vv. 5, 6).

Some men are great in parallel columns : they put down upon one side what was said the day before yesterday, and on the other side what was said only yester-morning, and they say, Look on this picture and on that : here is a man who has blown hot and cold, sent forth sweet water and bitter ; here is a man between whose utterances there is really no organic or vital consistency. They did not understand Job. His consistency was in his integrity, in his purpose, in his motive, in his character. Herein we do not altogether hold with those who say to preachers, Always be sure to agree with yourselves,—so that the sermon preached twenty years ago shall exactly match in length and in colour the sermon you preach to-day. No : a man must take the day as he finds it ; be the self of the passing day as to utterance, attitude, expression : but he must be yesterday, to-day, and for ever the same in holy desire, in upward looking, in waiting upon God. That is consistency enough for any mortal man. Job acknowledged that he was talking roughly and with some measure of incoherence, because he was talking in the dark, he was groping at midnight, and he was almost trying to speak himself into the right kind of music,—as a man who says, By-and-by I shall warm to my subject ; by talking about it I shall presently talk the thing itself, by hovering above it I shall get a better aspect of it, and then at the end I shall proclaim the solid and tranquil truth.

But Eliphaz proceeded along a most natural line to accuse Job of downright presumption :—

"Art thou the first man that was born ? or wast thou made before the hills ? Hast thou heard the secret of God ? . . . What knowest thou, that we know not ? What understandest thou, which is not in us ?" (vv. 7-9).

A most difficult position to occupy in life,—namely, to know something which the next man does not know, and which he could not understand if he did hear all about it ; to attempt his enlightenment would only be a contribution which would end in his regarding the speaker as even wilder and more presumptuous than he had originally supposed him to be. Hast thou been in the cabinet of God ? Why this self-exaggeration ?

You are really setting yourself up above the whole age and manner of things, and this is a conspicuousness which is irreligious; fall down into the common level, and speak like other men. There is a Hindoo proverb which is barbed with the same sarcasm. We are told that the Hindoos say about a man who is well-informed, progressive, almost audacious in thinking, "Yes, this is the first man, and of course he knows everything!" A marvellous thing, however, that even sarcasm has not been able to put down truth; still the truth comes on, waving its white banner, speaking its gracious word, and promising its everlasting kingdoms: it is hunted, sneered at, contemned, spat upon, crucified; but say of resurrection what you may, we see it broadly and amply enough in all truth-forms, in all the aspects and energies of love—"God is love": if sarcasm could have killed anything it would have killed God; who so laughed at, misunderstood, defied, blasphemed? But "God is love."

How difficult it was for Job to establish a new point of progress! If he had turned the three men into four and said, We must all walk step for step, we all know just the same, we must all speak precisely the same; then he would have been more comfortable: but he separated himself; he said—I do not know you, and you do not know me; for long years we have understood one another, but there is a point of time at which you and I are no longer in fraternity as to moral conception, and as to our outlook upon the whole sphere and purpose of things. That is a funeral day; that is the churchyard in which we bury old companionships, theologies, conceptions, usages; there we lay our dead selves, and pray that there may be no resurrection. Still how can a man say good-bye to Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar—old friends—without feeling a pang at his heart? Some there are who could not leave the old chapel, the old church, for the new academy, and the broader Lyceum, without feeling that they were giving up something which after all had a weird attraction for them. It cannot be easy to some natures to close the old Bible for the last time and lay it down for ever. It cannot be easy to give up all the old hymn-singing and all the old associations, and to write upon that which once was the very summer and heaven of life, "Farewell." Yet even this we have

sometimes to do; here are martyrdoms which history does not record, surrenders and sacrifices that never can be expressed in words; but the man who makes them, with the full consent of judgment and heart, is known to have made them, by the radiance of his countenance, by the largeness of his charity, by the peacefulness of his whole soul.

Eliphaz held a doctrine which is sometimes misunderstood:—

“What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (v. 14).

As we have said, Eliphaz, as a Temanite, belonged to the Arabic race. The Arabs were always proud of purity of descent, even as to animals; they would have no intermixture; they would stand by the original line, and, be it horse or man, he must come down by the right genealogy. Eliphaz had got the idea that the race had somehow been guilty of intermixture, or apostacy, or uncleanness: he did not necessarily use the word in a theological sense, but in a genealogical sense, and therefore he said, How can this line that has been thrown out of course, mixed, twisted, and debased in every way, rectify itself?

“Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.” (v. 15).

We do God injustice oftentimes by assigning to him an unimaginable holiness. There is a kind of adoration which if not carefully guarded separates God from man too widely. That God is ineffably holy no soul will deny, but there is a way of dwelling upon the holiness of God which may even discourage human penitence. We cannot reach God through the line of holiness. Is there no other word—no softer, shorter, tenderer word? Yea, truly: “God is love.” He will not cast out any that come to him upon their knees, their eyes blinded with tears, and their throats choked with sobs of emotion: then he opens heaven’s door, and would send all the angels to bid the home-comer welcome to his father’s house. We must not, therefore, work altogether along the higher intellectual line of pure reverence, and absolute adoration, and that awe which becomes oppressive, which hides from us the atmosphere in which it has pleased God himself to dwell—an attempered atmosphere suited to human need and human weakness. Let God come as he

himself pleases. We must not so drive the mind as to leave the heart in hopeless despair. Say, where you can,—“God is love”; “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”; “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come”; and then there will gradually dawn upon the penitent heart and the subdued mind the idea of God’s holiness; then questions will arise as to how that holiness is to be conceived, and in that hour of anxiety the sweet reply will be given—“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

Eliphaz said some beautiful things. He referred to the man who “dwelleth in desolate cities, and in houses which no man inhabiteth, which are ready to become heaps” (v. 28). At this point he was dwelling upon the destiny of the wicked; he was delivering a general lecture upon that destiny in the hope that Job would apply the whole of it to himself. The Arabs and other Oriental tribes had a great horror of cities which they supposed to have been cursed by God. Call it superstition—for so it was—but still it had a most energetic effect upon their thought and action. When the caravans were driving through such cities the men never looked round, never said a word to one another, but went on in silence and in terror: for the ban of God lay right across the city. What of those, then, who “dwelt” in desolate cities, as Job was about to do? Job actually built himself a house there, or bought one, and decorated and enjoyed it! “Why,” said Eliphaz, “the Arabs will cry out against thee; they go through the desolate place silently, fearsomely,—what will they say if they hear of the patriarch building a house that he may there take up his permanent abode?”

Eliphaz said—“Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense” (v. 31). A Hebrew pun, a play upon words, not evident upon our English page: If you trust in vanity, you shall have vanity for your wages; if you trust in that which is wrong, you shall have calamity in the end. Vanity brings forth vanity, was the argument of Eliphaz. Then said he, “It shall be accomplished before his time”: the man who works vainly shall have vanity for his recompense; and,



according to the literal meaning of these words, the wages will be paid before the work is quite done ; this is a master who does not wait until the last hour, and then say, There is your penalty. When a man serves the devil he often gets his wages in the early afternoon. They are bad wages : "The wages of sin is death." The devil, therefore, is a good paymaster ; he pays fully, he withdraws nothing, he bates no jot or tittle : if he is in a pit, it is a bottomless pit : he pays men on the road. There is no waiting for perdition ; we have it here and now, sharp enough and sad enough. Let us be wise in time, and understand the meaning of much pain and distress and bewilderment. If we search into the moral origin and causes of things, it may be that we shall find that at the beginning sin conceived and brought forth death.

Eliphaz compares the destiny of the wicked to an olive that casts off its flowers.\* Every age has its own metaphors. If we trace the whole poetry of the English tongue, we shall see how wonderfully it has changed with the change in the civilisation of the day, with the advance of learning, with the discoveries of science. So we go back to these old metaphors, and we do not despise them, notwithstanding our great intellectual advancement. The old Bible speakers turned what they themselves saw into the argument for the moment and for the use of the passing time. We have heard that the Syrian olive brings forth fruit in the first year, the third year, the fifth year,—brings forth its fruit at the odd years, or odd numbers ; on the second and fourth and sixth years the olive rests : but then it brings forth a good many blossoms ; travellers say that they have seen those blossoms shed—in the even years—shed in millions. Eliphaz, who was a seer, who had that inner eye that wanders through eternity, so far as much interpretation is concerned, said—That is the fate of the wicked : their blossoming comes to nothing ; all their beauty ends in dust : the bad man lives to be lost. Amid all this metaphor and poetry and sentiment there is no beautiful thing said about the wicked ! The righteous "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water . . . the ungodly are not so : but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." Poetry has

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\* See note on next page.

never lent a figure to the use of the bad man by which he might represent wickedness as a great joy, and sweet secret blessing. Metaphors have refused to be hired for the purpose of representing unholiness as good and profitable in the largest sense of the word: all music, all beauty, all poetry, all things that belong to flower, or star, or silver stream, have come together in one sweet conspiracy to represent God, God's love, God's care, God's fatherhood, God's mercy. Eliphaz and his brethren had but one conception of God: they knew not that every man has his own God; that the more we grow in grace the more we change our whole conception of God: but it is always an advance, an accumulation, a widening, a still larger and intenser illumination. In this faith may we live and grow, and according to the abundance and complexity of our experience, sanctified and ennobled, we shall be able to sympathise with those who are bowed down, and to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

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#### NOTE.

Many of the Scriptural associations of the olive-tree are singularly poetical. It has this remarkable interest, that its foliage is the earliest that is mentioned by name, when the waters of the flood began to retire (Gen. viii. 11), as we find it the most prominent tree in the earliest allegory (Judg. ix. 8, 9). With David it is the emblem of prosperity and the divine blessing (Ps. lii. 8); and he compares the children of a righteous man to the "olive-branches round about his table" (Ps. cxxviii. 3). So with the later prophets it is the symbol of beauty, luxuriance, and strength; and hence the symbol of religious privileges: "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree," are the words in the concluding promise of Hosea (xiv. 6). "The Lord called thy name a green olive-tree, fair, and of goodly fruit," is the expostulation of Jeremiah when he foretells retribution for advantages abused (xi. 16). The olive was among the most abundant and characteristic vegetation of Judæa. . . . Nor must the flower be passed over without notice:—

"Si bene floruerint oleae, nitidissimus annus."—*Ov. Fast.* v. 265.

The wind was dreaded by the cultivator of the olive; for the least ruffling of a breeze is apt to cause the flowers to fall:—

"Florebant oleae: venti nocuere protervi."—*Ibid.* 321.

Thus we see the force of the words of Eliphaz the Temanite: "He shall cast off his flower like the olive" (Job xv. 33). It is needless to add that the locust was a formidable enemy of the olive (Amos iv. 9). It happened not unfrequently that hopes were disappointed, and that "the labour of the olive failed" (Hab. iii. 17). As to the growth of the tree, it thrives best in warm and sunny situations. It is of a moderate height, with knotty gnarled trunks, and a smooth ash-coloured bark. It grows slowly, but it lives to an immense age. Its lock is singularly indicative of tenacious vigour; and this is the force of what is said in Scripture of its "greenness," as emblematic of strength and prosperity.—*SMITH'S Dictionary of the Bible.*

## Chapter xvi.

### MISERABLE COMFORTERS.

"I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. . . . I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you" (vv. 2, 4).

THERE was no reserve between the men or amongst them who sustained these wondrous colloquies. They spoke to one another with startling simplicity. It was altogether more like a controversy than an exercise of condolence. We are, however, endeavouring to understand the narrative, and not endeavouring to reinvent or reconstruct it. Still, it is noticeable that all the men were marked by extreme frankness of spirit. Nearly each speech begins with words which could hardly be deemed courteous in modern days. Job was equal to the occasion; whenever anything was said to him that was unwelcome, unsuitable, he answered in the tone of the speaker to whom he replied. But it is equally noteworthy that begin as the speeches might they ended in great sublimity. In this respect they are beautiful types of the best kind of human growth; difficulty at the first, and some rudeness and brokenness, but soon settling down into right relation, proportion, ultimate meaning, the whole culminating in brightness and glory. Job now puts himself into a position which we can easily comprehend. He says: I could talk as you do, if I were as unrestrained. There are no limits to the audacity of ignorance. The less a man knows the more eager is he to make it known. Some men cannot be fluent, because they see on the road spectres, angels, difficulties, possibilities, that do not come within the sweep of the unspiritual imagination; so they halt, they balance sentences, they go round the whole wealth of words to see if there be one that will fitly and precisely express the passing thought. Job says: I could be

a fluent speaker if I had a fluent mind : you talk easily because you have nothing to say ; not one of you has made a solitary original contribution towards the solution of my difficulty ; you have a genius for quotation ; you are clever in recalling what other men have said ; you are reciters, not authors or creators ; you act a dramatic part ; you speak what other men have written : but Job, continuing, says, in effect, I am the sufferer ; it is into my own soul that the iron has entered ; I am dying ; I cannot fail to see the end, and it is one to which I look as the promise of escape from unendurable torment. Now, here is a great principle—the principle that non-restraint would allow us to do many things we cannot at present do ; or, otherwise, the spirit of restraint keeps us back, in thought, in speech, and in social relation. What a wide field of thought and practical application is opened up by that principle ! Christian men may say, basing their speech upon this principle—We, too, could be infidels ; there is nothing so very daring, original, or mentally brilliant about being an unbeliever. We could walk without faith, release ourselves from all obligations such as impose themselves upon so-called Christian consciences. Or—We, too, could be worldly ; we could cut off this one little world, and make an island of it ; God looks upon it as part of a universe, but we could insulate it, and live upon it, and be happy upon it, and pile up upon it—a tombstone. Or—We, too, could be really bad ; we, too, could swear in tornadoes ; we, also, could serve the devil with both hands ; we could outspcak the loudest at the evil festival ; we could keep up the devil's dance longer than many who have served the devil faithfully : but——. Then comes into operation the spirit or principle of restraint ; whilst we could do these things in one sense, we could never do them in another. Sometimes the possible is impossible. We must distinguish the uses of terms. All things within a given sphere are possible, and yet not one of them could any man do who retained his reason and a sense of moral responsibility. This idea we have elaborated at some length : shall we give an illustration or two ? It is perfectly possible for a man to break every piece of furniture he has in his house, and yet it is impossible to every rational being. It is perfectly possible for a man of business to dismiss every servant, and to say to each, You shall never serve me any

more; and yet it is absolutely impossible that he can do anything of the kind. We are thus watched, restrained; we have only liberty between two points—a pendulum liberty of a limited oscillation: we go to come again, and whilst we swing in little segments we think we command a universe. It must, therefore, not be supposed that Christian people could not be worldly, selfish, bad, unfaithful;—all that little sphere is open even to Christian men: yet, whilst it is possible for them to do and to be all that is bad and shameful, it is also impossible, because before doing it they would have to slay reason, conscience, sense of justice; they would have to commit self-slaughter.

Job says that *he* would strengthen his friends with his mouth, and the moving of his lips should assuage their grief (v. 5). He supposes that they would sympathise rather than argue. But even Job is not to be taken at his word, for he did not know what he was talking about throughout the whole of this controversy: he will have to recall many a word, re-shape many a sentence, and by process of modification will have to adjust himself to the higher line of purpose and providence. Meanwhile, who does not think himself ill-treated when he is suffering? Who does not say, in his heart at least, If you were in my stead I would treat you better than you are treating me? Possibly nothing of the kind. Yet this is profoundly human. Who has escaped wholly the domination of the spirit of reproach? Who has not said to his sick attendant, You should be more gentle; I should be so were I in your place? Who has not said to his friend, You should lend me more money, be more liberal to me, be more generous in your consideration of me; I should be so were I in your stead? All this is false argument. Why is the argument false? Because the mental state is vitiated by moral conditions. Job supposed he would be rich in sympathy, but Job has proved that whatever was lacking in his mental constitution there was no lack of acerbity in his speech.

The great question to ask in view of this answer to Eliphaz would be, Knowing the conditions under which the history began, how has the devil carried out his part of the contract? Recall the case: the Lord said, Go, touch him, afflict him; only

spare his life. How has the devil accepted the situation? How does Job describe his own position and feeling?

"His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant. I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust. My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death" (vv. 13-16).

This is the devil's work! Whoever has been unfaithful in this melancholy business, the devil cannot be charged with infidelity. He makes men weep; he sends his darts and arrows into every point of body and estate; he breaks man with breach upon breach, he runs upon man like a giant, and he brings down the horn of power to the dust. What good thing did the devil ever do? Can any poor woman say, My home was unhappy until we yielded ourselves to the dominion of the evil one, so-called; and after that the fire burned brightly, the table was spread with plentifulness, the spirit of peace ruled the domestic circle, and children burdened with unspeakable grief expanded like showers in the sunshine, and were glad all the twenty-four hours of the day? Is any man hardy enough to say that so long as he attempted to pray, and to obey divine truth, and to walk by the light of Christian conscience, he was unhappy and miserable: but the moment he began to give way to appetite and desire and passion, the moment he threw the reins upon his baser nature, he became a really happy man; he sang all day and turned life into a festival of music? Not one. On the other hand, what have we? All history testifies with unbroken witness. When Christ came into the house, all was peace; the crust was turned into a loaf, the loaf was turned into a banquet, and the little oil we had in the cruse became like a plentiful fountain. We cannot turn aside the argument of history, or deny with any justice the logic of facts.

But this description of satanic work shows us the devil under restraint. Observe, this is a chained devil. Note well that this is the devil working under restraint, working permissively only; not having all his evil will, but limited. How sudden are his blows! how terrific the blasts of his mouth! how unsparing the cruelty of his spirit! Nothing touches him; nothing brings him to tears: he cannot cry; he is all cruelty, all vindictiveness, all

wrong. Is it far from this reflection to a third and most appalling one—namely, if this is the devil's work, and the devil's work when he himself is under restraint, what must be his work when there is no chain to bind him, when he is limited only by his own perdition? Do not let us turn away from such questions as if we were men of dainty taste and dare not look such matters in the face; do not let us murder ourselves at the altar of sentimentality. It would be most pleasant to say, There is no devil, there is no hell, there is no everlasting punishment, there is no worm that dieth not; it would be delightful: but would it be true in spirit? Let us not victimise ourselves by dwelling on the literal description, and asking small and narrow questions about what are so-called facts, but let us look at the spirit of the matter; and that spirit to us says distinctly, "The way of transgressors is hard." We see that now: what hinders us from carrying forward the immediate hardness of transgression into some other state of impenitent consciousness? What has the transgressor now? Alas! he eats bitter bread; he lays his head upon a pillow of thorns; he burns from head to foot with a secret but inextinguishable fire: call it self-reproach, or remorse, or compunction, or what you please, he has a harder time of it than even his best friends know. What must it be to fall into the hands of the unrestrained enemy? It makes one's heart sink when we hear fair, gentle, generous souls coming forward to say there is no such issue: we cannot but feel that they are speaking sentimentally rather than argumentatively; we cannot but feel that they are drawing upon their sensibilities rather than justifying themselves by the revealed Word. If you will, get rid of the Bible, have nothing to rely upon but your own sentiment, your own consciousness, your own conception of justice and penalty: then the case will be different: but you cannot keep the Bible and deny the future punishment of the wicked.

But was not Job sustained by a good conscience? He refers to that point in the seventeenth verse:

**"Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure."**

Do we not sometimes say that a good conscience will help a man to bear anything? There is a sense in which that is true, but

there is another sense in which it is perfectly untrue and simply impossible. Suffering unjustly calls up the conscience to questioning. Unjust suffering excites suspicion. The sufferer says, Why is this? If this is the way a righteous man is treated, where is the spirit of justice, the spirit of law, the genius of rectitude? Unjust suffering discourages prayer. Unjust suffering tempts the enemy to triumph, saying, "Where is now thy God?" Stuff thy throat with thine unanswered prayers, thou poltroon, thou Christian fool! Why serve a God who treats thee so? But these were temporary questions. Again and again we have had to say that if the whole discourse lay within four given points, no man could vindicate much that occurs in human life: but nothing is to be judged by a short line, by a limited and empty hour; everything is to be judged by God's line and by God's eternity. There are men who can say that all that happened in their lives of an adverse kind has come to be explained, and has been proved to be needful to the larger and better culture of the life. If we could establish one such instance in our own experience, that one instance would carry the whole case. The mountains are very high when we stand at their base, but could we be elevated just above the surface of the earth, and see the little globe wheeling round, we should be unable to discover that there is a single mountain upon it. We must, therefore, take the astronomic view, and not look upon the great disparities of the surface, when those disparities are crowding themselves upon our vision, but look upon them from some distance, and then the Dawalagiri, the Rocky Mountains, the Himalayas, sink into the surface, and the earth seems to be without wart or scar or tumulus. So it will be in the end!

Job gets some notion of the reality of things when he traces all to God, saying,—

"God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked" (v. 11).

We begin to feel that even the devil is but a black servant in God's house. There is a sense, perhaps hardly open to a definition in words, in which the devil belongs to God as certainly as does the first archangel. There is no separate province of God's universe: hell burns at the very footstool of his throne. We



must not allow ourselves to believe that there are rival powers and competing dynasties in any sense which diminishes the almightiness of God. If you say, as some distinguished philosophers have lately said, God cannot be almighty because there is evil in the world, you are limiting the discussion within too narrow a boundary. We must await the explanation. Give God time. Let him work in his eternity. We are not called upon now to answer questions. Oh! could we hold our peace, and say, We do not know: do not press us for answers: let patience have her perfect work: this is the time for labour, for education, for study, for prayer, for sacrifice: this poor twilight scene is neither fair enough nor large enough to admit the whole of God's explanation: we must carry forward our study to the place which is as lofty as heaven, to the time which is as endless as eternity. We all have suffering. Every man is struck at some point. Let not him who is capable of using some strength speak contemptuously of his weak brother. It is easy for a man who has no temptation in a certain direction to lecture another upon going in that direction. What we want is a juster comprehension of one another. We should say, This brother cannot stand such and such a fire; therefore we try to come between him and the flame: this other brother can stand that fire perfectly well, but there is another fire which he dare not approach; therefore we should interpose ourselves between him and the dread furnace, knowing that we all have some weakness, some point of failure, some signature of the dust. Blessed are they who have great, generous, royal, divine hearts! The more a man can forgive, the more does he resemble God.

## Chapter xvii.

### COMFORTERS AND FLATTERERS.

**I**N reading through the Book of Job up to this point, how often we forget what may be termed the mental effects of the discipline Job was undergoing. We think of Job as smitten down bodily, yea, as grievously afflicted in his flesh; we think of his losses of children and of property; we see him sitting in the dust, a desolate man; all this is in accord with the simple facts of the occasion: but have we not forgotten that some disaster may have been wrought in the man's mind? Has all this satanic discipline befallen the man, and is his mind in equipoise, in tranquillity; able to look around the whole horizon of fact and purpose, and to consider it with undiminished and unobscured reason; does no kind of insanity accompany some temptations or trials? We shall find along that line of inquiry a large explanation of mysteries which perplex the imagination, and sometimes indeed aggravate and trouble the conscience. There is a psychological side to this discipline; Job's soul was tormented as well as Job's body afflicted. We think of the sore boils, of the grievous outbreakings of disease, of the rheum in the joints, of the gall shed upon the ground;—all that is incidental, external. The real trouble is in the soul; his reason rises, as it were, from the throne, and says, I will now leave thee; and a man in that state is more to be pitied than the man who has gone farther into the mystery of mental unbalancing and spiritual loss. It is in the process towards unconsciousness, yea, towards madness, when we are partly man, partly beast, partly devil, with just one gleam of deity shot through the tumult, that we are most to be pitied. All proportions are altered—all colours, all harmonies, all the parable of nature, all the apocalypse of the universe; everything is out of course, out of square, out of balance, and the

things we once relied upon as if they were solid rock, feel as if they were giving way under our uncertain feet. One would suppose that the devil's work in the world has simply been to limit the days of our life, to throw us into a kind of social disorder, and to set up a black ruler called affliction to tyrannise over the strength and the fortune of man. The case lies deeper: our reason is beclouded, the whole inner man sits now in twilight, now in darkness; we see men as trees walking, we take hold of things by the wrong end, we misquote familiar sayings, we invert all that has been established and ordained. Unless we enter into this mystery of satanic power and discipline, we shall be dealing with the exterior and never touching the spirit of things. The devil has got hold of our hearts. We know that he has broken our bones, and filled our blood with poison, and scattered premature snow upon our heads, and that he has taken cruelly to dig our graves in our very sight—as if he might not have dug them in the dark, and said nothing to us until we went through the pathway of flowers into the last gloom. All that we know; but that is not enough to know: your thought is wrong—that marvellous quantity within you which makes you a man, which lifts you by the measurement of a universe above the noblest fowl that ever spread its pinions in the sunlight: the soul has been twisted, perverted, depraved, sown thickly with black and pestilent ideas.

This is the explanation of all the intellectual tumult of the Book of Job up to this point. Even the comforters were as much under satanic temptation as Job was, in the broader sense; there was a keener accent for the moment in Job's case than in theirs, but we must never think of Job as a man to be pitied by men who need no pity themselves. Job was a patriarch in more senses than one—a great world-father—and all his children are black with the same temptations and sad with the same distresses. Do not let us put away these old Bible men from us, as if they were figures upon a blackboard meant to illustrate something that occurred long centuries since. The Bible men are the men of all time. There are no other men. You will find yourself all-drawn, coloured to the last hue, in God's great book of portraiture.

Here, then, is Job with his ideas perverted, his hope covered over with midnight gloom, his whole soul upheaved and troubled with an unspeakable distress. He has lost the right conception of God. This is what occurred in Eden. Satan attacked the ideas of men. Satan did not afflict Adam or Eve with some poor curable bodily ailment: he whispered a question into the mind. Beware of question-asking. Who asked the first question in the Bible? The devil. We have seen that there is a question-asking which is reverent, which is part of the highest processes of education; but there is also a question-asking which doubles the mind down into the earth; troubles it with needless mysteries; throws across its adoration a dash of wonder which becomes presently a blot of scepticism. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" If you were to eat of this tree you would be gods yourselves. So Job is now asking curious questions, which he never asked in the days when the enemy was far away, and his prayer was a broad petition, as it were a whole morning's dew exhaling under the call of the sun. But now the very proverbs he trusted to as revelations he misquotes, and misplaces, and misapplies; and all established truth, to the great horror of Bildad the Shuhite, the typical traditionalist, becomes a kind of blurred thing which belongs to nobody. This accounts for the state of the world, and the state of what is temporarily called the Church. Once the world stood in God, waited for God, loved God, felt a sense of void and of hollowness in the absence of God: but ever since what invention, what wondering, what misapprehension! The right construction of this need not be harsh. When men are now plunging, groping, rushing forth with apparently irreverent and impetuous audacity, why not say of them, They have lost their God, and they must find him ere the sun go down?

Let us follow out a little in detail the experience of Job in this matter. Having lost the right conception of God, he has been filled with a sense of self-repugnance:—"My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct" (xvii. 1); and then in another place he says, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return" (xvi. 22). Throughout the whole of his speech he feels a sense of self-disgust. A

strange and beautiful thing is that in the development of the history of a soul. Man cannot be satisfied with himself; he says, There are lines of beauty, and lines of strength; there are qualities not to be denied; but oh, the monotony of myself! Why, it is so, as we have before said, with regard to nature. There is nothing more monotonous than sunshine. The sunlight would tire you long before the stars do. O weary, weary sunshine! we soon come to say, The grass is all burned up, and the flowers seem to be afraid, as if they had sinned and had been forsaken of the blessed Spirit; Oh send the clouds, the black rain-laden clouds, and let them come, and let us see rainbows, and hear the splash of liquid music, and observe the whole earth, as it were, rising in grateful appreciation of the long-needed visitation! So a man becomes intolerably monotonous to himself if he think about himself, and cannot complete himself by the idea of God; he sickens of himself; he says, This self-analysis must go no farther; I have nothing else to do; I am continually practising vivisection upon my own soul; I am tired of myself; my very breath is corrupt, my days are extinct; I am offensive to myself. That is the issue of human life without the right conception of God. We need God to give our manhood its right expression, to limit it by its proper boundaries, to set it in its right perspective, to give to it exceeding great and precious promises. Given a right conception of God, the great One, and greatest of all because he loves with ineffable affection, with infinite emotion, with tenderness that shrinks not from the agony of the cross,—then we ourselves are but a little lower than God, we have companionship that fits our necessity, that appeases the prayer of every instinct, and gives us rest and hope. We need to withdraw from ourselves, in order to return to ourselves with all our faculties in full force, and all our aspirations sanctified and transformed into prayers. Man cannot live always under a roof of wood however polished, or fresco however handled. Man was made to live under the sky. The roof affords a momentary hospitality, which is precious; but taking the years in fives and tens and twenties, carrying on human age to fifty, and farther on still, man says, Is there nothing higher than this poor roof, which seems to be coming nearer and nearer to me, threatening to crush me? Is there

no firmament, no wide open sky? He feels like a young bird, moved by an inexplicable fluttering, which, being interpreted and magnified into its fullest meaning, signifies flying without wings and without fear. You know by your experience that when you have lost the right conception of God your life goes down into a sense of self-corruptness and self-loathing, which is made up for in some degree by the fool's policy of excitement, amusement, dress, vanity, of every figure and every change: but the dead self is still rotting, and presently the pestilence will make the air intolerable. Be wise in time. Seek thy God, O man, and in him alone wilt thou find true manhood, joy unstained as morning dew and beautiful as morning light.

Then Job, having lost the right conception of God, finds himself in utter loss and misery:—

“He hath made me also a byword . . . mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow” (vv. 6, 7).

Who cannot sign this with his own name, saying, That is my experience; the letters may have been changed a little, but the spirit and the substance represent an actual fact in the spiritual life? Then we have again Invention. Man will invent something; he will build some altar to a forbidden god; he will invent a superstition; he will create a new arrangement and adjustment of social relations and responsibilities; he will try to cure himself, only to end the trial in the conviction that self-cure is impossible. Observe, self-cure has been attempted. It does not lie amongst the untried suggestions of human thought and human history. From the beginning, when fig-leaf was attached to fig-leaf, man has been trying to hide his sin, to cover his transgression, to conceal his shame; having fallen out of heaven, he has been building a kind of staircase back again to the sky; and, lo, in the very midst of his venture, the whole edifice has collapsed, and he has returned to the dust. This is the deep conviction of Christian faith and Christian experience, and this is the reason of Christian activity. We do not build churches for the purpose of beautifying landscapes; we do not put on church-roofs for the birds to build in; we build the sanctuary because our souls need it—not always in the same

degree of consciousness. Sometimes we are hardly aware that we have souls; it would seem as if now and again we passed into the kind of unconsciousness which is mistaken for satisfaction; we are merry, we can sing and play and dance, we admire the beauties of nature, and say, with a sigh that has no deeper meaning than the words it utters, the world is very beautiful, call it a vale of tears who may. When a man is full of strength, when fortune goes well with him, then he needs, to his own immediate consciousness, no great sky of thought and hope, no God judging one day and redeeming another, and conducting all the mysterious process of human education: the man thinks he has attained the summit of human desire. But the day has changed; the year is not all June; the east wind blows, the frost seals up the fountains, the winter dismisses the labourer from the field, and darkness suddenly blots out the day, and death comes after affliction has fought a great fight against human strength—then grim, ghastly, pitiless, all-devouring death comes; then they who were so glad in June, when they thought themselves part of the great system of bird and flower and light, begin to inquire for comfort, for Christian inspiration, for the strength which looks death in the face and bewilders the power of the tyrant. We must take an all-round life as the circuit of our judgment, if we would deal gravely and justly with this solemn subject.

Job found himself surrounded by flatterers.

“He that speaketh flattery to his friends, even the eyes of his children shall fail” (v. 5).

This is the position of affairs to-day: we are surrounded by comforters,—that is to say, by men who do not understand us, and whose words have no relation to our experience. Hence oftentimes the empty church. The world knows that what the man of “words” is talking about has no relation to the killing pain, the intolerable sorrow, the unutterable agony of life. So the fool often beats the preacher herein, that he can at least often excite, or intoxicate, and create a momentary illusion apt to be mistaken for a permanent satisfaction. And we are surrounded by flatterers, men who tell us that after all we are not so bad. Look at your conduct: you pay your way, you keep

your word, you are faithful to your marriage, you are known in the neighbourhood as an upright citizen—why, where will they match you? And the heart all the time says, Such talk is flattery, such talk is falsehood. I know all they say, but it was done by the hand; it is a trick of mine. I keep my clock right by putting the hands backwards and forwards just as the general time requires, and they think the clock keeps its own time; all my morality is etymological, and really a manner, an attitude; I pay my bills punctually because I have an object, which I will not disclose: but they are telling lies all the time, they are not touching my soul with any comfort; in my soul I despise their flattery, and I blow out the candles of hope which they would set in the window of my soul. Do not believe the flatterers. They will tell you that if you attend to sanitary discipline, to all personal rule and self-subjection, if you store your intellect, if you cultivate your taste, you will pass through the world honourably. Let your soul speak; ask it at midnight what it thinks of all the flare and garishness held before it in the vulgar day. Let your conscience speak; speak to yourself. Do not make a noise in the ear,—that is not talking to yourself—but hold your soul to an exercise of spiritual attention, and the soul will tell you that everything that addresses itself to fancy, to manner, to custom, to bondage, is a lying deity, a false angel, a worthless gospel.

Observe how, without the right conception of God, all proverbs and maxims as quoted so fluently by the man of yellow hair from the land of pleasantness, Zophar and Naamathite, are turned upside down: they are quoted, but the old music does not come back with them:—

“The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger” (v. 9).

The words are quoted as if they ought to be true, as if once they had been known to be true: but now that I repeat them, Job might have said, They seem to mock me, because whilst the words are being uttered by my lips they are being contradicted by the facts which I embody. I am righteous, I have clean hands, I cannot hold on my way, I cannot get stronger and stronger; I am getting weaker and weaker: the proverb ought



to have been right; it must have come down from heaven, this is not a flower grown in our gardens, it was a flower from heaven; but I am contradicting it,—I, the most reputable righteous man of my time, am lying here self-disgusted: my breath is corrupt, my whole flesh is a burden of fire, and as for my hope, it is put out, like a candle by a cross-blowing wind. Thus we cannot get comfort from the old maxims and commonplaces of history. Even the old wine of truth does not taste as it once did. An enemy hath done this; let him be named, described, set forth in every frightsome detail, that men may know him, and resist him when he would approach.

Then all life bears downwards:—

“My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. They change the night into day: the light is short because of darkness. If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (vv. 11-15).

This is the course of human nature without the divine sanctification and guidance. Do not quote appearances as against the philosophy. What can be more deceptive than appearances? “Things are not what they seem.” Do not say that the world is well dressed. We know it. But a corpse may be shrouded in silver-cloth. We are not asking about fortune, property, display, appearances. We know a cripple by his lurch, whatever purple may be upon his shoulders. Byron, the poet of fire, the seer of perdition, knew he was lame, though he was a lord. You cannot cover up the evil, in the sense of extinguishing it. For a time it subsides; then it heaves. Oh, that initial heave! under whose influence the soul says, It is all coming back again. It is like poor Mary Lamb's intermittent insanity. She would say to her brother, almost in tenderness an apostle of Christ, I feel it coming on again! She would have her little arrangements made whilst she could make them, because to-morrow the great darkness might settle upon her mind, and she would have to be led away to an appropriate place. The feeling of its coming on! So it is with conscience, with the presence of evil in the soul: a passion is lighted, an instinct is awakened, an old appetite begins to feel a burning thirst; the soul says—O my God, it is

coming on again! corruption, thou art my father: worm, thou art my mother and my sister! This is part of human experience, and sometimes an appointed part; because it may be that God has withdrawn himself that we might feel our need of him. He has taken a time for withdrawment, but he himself has measured it; his sweet words are—"For a moment I have forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." Thus he blots out our moments of darkness; thus he extinguishes our sensations of sin; "where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." God pours the Atlantic of his blessing or grace over the black pebble of our iniquity: it is lost; it is at the bottom of the sea.

Then Job looks round and says, "And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it?" (xvii. 15.) Thus he talks with a strange incoherence; thus he is true to the working of an intermittent insanity. Even the bad man looks round sometimes for his hope. Even the atheist tries to pray; he may have his own form of words, and may disdain all Christian formulas of worship, but the soul, label it atheist or theist, must sometimes say to all other powers within, Let us pray. What, then, is needed amid all this riot and tumult, this darkness, this storm of night? What is needed? The gospel is needed; the glorious gospel of the blessed God; the speech of blood. What is needed? A man is needed, beautiful as God, complete as the Father, holy as the eternal deity. A Lamb without spot and without blemish is needed. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Golgotha, are all needed. Son of God, we need thee! Blessed Jesus, Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God, Immanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,—names that seem to contradict one another—we need thee. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

## Chapter xviii.

### THE SECOND SPEECH OF BILDAD.

WE now begin to see in what a little world the three comforters lived. There are men who can only go on for a time; then they resign their ministry, and go elsewhere to repeat the few tunes they know. It was so with Job's three friends. They began eloquently; they seemed as if they were about to fly straight away into higher levels than had ever yet been attained in eloquence or in music. But we now see them returning: we now notice, what had escaped us before, the tether which binds them to the earth. They repeat themselves; even their cursing becomes commonplace by repetition; the sharp accent is no longer felt; we begin to expect the fury, the little whirlwind, and the *brutum fulmen*. "Bildad reproveth Job of presumption and impatience." So says the heading of the chapter. But this is precisely what the comforters have been doing all the time. All their eloquence is but a variety of denunciation. They have never gone into far-reaching philosophy; they have beaten Job with the rods which have chastised all preceding generations, but they have not touched with curing balm, with soothing sympathy, the wound which has rent his heart. All literalists live in a little world. We cannot stretch the alphabet beyond a certain point. The comforters told Job all they knew, and they knew nothing about his case when all was told. They had wise words to speak, but they were speaking them to the wrong man. A word fitly spoken—how good it is when it just fits the occasion, when it says enough but not too much, when it soothes but not excoriates. The heart knows such a word when it is well spoken. There are many things we know which we were not aware of. Some tunes seem to belong to us; soon we come to think that we ourselves invented them; the authorship is forgotten in the fascination of the music, so

that were we charged with singing another man's tune, we might for the moment resent the impeachment, feeling that the melody came so naturally and swingingly into our lives that we might have made it, if we did not. It is even so with Christ's great gospel: it becomes part of us; chapter and verse we have forgotten; nor need we remember them; the great life-principle is in the blood, in the heart-beat, in the new prayer which surprises every day the tongue that utters it. But Job's comforters had a lesson, and not a teaching rooted in eternity, and stretching on through all infinities of thought and feeling and want. There is a difference between a recitation and a speech; there is an indescribable difference between that which we recite from our memory and that which God creates for us in the heart, and enables us to hurl from the lip with ringing and gracious power. The three comforters would have talked just the same to any other man in suffering as they talked to Job. They had not special insight into particular cases. Any one can tell the difference between night and day: but what is the difference between twilight and twilight? What is the difference between colours that shade into one another, as if slyly and invisibly, as if to cheat the eyesight and the fancy of the world? Great spiritual teaching depends upon this insight, this discrimination, so that there shall be seven Gospels in a family of seven people, and yet all the Gospels shall be one, but they shall be so distributed, and coloured, and represented, and focussed, as to suit our necessity and satisfy our eye, every beholder seeing what he needs, and being fascinated by the celestial beauty. This is the difference between Jesus Christ and all other teachers. Jesus Christ never repeated himself. He had a parable for every case. He knew the right word to speak to every individual—man, woman, or little child. He, too, could outcurse Bildad; when it came to objurgation and fire-speech all the comforters of Job stood back to give him space enough. Yet how gentle, how sweet, how tender, how gracious! Touching a flower only to make it blush in some deeper beauty, lifting up a child only to touch it into some higher consciousness of life, and touching trembling tears only to make them into quivering jewels. Never man spake like this man! Every man said to Jesus Christ for himself—my Lord and my God. Such was the administration of

Jesus Christ, that he seemed to belong exclusively to every man as each man's sole and entire possession.

How comes it, then, that three men, not without large sense and power of words, should thus have walked round and round Job and left no blessing behind them? It is the misery of the world which has puzzled the philosophy of the world. Oh, this misery! The books of the philosophers have nothing in them to touch the world's misery. Reading all other books but Christ's, one would imagine that this was a healthy world, a world all sunshine, steeped in summer, painted or belted with rainbows; every river exhaling heavenly odours, every fountain filled with the gold of the new Jerusalem! But this misery—red-eyed, tear-stained misery; this gaping wound, this infinite sorrow, this Gethsemane of woe! Before that spectacle philosophy looks poor, shrivelled, empty-handed. Philosophy does well in a world that is all summer; philosophy then talks largely, wisely, in long, long words; philosophy then invents words, puts syllable to syllable like joint to joint, and goes on with the long vertebration: but this horrible misery, these agonies that will not bear to be talked to in polysyllables, these pierced hearts, these wounded spirits, what is to be said of them? It is in sight of these that Jesus Christ shines forth in all the mildest radiance of his love; he is able to speak a word in season unto him that is weary; to speak as if he were not speaking; to breathe eloquence rather than to articulate it. It is the misery of the world that perplexes agnostics and secularists, and inventors, and tricksters of every name and colour. They would have an open highway were they not blocked back by misery. It was so with Job's three comforters. They could not speak to such misery as his. They had seen sorrow before, but a kind of sorrow that might have been laughed out of its melancholia; they had seen instances of men in loss and trouble, but a sort of every-day loss and commonplace trouble, and a word of good cheer might bring back memory enough, and kindle hope enough to meet the occasion: but here is a man whose gall is shed upon the ground, and whose root is cleft with lightning, and they can only walk round him, and abuse him, and shoot hard words at his poor weary head; and he cries to be saved from his friends,

for they are but an addition to his sorrow. Whenever you hear of any man who has any nostrum to offer for the good of the world, inquire what he proposes to do with the world's misery. Never let any empiric run away with the idea that he is treating a healthy world; ask him what he will do with the churchyards. He wants to sail on blue rivers, on seas ruled by a halcyon spirit; he wants to take you away into groves and waving woods and odorous gardens: ask him what he intends to do with the cemeteries, with the sick at heart, with men of shattered vows, with lives that have lost the centre, with souls that have been caught in the infernal gravitation, and are being drawn downwards to hell. Be impatient with all the men who would heal the world's wound slightly; be wrathful with the men who would daub the wall with untempered mortar. There is nothing that can meet the whole necessity but the evangelical faith. We have heard that faith jeered at, but the faith still remains, large, noble, holy, unresentful. The evangelical faith must not be touched, except that it may be redefined, delivered from some of its friends who have unduly narrowed it, and who have interfered with the music of its expression: but in its soul it is right; it touches every day's history; it has an answer to every day's necessity; it has a blessing for every moment's labour. The three friends of Job did not understand the case, or had not at hand the remedy; and therefore they talked much, denounced much, and tried to talk themselves into some new power of dealing with an unfamiliar instance.

The poorest of all explanations is personal wickedness. That was the *pièce de résistance* of which the three friends always availed themselves. They said in effect: We can always abuse Job; we can always make general speeches on human depravity, and allow him to appropriate them to himself; we can at least suggest that he has hidden under his ample cloak some big black sin; we can tell him, in varied expression, that all this is but his desert; he has done something to deserve this; that must be our weapon; we must keep to that; we must hunt him down; we must tell him what a villain he is. The world has grown no better by such violent assault. The poor world takes heart again when we say to it "things are not what they seem." It is true there

is none righteous, no, not one ; but that applies to us all ; there is something beyond all that we see ; by-and-by it will be revealed ; we are undergoing educational processes, we are being pruned that we may bring forth more fruit ; all this misery, sorrow, necessity, pain, death, has a meaning. Let us wait for it ; it may come at any moment ; no one can tell when the Son of man will come—at midnight, at cock-crowing, or in the full noonday ; but come he will, and with him he will bring the books which will clear up every mystery. Then we should continue our great speech and say, “In one sense, this is a little world ; in another sense, it is a great world ; it is to us the beginning of worlds, the first step upon a staircase infinite. Get your foot well upon the first step, then the rest will come with comparative ease. Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth ; at any moment you may pass into a new world ; to-morrow we may wake in heaven. We need, therefore, more cheerfulness ; and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is emphatically a cheerful word ; it comes to the heart like music in the night time. We know what it is to sit in great desolation, and to hear a footfall on the stair which we recognise as the step of a strong friend. When he comes in he seems to bring with him new breath, new hope ; whilst he tarries in the room we shall not be afraid of death ; yea, we feel if he were present we could die happily ; his very nearness would give us courage. Knowing this socially, we also know it religiously : given a heart that is sure of the presence of Jesus Christ to comfort and sustain, and death is abolished, the grave is no longer deep and cold,—it is as a vase filled with flowers from heaven's paradise. It is useless, therefore, merely to denounce the sin of the world ; it is aggravating to have nothing to say to the world but that which is of the nature of denunciation. The world has been well cursed by its brilliant Carlyles ; it needs now to be blessed and comforted by its more brilliant evangelists.

How wonderfully well the three comforters painted the portrait of wickedness ! Nothing can be added to their delineation of sin. Every touch is the touch of a master. If you would see what wickedness is, read the speeches which are delivered in the Book of Job. Nothing, let us say again, can be added to their grim

truthfulness. But there is a great danger about this : there is a danger that men may make a trade of denouncing wickedness. There is also a danger that men may fall into a mere habit of making prayers. This is the difficulty of all organised and official spiritual life. It is a danger which we cannot set aside ; it is indeed a peril we can hardly modify : but there is a horrible danger in having to read the Bible at an appointed hour, to offer a prayer at a given stroke of the clock, and to assemble for worship upon a public holiday. But all this seems to be unavoidable ; the very spirit of order requires it ; there must be some law of consent and fellowship ; otherwise public worship would be impossible : but consider the tremendous effect upon the man who has to conduct that worship ! The men to be most pitied in all this wide world are preachers of the gospel. We are aware that there is another side, and that the men who are most to be envied in this world are also preachers of the gospel ; still it is a terrible thing to have to denounce sin every Sunday twice at least ; it is enough to ruin the soul to be called upon to utter holy words at mechanical periods. The necessity is great, the necessity is tremendous ; but may we not become familiar with such words as " God," " truth," " love," " Christ," " purity " ? On the other hand, there are times when all these words shine upon us like new suns, and for all the worlds of God's universe we would not give up the joy of living under the influence of such words and answering all their music. Could we know what men have to pass through who teach us we should be more lenient with them and get nearer to them with abundance of sympathy and prayer. Who can preach twice on one day ? Who can have his heart torn out of him regularly morning and evening, Sabbath by Sabbath ? We need the ministry of silence ; we need the blessedness of sitting down sometimes in absolute speechlessness. That we might do, and fix the day and the time and the place for silence, but not for speech ; then if during the holy silence the fire should burn and the tongue should desire to speak, who knows what blessedness might accrue ? But the meaning of this is that it is possible to read the Bible until we read ourselves out of it,—merely to repeat its words, and not to feel them or to feel that we ought to feel but cannot feel, and that is a consciousness that lies close by despair.



Punishment does not kill wickedness, otherwise what Bildad has said about it would be concluded with a declaration that wickedness is dead. How does Bildad put the case of punished wickedness? The light is put out, the spark of fire is destroyed, there is no light in the tabernacle; the steps of strength are straitened; his own counsel has cast the man down by leading him into confusion; the wicked man's feet are in a net, and a gin has taken hold of him by the heel,\* and the hand of the robber is throttling him; the snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way; terrors like hobgoblins laugh and chatter at him from every hedge in the night-time, and he is startled to his feet by new alarms when he lies down to sleep; his strength is hunger-bitten, and destruction is standing at his side ready to open its pitiless jaws to devour him; his skin has lost its complexion, and the firstborn of death has devoured his power; his confidence is dead, and he is brought to the king of terrors: and what does he do? He still sins. All this some men have proved, and they still plan wickedness for to-morrow at noon and the day after at midnight. Brimstone is scattered upon their habitation; their roots are dried up beneath, above their branch is cut off; their remembrance is perished from the earth, and their name is a loathing in the street: what then? They still sin. They would sin if God stood over them visibly! How mad is sin! What can tame the tiger-heart? What can get at it in one brief hour of confidence? A man will sell his children if they stand in the way of his wicked desires. Yea, a man will defy the spirit of self-slaughter in order to reach that one damned object, and all God's white angels could not keep him back. He knows what will come. Tell him that if he pursue this course his wife will be broken-hearted, his children will be blighted, his home will be shattered, his fire will be put out, the old, old days of love will never be revived; everybody will shoot out the lip in scorn, and his very name shall be a byword: what will he do? He will look as if he listened, and then he will take a leap into the arms of the devil! Such is the state of things. We are not half-respectable bad men; we are not gone in little fragments and sections of our nature; we would kill the fairest child that ever

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\* See note on next page.

kissed our cheek rather than not do the thing our heart is set upon. Can this case be met by little theories, human inventions, novel propositions, untried and unintelligible philosophies? If a man will take his fair-haired child, as it were, by the throat and throw it away, so that he may get at the devil's table, is there any philosophy in creation which he would not clear from his path in order to reach his destination? What, then, is to be done? There is only one thing to be done, and if that fail God fails. There is only one thing that touches the case at its centre, and that one thing is the redeeming Gospel of Jesus Christ, the mystery of the cross, the grace of the atonement,—easy enough to ask perplexing questions about, and not difficult to contemn and reject; but it is the only thing that can touch the case. The sun is the only light that can glorify the earth, and yet nothing can be shut out so easily; a child has but to close its eyelids, and the sun is gone. So a man has but to say—I do not believe thee, thou bleeding, dying Christ, and the whole blessedness of the cross is lost. On the other hand, a man has but to open his eyes, and the sun seems to have been made for him, and to be all his. A man has but to say, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," and Satan falls before him as if lightning-struck. The devil knows that word, and hates it.

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#### NOTE.

The act of taking birds by means of nets, snares, decoys, etc., is frequently alluded to in Scripture, mostly in a figurative and moral way. Birds of various kinds abound, and no doubt abounded, in ancient times in Palestine. Dean Stanley speaks of "countless birds of all kinds, aquatic fowls by the lake side, partridges and pigeons hovering, as on the Nile bank, over the rich plains of Genesareth" (*Sinai and Palestine*, p. 427). The capture of these for the table or other uses, would, we might expect, form the employment of many persons, and lead to the adoption of various methods to effect it. Hence we read of the "snare," Ps. xci. 3, cxxiv. 7; Hos. ix. 8; and of the "net," Prov. i. 17; Hos. vii. 11: "of the fowler" or snarer. In Hos. v. 1, both net and snare are mentioned together. The *mokēsh* is used synonymously with *pach*, Amos iii. 5. This was employed for taking either beasts or birds. It was a trap set in the path, Prov. vii. 23, xxii. 5; or hidden on or in the ground Ps. cxl. 6, cxliii. 4. The form of this springe or trap net, appears from two passages—Amos iii. 5, and Ps. lxix. 23. It was in two parts, which, when set, were spread out upon the ground, and slightly fastened with a stick (trap-stick), so that as soon as a bird or beast touched the stick, the parts flew up and inclosed the bird in the net, or caught the foot of the animal. Thus Amos iii. 5, "Doth a bird fall into a snare upon the ground, when there is no trap-stick for her? doth the snare spring from the ground and take nothing at all? *i.e.*, do<sup>e</sup>s anything happen without a cause?"—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

## Chapter xix.

### JOB'S REPLY TO THE SECOND SPEECH OF BILDAD.

THE patriarch touched the reality of the case when he described the speeches which had been addressed to him as "words," saying, "How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?" (v. 2.) Words are different in their meaning according to the difference of the tone in which they are uttered. Every speaker should be heard in his own personality, and hardly any one who has not heard him should be entrusted with the pronunciation of his words. You may take the meaning out of a letter of love; you may turn the Bible itself into a mere gathering up of words: the heart is the reader, and the heart is the listener; he who listens only with his bodily ear cannot pay attention; the heart must be on the alert, the spirit must be alive. Has not the Church too long dealt in the useless medicine of words? Has not the Church indeed often been the victim of phrases that are now obsolete? Is it not time to adopt the language of the current day and to serve up the wine of the Gospel in goblets which people prefer? The wine will be the same, and the bread from the heart of Christ charged with the elements of immortal health. Why insist upon always adopting the same words and being bound by the same formularies? Why not rather consider the reality and vitality of the case, and subordinate everything to the supreme purpose of bringing men back from ways forbidden, and setting their wandering feet in roads that lie upwards toward the sky? But Job might have pitied the men if they had confessed that they were uttering only words. A speaker draws to himself our confidence when he assures us that he would do better if he could. The moment the speaker says, I am aware that I cannot go the whole distance covered by this necessity, but I will tell you

all I know ; I will offer you the advantage of my own experience ; if you care to accept such brotherly sympathy and guidance, I shall be thankful ; but I am well aware that when all my words have been uttered there lies beyond a pain I cannot touch, a necessity I cannot satisfy,—to such a man we listen, we repay him with our gratitude, because we know he would have done more if he could, that he only ceased because he was conscious he had nothing more to deliver by way of helpful message. But Job's friends were not so ; they spoke out all their words as if they were all the words that could be spoken ; hence Job reproves them thus:—"Ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me" (v. 3). If you blushed with shame, I could forgive you ; if you halted or faltered in your poor message, I should pity you, and believe you up to a given point ; but ye are proud, self-conscious, loaded with vanity, and ye stand before me as if ye were the men, and wisdom would die with you. The Church ought to be ashamed when it separates itself from the necessities of the world. The Church must not be allowed to luxuriate and philosophise and poetise and dream as if it were doing God's holy service. The world is a dying world, and all messages delivered to it must be accommodated to its weakness, or must be measured out in their energy according to the pressure of the exigency. But the Church has separated itself from the world ; made itself strange to the world ; has adopted a language of its own ; might indeed have a dictionary peculiarly belonging to itself ;—all this is mischievous, all this is anti-Christian : the Church should speak the language of the whole world, and should breathe a spirit which all men can understand. Sad beyond all sadness is it that the Church has made a profession of the great word Theology ! Sad that men should be examined in Epictetus, when they ought to be examined in the condition of the next slum ! Unpardonable that men should be qualified in the classics, and know nothing about the state of the men, women, and children dying around the very environs of the Church. If the one should be done the other should not be left undone. It was said of Daniel O'Connell, the great agitator and the great leader, " Other orators studied rhetoric, Daniel O'Connell studied man." That is what the Church must do ; then the Church will

no longer make itself strange to the people, but it will sit down beside them, and talk about the debt that cannot be paid, the illness that is hard to bear, the prodigal son who is far away, and will converse upon all the heart-break that makes up life's daily tragedy: who then will be so welcome to the family circle as the minister of Christ, the gentle, gracious, genial, tender soul, the outgoing of whose breath is like the outgoing of a benediction? We do not want men to stand apart from us and talk at us; the world needs men who understand it, and will come down to it, or go up to it; who will confess all that is good, really or apparently, in it, and then begin the mighty and redeeming work which is associated with the name of Christ. In this way the Church will reclaim a great deal of property. When men say they are Agnostics, the Church will say, So am I. The Church is the very place for Agnostics—for men who know nothing, but who are perfectly willing to know all that can be known. A man who calls himself an Agnostic and shuts all the windows, and bars all the doors, and lives in the darkness he creates, is not an Agnostic—he is a fool. We know nothing, but we want to know so much; we are very ignorant, but we put out our hand like a prayer; we can answer few questions, and oftentimes the answer is as great a mystery as the original enigma: still, we grope, and inquire, and hope, for at any moment all heaven may come down to rest with us, and give us peace. We cannot, therefore, allow the Agnostics to form themselves into a body, peculiar and distinct from the Christian Church; we claim them all, in so far as they are reverent, self-renouncing, and docile. When men say they are Secularists, the Church should say, So am I. You cannot go off on that ground. In short, we give the enemy all his points, and then demolish him as an antagonist. The great heaven of truth lies beyond all the prickly fences which men have planted, and in which they take an unspeakable and unwholesome pride.

Now Job will talk another language. He has found that there is a great gulf between him and his friends; they are friends no longer in the deepest sense of the word. He is my friend who knows my soul, and can say to me with sweet frankness, You

are wrong; stop that; turn round. Or, otherwise, You are right; stand to it; play the man; be courageous; do not be laughed down or talked down. The time will come when friendship will be re-defined; then he will be the true friend who knows most of the soul, the thought, the purpose, and the right way of doing things, the royal road to life and joy.

What, then, is Job's new position? He assumes it in the sixth verse:—"Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net." Now he will be a better man. He has turned away from human comforters: he has ventured to pronounce the right word, that word being God,—as if he said, Now I know who made this wound; God made it: now I understand who has taken away all my children and all my property; God has taken them: I should have said so theoretically, Job might have continued, But now I know it experimentally; when the first blow fell upon me, I said, "The Lord hath taken away," but I did not know that truth then as I know it now,—then I uttered it as part of a creed, but now I declare it as the sum-total of my faith. Thus Job was driven back upon the truth by the emptiness of human interpretation. So many men have been driven to God by incompetent teachers; the needy souls have listened to the word that was spoken, and they have said, No: that is not it, that is mere composition; that is mere make-up of words and phrases; the speaker seemed to be afraid of his subject, and did not tell all that was in him in the common open speech of the time: now I must go to God face to face, and make the whole of my experience known to him, and we must talk it out together in awful solitude.

See from Job's description, beginning at the seventh verse and going onward, what God can do to man, or permit to be done. "He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass:" yet the road seems open enough. That is the difficulty. We say to some men, Why do you not go forward? And they reply, My way is fenced up so that I cannot pass; and we ridicule the idea; we say, There is no fence: what mania is this, what foolish delusion? the road is wide open, pass on! But every man sees his own road as no other man can see it. Every traveller on life's

perilous journey sees lights, images, fences, boundaries, which no other traveller can see in just the same way. Is not God doing this in reality? Our answer must be a decided affirmative. We know there are things we cannot do, and yet there seems to be absolutely no obstruction in the way of our doing them. What is this which makes a man unable to reach just one inch farther? Is there some one at the end of his arm taunting him, saying, Reach higher: you ought to be able to do so? Is there some sprite that laughs at our limitation? There, however, is the fact of the boundary. We come to a given point, and say, Why not go ten points higher? That the sea has been asking in every rolling billow which ventured on the shore, and the answer was: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther." Who is it that speaks that limiting word? What voice is it that says, I have set the boundaries, and no man may trespass them? This we could dismiss as a theory if we could get rid of it as a fact. Then again: "He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head." Can a man not keep on the diadem by laying his hands upon it? No. You cannot bind the diadem to your brow when God has meant to take it off, and leave you bereaved of every aureole and halo, and sign of glory. Then again: "He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone." Is not that true of life? We are not able to do the things we wished to do, and we cannot tell why. We are not always conscious of this loss of personal power: "Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not;" decay comes on imperceptibly; we are destroyed on every side: we used to speak authoritatively, and now we have to make requests; the royal voice has gone down into a whisper that cannot be heard; the power that never tired is now unconscious of energy. What is this? Call it "law of nature." You have not explained the mystery. What is "law"? What is "nature"? Why not rather face the fact that after a given point in life we go down? Why not say, It is with life as with the clock—once twelve is struck, the rest is after noon? Truly it is a law. If it came and went and varied its operations, we should call it a whim, a play of haphazard, a variety of fortune; but it comes so subtly, proceeds so steadily, moves so silently and majestically, and has everything its own way. They who wish to be content with the

word "law," are content to live upon ice; they who say, "This is the law of the living God," feed upon the bread of life. Then again: "I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth:" I am thrown down into contempt; my words come back again upon me. Yet man thought he could be as God. There is a mounting time in life, an upgoing time, when we say, All the rest is ascension. But suddenly we find that the rest is going down, passing along the other part of the circle. We cannot go beyond a certain point. To-day those are masters who yesterday were servants; to-morrow they will be servants who to-day are masters. This is how God keeps society in some measure sweet. There is a self-adjusting power in society. Aristocracies come for a day when they come aright, and no man is an aristocrat to-day because his father was one yesterday. The Son of man shall come, and men will be valued for what they are, and can do, and they will go down and go up, and thus society will be kept in motion: the first shall be last, and the last shall be first—not by the operation of any arbitrary law, but just to sweeten and fraternise the world.

Job turns back to his friends and says: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me" (v. 21). We must be just to the friends. How do we know what action God has permitted to take place upon the minds of the three comforters? May not God have said, Hitherto shall ye come, but no farther; I will touch you, as well as touch Job; I will bring you to intellectual poverty that ye may cry unto me as ye have never cried before; I will riddle your wisdom through and through, so that it shall be useless to you; I will make you as men who are trying to draw water with a sieve? God does a great deal of collateral work. The whole of his action may not exercise itself in the personality of Job; the whole outlying world may be touched by the mystery of Job's education. We ought to learn something from great sufferers; and we ought to learn something about prayer from the pointlessness of our own. When we utter the prayer and receive no answer, we should fix ourselves upon the prayer and say, The fault is there. Instead whereof we have fixed ourselves



upon the answer and said, Behold the inutility of prayer. "Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss."

Now we see how to agony we are indebted for many a bright word. Suddenly Job exclaims:—

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (vv. 25-27).

There is no need to push these words too far. We lose a great deal by attempting to find in a passage like this what in reality is not in it. Suppose that Job is referring to the Goel, the elder brother of the family, whose business it was to redeem, and protect, and lead onward to liberty—suppose that this is an Oriental image, that is no reason for saying that it is nothing more. There have been unconscious prophecies; men have uttered words, not knowing what they were uttering; thus Caiaphas said to the council, "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not," not knowing himself what he said. We must allow for the unconscious region of life, the mysterious belt that is round about so-called facts and letters; we must allow for that purple horizon, so visible, so inaccessible. He would be an unwise teacher who said Job knew all that we understand by Christ, Resurrection, and Immortality; but he would be unwiser still who said that when his soul had been wrought up to this high pitch of enthusiasm in the ardour of his piety he knew nothing of the coming glory. Let Job speak literally, and even then he leaves a margin. Here we find a man at the utmost point of human progress; figure him to the eye; say the progress of the world, or the education of the world, is a long mysterious process; and here, behold, is a man who has come to the uttermost point: one step farther and he will fall over: there however he stands until vacuity is filled up, until vaticination becomes experience, until experience has become history, until history, again, by marvellous spiritual action, shapes itself into prophecy, and predicts a brighter time and a fairer land. There have been men who have stood on the headlines of history: they dare not take one

more step, or they would be lost in the boundless sea. Thus the world has been educated and stimulated by seer, and dreamer, and prophet, and teacher, and apostle. There have never been men wanting who have been at the very forefront of things, living the weird, often woeful, sometimes rapturous, life of the prophet. What was a dream to Job is a reality to us. We can fill up all Job would have said had he lived in our day; now we can say—I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. When these words are sung, do not think they are the words of Job that are being sung; they are Job's words with Christ's meaning. Yes, we feel that there must be a "Redeemer." Things are so black and wrong, so corrupt, so crooked, so wholly unimaginable, with such a seam of injustice running through all, that there must be a Goel, a Firstborn, an elder Brother, a Redeemer. It is the glory of the Christian faith to proclaim the personality and reality of this Redeemer. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the almightiness of God, the very omnipotence of the Trinity, to every one that believeth. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Nor can we consent to change his name: what word sweeter than "Redeemer"? what word mightier? A poem in itself; an apocalypse in its possibilities; divine love incarnated. Oh, come thou whose right it is! "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." That same Son of Mary, Son of man, Son of God. Accept him as thy Redeemer!

## Chapter xx.

### AN ANCIENT CONCEPTION OF WICKEDNESS.

ZOPHAR was in a great tumult of mind when he made this closing speech. He was determined to end with commination, and sound of storm and ruin. Probably there is no such chapter in all the sacred canon. Zophar did not know where to begin, nor could he connect his senses well together for a little time; he made haste, without progress; he went forward, and came back again: but once fairly started he never lost his feet; he grew in power of denunciation; the spark at last burned like an oven. It is interesting to go back thousands of years, and to ascertain what was thought of wicked men at that early period in the world's history. Have we improved in our conception of wickedness? According to some authorities, the Book of Job was written by Moses.\* There is a general consensus of opinion that it is a production of the patriarchal age. It was undoubtedly written before the giving of the law, as it came by Moses; for there is not in the whole poem a single reference to Mosaic legislation. It is helpful to bear this in mind, because it assists us to fix the time of the authorship, and if that time was very remote how interesting is the question, What was thought of wickedness then? Was it treated as youthful, as a mere exhibition of inexperience, an unexpected variation of human conduct? or were the early ages well instructed in morals, having large and clear view of conduct, motive, and issue of life? Awful is the thought that wickedness, disobedience—call it by what name we may—was at the first treated like an old enormity. The law of penalty did not grow from little to more, from more to much; the law of penalty began where the law of penalty will end; it began in death, and in death it terminates. All penalty is of the nature of death. Whoever receives one stroke upon his body for wrong done dies,—not in the obvious and literal sense

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\* See note, *post*, p. 196.

of giving up the ghost and being buried in a grave ; that is a narrow and unworthy conception of death ; that is how dogs die. Every child set in the corner in chastisement dies. Would God we could recover that idea ! It might make us sometimes thoughtful, solemn, and take out of all punishment the idea of frivolity. Said the Lord God, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Men have thought that the utterance meant in effect, thou shalt drop down dead ; thou shalt be a dead body, and none shall live to dig thy grave ; thou shalt rot in the hot sands, and be a pestilence in the air. Nothing of the kind. When you uttered one forbidden word you died. We are all dead men. If we live it is by the miracle of grace. "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." We lose much by too scrupulous a literalness. We say, Adam did not fall down dead ; he lived ; he was turned out of Paradise, and he became the father of the human race ; he did not die. So talking we are frivolous, superficial, utterly uninstructed in spiritual thought and purpose. Man dies when he does wrong ; hidden life is death. The point of interest, however, in this particular chapter relates to the judgment which was formed of wickedness in ages long gone. Zophar states the case with extreme vivacity of language, with striking picturesqueness of illustration. Let us follow this frank speaker in all his graphic talk.

"Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?" (vv. 4, 5).

We speak of Zophar as being old, and Zophar himself went back upon the thousands of years that had expired before his time ; so that from the very first wickedness had a bad reputation, and was doomed to early judgment. Observe the words. The wicked has triumphing, and the hypocrite has joy : these things are allowed. There is great triumphing in wickedness. Men may become proud of it ; they may laugh themselves into delight when they view the abundance of success which they have achieved in villainy. Manasseh was the worst king of Judah, yet he lived the longest : might not he have lifted up his head and said : They call wickedness death ; I have outlived all the kings of Judah who have tried to do a little better than their predecessors ? The worst pope lived longest and died richest : might

not he have said: There have been simpletons on the throne, princes of Rome, that tried to pray; I never tried; I muttered the sacred words, but I took care to let them all fall into the dust and not to rise to heaven, and I shall leave more property than the princes of the Tiara that went before me? There is a triumphing in wickedness. It is possible for a man to be so strong that he can crush all weaker men, to put them out of his way by oppressive and overwhelming strength. All this is admitted in the Scriptures. And there is joy in wrong-doing. There is a stolen laughter; there is a fatness of prosperity which is all put on from the outside. Hypocrisy can live in the biggest house in the terrace. Wickedness can have hundreds of acres of park-land more than righteousness. Let it be clearly understood that all this is taken into account. But what was said about it of old, since man was placed upon the earth? When the wicked were triumphing an invisible hand wrote the word "*short*" upon all the mad hilarity: this is but a bubble, a flash of fire; presently it will go out, and nothing will be left but the smoke and an intolerable odour. The hypocrite had joy. He laughed behind his vizard; he chuckled when men thought him good; he made merry with them in his heart; but an invisible hand wrote upon that white vizard, "*for a moment.*" There is the drawback to wickedness. A man shall take to the practice of any form of vice, and for the first mile he shall gallop. But watch him. Why does he not gallop the second mile? Perhaps he does, at least for a furlong or two; he may even go into the third mile, and still his well-spurred steed may be flying through the air. He gallops well, but, see, he leaps! "Where is he?" And the answer is, "Where is he?" There is no road down there; at the end of that little path there is a smoking, reeking pit. Such was the repute, then, in which wickedness was held of old, since man was placed upon the earth.

Then again Zophar says:—

"Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?" (vv. 6, 7.)

Observe the two parts of the statement. His excellency mounts up to the heavens. There is no mistake about this, men may

say, as they look upon wickedness achieving its aim and wearing its coveted laurels. There are men who have been wicked who fill as large a space in history as has been filled by men who have been virtuous. Some tyrants have a longer biography than Christ had. So we are not to judge anything before the time. If we look when his excellency mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches unto the clouds, we shall form a wrong judgment altogether; the day must be taken in its completeness, and not in any particular hour of the circle through which it runs. The second part of the statement has in it the word "perish." That is the doom of wickedness. Why do we try the experiment for ourselves when age after age it has been tried and age after age has confirmed the doom? What reason have we to suppose that we are abler men than those who have gathered together all the resources of wickedness, and used them all the day round? What resources have we that Solomon had not? But we need not go to history for a confirmation of the doom; that confirmation is within our own hearts. No man ever had any real joy in ill-gotten money. His money and he never were friends. They were mutually-suspecting partners. The money said, You have no right to me, you villain! and the owner said, Not for worlds would I let it be known how I got you into my possession! They have lived a kind of made-up life together. The bad man's unclean hands have chinked the gold, but could get no music out of it: it was the sweat of poverty, it was the groan of weakness, it was the price of blood. We have never done wrong but we ourselves have known the meaning of the word "perish." The lamp of life has gone out; as for the little lamp of self-approval, it has been crushed out by some sudden and tremendous force, so that it could never be lighted again. We have never done a mean deed without being ashamed to meet an honest neighbour. What fantastic tricks we have played in our meanness! We have taken offence at others because we have done wrong ourselves; we have become thin-skinned because our conscience has given way, and has followed us like an avenging creditor demanding the uttermost farthing. Then the fool's laugh has curled our lip; then the untrue gladness has tried to gleam in our eyes: but within, what a tumult—understanding slain, conscience angry, love dead! **Wickedness is**

not worth the doing, were it merely a question of equivalent and result. It tastes well in the mouth ; it poisons the vitals.

In the ninth verse Zophar uses a word which, put into English, is very familiar to us. The word is "no more"—"the eye also which saw him shall see him no more,"—nor want to see him. That is the worst of it. Who mourns over the loss of that which is not desired? Why mourn we our dead with long lamentation and with rivers of tears? Because we would see them again. No man wants the wicked-doer to come any more. There are some loved ones whom we would like to spend a day with. Could they but lean over heaven's gate and talk down to us from amid the glory, we should be glad to see them. There are those who have gone whom we should seek out had we to creep around the circumference of the earth to enjoy the opportunity. But no man wants the bad thinker and evil actor back again. Let him rot in his grave! There are graves on which even children would not plant a flower ; graves that never dry ; graves that are soaked, and which the sun will never bless ; and the only epitaph that should be written upon the cold stones is—"no more." What a poor life is that which ends in such an issue! The better life is before us—the sweet possibility of so living that men will never allow our names to die ; when men think of our names they will straighten themselves up to some new effort in virtue ; when our conduct is recalled it will come upon the reviving memory like an inspiration, and we shall be blessed for thoughts of mercy and for deeds of charity. But suppose the wickedness should never be discovered? That is impossible. Discovery is a large word. It is not to be judged by the letter. Discovery comes in providences that hunt a man to death in a thousand ways. God's providences guard all the golden gates, stand upon all the hilltops, watch with jealousy the frontier-land, so that there shall be no crossing ; and men may ask, Why this bewilderment, perplexity ; why this continual backdriving, why this impossibility of progress? Other men pass on, and we cannot advance ; and when that question is asked seriously, clear away down in the deep sanctuary of the heart, an angel will answer, This is the black harvest of a black seed-time. Blessed be God for this punishment. We are kept right

by penal statutes. Were there no punishment, how soon would the world commit self-slaughter, perish, and disappear; and the bright stars all round the belt of heaven would say, Where is the little earth? The answer might be: The law of punishment was suspended,—nay, abolished; men were allowed to do what they pleased, without any results of a penal kind, and they have one and all leaped into destruction. How much do we owe to that which we fear! Whilst it may be wrong to preach so as to excite only the fears of men, there is no real preaching, no complete preaching, that omits any appeal that can call men to thoughtfulness or sober them into gravity for a moment. Such preaching will never be popular. Who likes to hear of punishment, of death, or hell? Nothing is easier in the world than to be popular, to excite whole towns, by telling lies, or tricking out the truth with a vain show. And were life's history but so many sunny days, this would be easy and pleasant; but there is an after-time. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." That is right. God must be severe with watchmen. The law of trusteeship must be the severest in all the statutes of the land. Were the preacher to call you by endearing names, and assure you of an immediate heaven, do what you please, how pleasant the intercourse! How joyous every occasion of meeting! That might be so for a day or two, but "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment." And the hypocritical preacher will have the hottest of all hells! He never told the people the reality of the case; he had his philosophies, and his theories, and his new conceptions; he yesterday hit upon a novel hypothesis by which to set the universe at a new angle, so that men saw it as they never saw it before: but who made him a hypothesis-monger? Who asked him to awake his invention, when he ought to have declared a revelation? O Wickedness, thou hast a bad character! thy reputation is ancient enough, but from the first God's wolves have been out upon thee, and they will tear thee to pieces. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and



the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Do not be misled by fine-drawn distinctions between infirmity and wickedness. Whatever distinctions are to be drawn, let God draw them. As for us, let us be severe upon ourselves. When a man tries to look at his actions so as to make them as white as possible, he is doing wrong. Self-forgiveness should be impossible. We speak a great mystery, but it touches the soul of things. When the law pronounces a man legally innocent, let him retire into his conscience, and if his conscience say, You have escaped because the letter of the law could not touch you, but only on that ground, let him never go out into society again ; let him live in the hell of his own remorse. That is the true purgatorial fire. It does not prevent the heaven of God's forgiveness beyond, but it is God who alone can forgive sin—no man can forgive himself. The lie you told a quarter of a century ago shall add bitterness to your feast this day. You need not speak about it, or make yourself a hero in suffering because of it, or say, Behold how sensitive is my moral nature, and how responsive to every appeal is my conscience : you can have intercourse with yourself within, and that intercourse will often make you hold down your head, whilst other men are holding up theirs and enjoying the feast. Walk softly all your days. Do not imagine that this will interfere with the divine forgiveness ; and do not imagine that it will destroy another feeling, sacred and enrapturing, which will come out of the consciousness of the divine forgiveness. Life is a great mystery. It is not made up of simplicities which a child can handle, and enumerate, and set in regular order, as so many, and no more. Life is conflict ; life is self-contradiction ; life is torment with joy, and joy with torment. There is a moral memory, a conscience which is an inspired recollection, and which says, Remember the hole of the pit out of which you were digged. When men forget the past they misinterpret and misapply the present.

Zophar, then, was very frank and distinct about the wicked, and he went so far as to say that the children of the bad man shall come into an evil inheritance. We cannot prevent this.

Here is the fact, if the Bible were burned. Men talk about not being responsible for what another man did long, long ago. Such reasoning is false, because untrue to fact, as known amongst ourselves, outside the Church. Why that eruption in that man's body? Did he make it? No. Who made it? It has come down through ten generations, that same stigma, that same cruel signature. Why are these people so sensitive, nervous, fidgetty, wanting in self-control? what is the matter with them? Their father lived a life that expresses itself so in his innocent little children. They cannot bear this, and they cannot endure something else, and they are afraid and weak, fragile, wanting in robustness of nerve and thought, and all kinds of force. Why? Yet their father says he has pursued a certain course for forty years, and never felt the worse for it. What a fool's boast! Would he but look at his children he would see that he has made them suffer for it. This is not in the Bible, this is not a theological doctrine made by the priests and foisted upon society by the tricksters of the pulpit; this is reality. With such realities before us, it is impossible to deny that we may to-day be suffering because long ages since a man broke loose from God's altar and forgot to pay God's tribute. We are not dissociated individuals, each having his own individuality, his own eternity, his own self-contained and complete personality. Humanity is one. The solidarity of the human race is now affirmed by the highest teachers of science. Let us thank God that humanity is one: for then one Saviour may handle the delicate and difficult situation; and if death came by one, so life may come by one,—if by one man's disobedience great evil was wrought, by one man's obedience great triumphs may be achieved. The evangelical conception is to our thinking day by day clearer, in all its reach and meaning, and it is easier to sneer at it than to disprove it.

Zophar indicates another thought which is full of pleasing reflection. He pictures, in the tenth verse, the children of the bad man seeking to please the poor, and trying in some way to restore their goods. Let us make this the meaning, if we can do so without straining the letter. It has, at all events, a meaning which does occasionally exemplify itself in that manner

The difficulty is this, that sometimes we do by way of grace and goodness what we ought to do by way of right and justice. We say to men, Be pleased to take this; it gives us pleasure to convey it; we wish to be courteous and hospitable and kind; be good enough to receive this token of our good-will. By so doing we are practising tricks of vanity and self-display. We should rather say, My father robbed your family fifty years ago: take this as part-payment. Would God we could pay you to the uttermost farthing; but it is yours, not ours, and I will go away and try to make some more, and I will bring it to you; yea, if God spare my health, I will try to pay you fourfold. It was a bad deed; the man, the literal robber, is not here himself, but I cannot rest with the stigma upon my name: take it, not as a favour, but as a right, and put down on paper that I have paid you so much in the pound.

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#### NOTE.

The age in which Job lived is a question that has created much discussion. The most probable opinion fixes it as earlier than Abraham. The book may be read, therefore, between the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Genesis, as a supplement to the concise record of the early condition of our race, given by Moses.

The arguments adduced in support of the latter opinion are as follows. (1) The long life of Job, extending to two hundred years. (2) The absence of any allusion to the Mosaic law, or the wonderful works of God towards Israel in their departure from the land of bondage, and their journey to Canaan; which are constantly referred to by the other sacred writers, as illustrating the character and government of Jehovah. (3) The absence of any reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; which memorable event occurred in the vicinity of the country where Job resided; and which as a signal and direct judgment of the Almighty upon the wicked, would hardly have been omitted in an argument of this nature. (4) The worship of the sun and moon being the only form of idolatry mentioned; which was, without question, the most ancient, chap. xxxi. 26-28. (5) The manners and customs described, which are those of the earliest patriarchs. (6) The religion of Job is of the same kind as that which prevailed among the patriarchs before the Mosaic economy. It is the religion of sacrifices: but without any officiating priest, or sacred place. (7) To these arguments Dr. Hales has added one derived from astronomy, founded on chaps. ix. 9, and xxxviii. 31, 22. He states, that the principal stars there referred to, appear, by a retrograde calculation, to have been the cardinal constellations of spring and autumn about B.C. 2130, or about one hundred and eighty-four years before the birth of Abraham.

It is worthy of notice, that if Job lived between the deluge and the call of Abraham, we have an additional proof that God has never left the world without witnesses to his truth.—ANGUS'S *Bible Handbook*.

## Chapter xx.

### AN ANCIENT CONCEPTION OF WICKEDNESS.

#### II.

**Z**OPHAR has drawn a dreary picture of the wicked man and the issue of all wicked action. His language has been incisive, picturesque, unmistakable as to emphasis and meaning. He thus speaks of the wicked man :

“ His bones are full of the sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him ” (vv. 11-14).

According to Zophar, the wicked man is not permitted to keep that which he has attained; he falls back from every point of supposed progress; he yields every assumed victory. “ He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again ” (v. 15). He shall not be for ever rich. He may have the handling of much gold, but he will be a beggar at the last. He shall suck the poison of asps which lies in the hedge. He shall suppose himself to be enjoying a luxury, but he shall awake too late, to find that he has been feeding upon the poison of asps.

Zophar leaves the wicked man no point of redemption, no rag of reputation, no standing-ground in the assembly of the ages. He kindles a hell around the evil-doer, and burns him, so that there is nothing left of him but hot ashes. The judgment is complete, all-including, terrible in all its aspects and issues.

But all this might be taken as so much denunciation in words, were not some substantial moral reason assigned for all this visitation. Here is the strength of the Bible. We may stand and gaze upon its Niagara-like denunciations, we may wonder at

the torrent of "woes" proceeding from the gracious lips of the Son of God, and we may say, All this is eloquent expression : but is it anything more ? Now, wherever there is denunciation there is explanation, and in all cases the woe never exceeds the moral reason ; there is no excess of utterance ; the reason is deep enough to hold all the torrent. We have that reason even in the speech of Zophar. He, not supposed by all commentators to be logical and coherent, strengthens his speech by a "because." If we can find in that "because" room enough for the judgment, we may turn again to the judgment and read its words with new significance and new appreciation :—

"Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor ; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not" (v. 19).

That is the reason ! It is sufficient ! This is a moral universe, governed by moral considerations, judged by moral standards. This is not a mere creation, in the sense of a gigantic framework well put together, excellently lighted, and affording abundant accommodation for anybody who may choose to come into it ; this is a school, a sanctuary, a place of judgment, a sphere in which issues are determined by good conduct. Let us dwell upon this point until we feel much of its meaning.

What is it that excites all this divine antagonism and judgment ? Was the object of it a theological heretic ? Was the man pronounced wicked because he had imbibed certain wrong notions ? Was this a case of heterodoxy of creed being punished by the outpouring of the vials of divine wrath ? Look at the words again—"because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor." His philanthropy was wrong. The man was wicked socially—wicked in relation to his fellow men. All wickedness is not of a theological nature and quality, rising upward into the region of metaphysical conceptions and definitions of the Godhead, which only the learned can present or comprehend ; there is a lateral wickedness, a wickedness as between man and man, rich and poor, poor and rich, young and old ; a household wickedness, a market-place iniquity. There we stand on solid rock. If you have been led away with the thought that wickedness is a theological conception, and a species of theological nightmare, you have only to read the Bible, in its complete sense, in order

to see that judgment is pronounced upon what may be called lateral wickedness—the wickedness that operates amongst ourselves, that wrongs mankind, that keeps a false weight and a short measure, that practises cunning and deceit upon the simple and the ignorant, that fleeces the unsuspecting,—a social wickedness that stands out that it may be seen in all its black hideousness, and valued as one of the instruments of the devil. There is no escape from the judgment of the Bible. If it pronounce judgment upon false opinions only, then men might profess to be astounded by terms they cannot comprehend, by metaphysics that lie beyond their culture: but the Bible goes into the family, the market-place, the counting-house, the field where the labourer toils, and insists upon judging the actions of men, and upon sending away the richest man from all his bank of gold, if he have oppressed and forsaken the poor. Compare this with Christ's judgment of opinions:—"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." And he shall say unto them on the right hand, You have had excellent opinions, you have been good judges of philosophy, you have been sharp-minded, keen-eyed; you have been very brilliant metaphysicians: therefore go into the golden heavens, and enjoy the New Jerusalem, and be at rest for evermore. How poorly the judgment would have read! And to them on the left hand the Judge shall say, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for you have been as owls in the sanctuary, seeing nothing of the mystery of daylight, you have been without cleverness, ability, mental astuteness; you know nothing about long words and difficult terms: therefore go down, and sink into eternal night. How unjust the judgment! We have not had equal chances in this matter. But the judgment shall run contrariwise, on a great broad human and social level—"I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat." Any man can divide his crust with another,—if not divide it in equal halves, divide it so that the other man, aching with hunger, shall at least appease his desire. "I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." Any one can hand a cup of cold water. The merit is

not in the water, but in the cup and in the handling. The well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with, but I have a vessel with which I can draw; and if I see thee die of thirst, because I will not lend thee the vessel or show thee how to draw the water, I care not if I am as metaphysical as Athanasius and as learned as Augustine, there is no hell too hot and deep for me. This is the commandment of God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself." Where can we find in all the range of Holy Scripture a single instance in which a man was, so to say, promoted to heaven because he had clear views, because all his opinions were exquisitely right and were laid out in faultless intellectual mosaic? The Pharisees were men of learning: did the Lord ever pronounce a single eulogium upon them? The scribes lived in letters, all day they were writing words, explaining terms, reading the law; they were in very deed the literary men of their day: when did Christ gather them together in a common feast and say, Now shut the door, and let the ignorant be excluded, whilst we, wise men and learned, instruct one another in terms of brotherhood and love? To whom did Jesus Christ ever say, Whatever they say unto you, do it; because they sit in Moses' seat and their word is right enough: but do not follow their example? These were the learned men of the time! On the other hand, how often is conduct made the rule of judgment? There can be no difficulty in pointing out instances illustrative of this:—the poor woman who followed the Saviour into the house of Simon, stood behind him, and cried over him, and washed his feet with her tears, and dried them with the hairs of her head; she was forgiven all her sins: the poor widow who passed the treasury and dropped in all her living. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me." That verse should be read backwards sometimes, so that the littleness of the *deed* may be seen in the littleness of the *receiver*: inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these—we fix our minds always upon the person receiving the benefaction: whereas we ought to say—If done to the least, it was the least that could be done, yet upon this minimum of excellence God sets the seal of heaven. We have stated this thus broadly and fervently, but if it went without modification it would present a totally incomplete and mischievous

view of the case. Do let us beware of all half-truths. It is distressing to see how men will eagerly snatch at half a truth when it pleases them, and forget the other half that would modify it, and hold it in just proportion, and chasten the receiver, and keep him within the grip and discipline of God. A man's conduct is not necessarily good *because* he has no opinions. A person is not necessarily of the very highest quality of character because he professes to know nothing about God, and the spiritual world, and the mysterious laws that are said to govern human motive and human destiny. It might be supposed from some eloquent speakers that if a man only endeavoured to be charitable, if he cared nothing for what people thought, if he opened his door to all sorts of men and never asked them a question about the law or the gospel, he would be an excellent person, and would be sure of heaven. Let us protest against this sophism; yea, let us call it more than a sophism: it is the deceit which men like; it is easy piety; it gratifies many a sensibility without bringing the whole soul under discipline, and under a sense of indebtedness to him from whom alone is every good gift and every perfect gift. Let us reason rather in some such way as this: here is a man who is endeavouring to do good; therefore God is working in him, though the man himself know it not; having begun by being charitable, he may end by being also truly spiritual: in the meantime, the charity is excellent, it is to be encouraged, a divine blessing goes along with it, without it there could be no piety; but in itself it is incomplete, yet, who knows? Persevere in doing the will, and at last you may know the doctrine: multiply your good deeds. Do not discourage yourself in sacrifice, in gift of every kind, in service of every range and quality, but proceed, and be abundant in good labours, because you are doing more than you think you are doing: you are undergoing a process of education, and some day there may strike you a new light, an illumination above the brightness of the sun, and you may then see the explanation which had never entered into your conception before. Let us resist the foolish suggestion that it is sufficient to be easy, genial, unsuspecting, even liberal in donation;—all that is right, good, invaluable: but unless the fountain be pure the stream cannot continue to be good; here and there it may be limpid enough,



very attractive and most useful, but a clean thing cannot come out of an unclean ; the stream is only right when the fountain is right ; not until the heart is right with God can the hands—both of them, and all day—be right with society.

Zophar gives a view of the wicked which is very significant:—

“In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits” (v. 22).

That is a marvellous instance of divine judgment. A man may have much, and yet be in poverty. We have heard of some such instances in actual life. Men are said to have quite an abundance of property, and yet they cannot meet an immediate obligation : their property is consolidated ; it is not immediately available, so that comparatively rich men have sometimes to ask favours of their friends. All this may be good in commerce, perfectly intelligible in business relations ; it involves no dishonour whatever : but take it as a suggestion of something far beyond itself. Here is a man who has “fulness of sufficiency,” and yet he is in straits. He has plenty of the wrong stuff. A man at a toll-gate who has a million-pound note is as badly off as the man who has not a single halfpenny : neither of the men can pass through the toll-gate. There may be a poverty of wealth as well as a poverty of destitution. So the wicked man may be in straits of all kinds ; he may have plenty of money, and not know how to spend it ; he may have an abundance of property, and be without thoughts, impulses of a heavenly kind, aspirations that seek the skies. The bad man may have no explanation of the miseries which torment him ; he may be mad with impatience because his spirit has never been chastened by heavenly experience. The good man may have nothing, and yet may abound ; he may be hungry, and yet may be satisfied : his affliction is a sanctified sorrow ; he says, This is for the present, and “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby ;” and the Lord may come to-morrow, or on the third day he may be here : one look, and I shall forget my lifelong trouble ; one vision of Christ, and all earth's tragedy will be sunk in oblivion. The good man, whose whole estate is in God, can never be in

straits; he meets a mystery, and hails it, turns it into an altar, and under its darkening shadow prays his mightiest prayers. The good man entertains as a guest black affliction, weird grief, awful sorrow, and says to the guest, You are not welcome for your own sake, but a blessing shall come even out of you: God sent you: you may eat my flesh and my bones, and drink my blood, and seem to conquer, but inasmuch as I believe God, and in God, and live in God, you cannot hurt me; I have a word singing in me now, and this is what it says—"Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do:" stop as long as God wants you to stop: your victory will be your failure; when you have conquered in your little purpose, you will have but cut the tether, and given me all the room of heaven. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." "Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter . . . esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Liberty is in the mind; freedom is in Christian hope: he who is in Christ, and seizes the future in Christ's spirit and in Christ's name, is not poor, cannot be poor; he is rich with unsearchable riches.

So Zophar has described the estate and condition of the wicked. Who will be wicked now? Who will dare this fate? We know it to be true; we need no logician or rhetorician to prove this truth and drive it home upon us: we know it to be true. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" "Our God is a consuming fire;" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." "The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment." We cannot tell the meaning of these terms; we have never pretended to define them; if they could be defined they would be weakened: let them stand there, in all their dumb significance, too vast for

language, too awful for metaphor. If this be the fate of the wicked, it follows that the fate of the righteous must be otherwise. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." I would rather die with Christ by my side in the poorest hovel in creation, than die without him in a king's palace, with regiments of soldiers gathered in serried ranks around the royal walls. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them: "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;" they shall serve God day and night in his temple, and his name shall be in their foreheads, and a white stone of mystery in their palm. May this be our sweet fate! That it may be so we must adopt the divine means for securing the gracious end: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Seeing that we have to face the future, that every man has to read the dark book for himself, who says that he will refuse the light of Christ's presence,—the joy of Christ's comfort?

## Job xxi. 15.

“What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?”

### THE PROFITABLENESS OF RELIGION.

**T**HIS inquiry will lead us, by a very little expansion of its terms, to consider the general subject of the advantages of religion. Regard the text in that broad aspect, not limiting it to prayer, or any special exercise of piety, but as opening up these great questions: What better is a man for being religious? Is it not possible to be as good and as great without religion as with it? Understand that we are speaking exclusively of the Christian religion, and not of any form of pagan superstition. What profit is it, then, that a man should believe the doctrines of Jesus Christ? What advantage arises from believing in God as revealed by his Son? If a man be sincere and consistent, what disadvantage does he suffer, as compared with the man who accepts all the doctrines of the Christian faith? Such is our subject, namely: The profitableness of religion; an answer to the great inquiry, What profit should we have, if we serve the Almighty?

No man can hold the Christian view of God's personality and dominion without his whole intellectual nature being ennobled. He no longer looks at things superficially; he sees beyond the gray, cold cloud that limits the vision of men who have no God; the whole sphere of his intellectual life receives the light of another world. The difference between his former state and his present condition, is the difference between the earth at midnight and the earth in the glow and hope of a summer morning! This is not mere statement. It is statement, based upon the distinctest and gladdest experience of our own lives, and based also upon the very first principles of common sense. The finer and clearer our conceptions of the divine idea, the nobler and stronger

must be our intellectual bearing and capacity. When the very idea of God comes into the course of man's thinking, the quality of his thought is changed; his outlook upon life widens and brightens; his tone is subdued into veneration, and his inquisitiveness is chastened into worship. Intellectually the idea of God is a great idea. It enters the mind, as sunlight would startle a man who is groping along a path that overhangs abysses in the midst of starless gloom. The idea of God cannot enter into the mind, and mingle quietly with common thinking. Wherever that idea goes, it carries with it revolution, elevation, supremacy. We are not referring to a cold intellectual assent to the suggestion that God is, but of a reverent and hearty faith in his being and rule. Such a faith never leaves the mind as it found it. It turns the intellect into a temple; it sets within the mind a new standard of measure and appraisal; and lesser lights are paled by the intensity of its lustre. Is this mere statement? It is statement; but it is the statement of experience; it is the utterance of what we ourselves know; because comparing ourselves with ourselves we are aware that we have known and loved the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that since we have done so, our intellectual life has sprung from the dust, and refreshed itself at fountains which are accessible only to those who live in God.

This, then, is the first position for our thought and consideration, namely: That no man can entertain with reverence and trust the idea that God is, without his whole intellectual nature being lifted up to a higher plane than it occupied before; without his mind receiving great access of light and vigour. Do you say that you know some men who profess to believe in God, and who sincerely do believe in his existence and his government, and yet they are men of no intellectual breath, of no speciality in the way of intellectual culture and nobleness? We believe that to be perfectly true; but can you tell what those men would have been, small as they are now, but for the religion that is in them? At present they are very minute, intellectually speaking,—exceedingly small and microscopic. But what would they have been if the idea of God's existence and rule had never taken possession of their intellectual nature? Besides that, they are on

the line of progress. There is a germ in them which **may** be developed, which may, by diligent culture, by reverent care, become the supreme influence in their mental lives. Such modifications must be taken into account when we are disposed to sneer at men who, though they have a God in their faith and in their hearts, are yet not distinguished by special intellectual strength. We hear of men who never mention the name of God, and who, therefore, seem to have no religion at all; who are men of very brilliant intellectual power, very fertile in intellectual resources, and who altogether have distinguished themselves in the empire of Mind. But we ask what might these men have become if they had added to intellectual greatness a spirit of reverence and adoration? It cannot surely be said that those men would not have been greater had they known what it is to worship the one living and true God? We must say that they would not have been greater and would not have had intellectual profit, before we can establish the charge that we are now arguing upon a mistaken assumption. But the suggestions are perfectly correct. Some religious men are intellectually little, some unreligious men are intellectually great; and yet neither of these suggestions touch the great question under consideration.

Not only is there an ennoblement of the nature of a man, as a whole, by his acceptance of the Christian idea of God—there is more. That in itself is an inexpressible advantage; but there is a higher profit still, forasmuch as there is a vital cleansing and purification of a man's moral being. Let a man receive the Christian idea of God, let him believe fully in God, as revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ, and a new sensitiveness is given to his conscience; he no longer loses himself in the mazes of a cunning casuistry; he goes directly to the absolute and final standard of righteousness; all moral relations are simplified; moral duty becomes transparent; he knows what is right, and does it; he knows the wrong afar off, and avoids it. Before he received the Christian idea of God and worship according to the spirit and law of Jesus Christ, he could hoodwink himself—that last act of wickedness! He could put his own moral eyes out, and imagine that having closed his own vision he had extinguished all spiritual light; he could regard the flame of a candle as sufficient, without

consulting the light of the sun; he could mistake a maxim for a principle, and justify by usage what he never could defend by righteousness. But now that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is in him, now that he looks at everything from a Christian standpoint, he takes a spiritual view of every question and every duty; he examines the shades and colours of his life by God's light; and he is ashamed, with unspeakable shame, of the chicanery which enfeebled and disgraced his former existence.

This is the statement of a fact, which we ourselves have experienced. We are not in this matter to be regarded as special pleaders only. We are the witnesses as well as the advocates; we are speaking upon our oath! We have sworn upon the Holy Book, to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,—and this we do when we say, That life in Jesus Christ the Son of God, has given us a new sensitiveness of conscience, a new moral standard, a new test of moral satisfaction. It is often urged that some persons make great professions of religion, who after all do not appear to very high moral advantage when compared with others whose profession is by no means so loud and broad. There can be no controversy upon that point. But it is not their religion that is to be blamed; it is their want of religion that is to be pointed out and deplored. Some men never open the Bible, never identify themselves with any church, and are yet considered noble, honourable, upright men in the marketplace and in the various relationships of life. But how much nobler and better—better altogether—such men would be if they believed in God as revealed by Jesus Christ! That is the point of view to occupy, if we would be fair to this question. It is not to be dismissed on mere superficial suggestion. There are men who disgrace the name they bear; but do not blame the name, blame those who are traitorous to its spirit and claims. There are men who do not identify themselves with any organised form of Christianity; and we do not say how far they may or may not have the Spirit of God within them; but any man who has a high natural sense of honour becomes a greater man, more spiritual in his moral definitions, more keenly spiritual in his moral vision, in proportion as he knows, and worships and serves the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Further, it is always profitable to base life upon intelligent faith. He who walks by sight only, walks in a blind alley. He who does not know the freedom and joy of reverent, loving speculation, wastes his life in a gloomy cell of the mouldiest of prisons. Even in matters that are not distinctively religious, faith will be found to be the inspiration and strength of the most useful life. It is faith that does the great work of the world. It is faith that sends men in search of unknown coasts. It is faith that re-trims the lamp of inquiry, when sight is weary of the flame. It is faith that unfastens the cable and gives men the liberty of the seas. It is faith that inspires the greatest works in civilisation. So we cannot get rid of religion unless we first get rid of faith, and when we get rid of faith we give up our birthright and go into slavery for ever! We do not say that there may not be an apparent equality between one man and another. One man may profess faith in Christ and pray to God; and the other may make no such profession. Viewed according to the mere flesh, there may even be superiority on the side of him who makes no profession of religion; there may be points of great similarity as between them; yet there may also be between them the profoundest contrast. They may dwell in the same neighbourhood, yet they may live in different regions of the universe. They may reside upon the beat of the same tax-gatherer, yet may breathe atmospheres separated by immeasurable miles; and the explanation of the difficulty may be found in the presence or absence of faith. All birds are not the same birds; neither are all men the same men. Though it is very possible for a child who is looking at two birds to say, "They are both birds; one, therefore, must be as good as the other;" for the child would judge by colour and shape, and form his judgment upon things that are but superficial. Hear a dialogue and say what it means: Two birds are in conversation. "How many eyes have you?" "Two." "So have I." "How many wings have you?" "Two." "So have I." "How many legs?" "Two." "So have I. And you are covered with feathers, and so am I." Then the birds are both alike; they are both birds, and there is an end of the matter. No, no! They are both birds,—yes. But the beak of one is as wax, and the beak of the other is as iron; the legs of the one spread out into webs, the



judgment, That that is her Christianity? That man is a devil, who would slay the Son of God! Does a woman taunt and jibe her husband who makes a profession of Christianity, and tell him that his misdeeds and shortcomings are attributable to his religious faith? That woman's name ought not to be mentioned in civilised, not to say Christian, society! We are well aware that we are chargeable with inconsistency; but could we face an assembly of sneerers, we should claim this as a right—blame *us*, do not blame our Master—scourge us to the bone, to the marrow, but lay no finger on the Son of God! Visit us with your criticism—and, alas! we have no reply to it. If you tell us we are inconsistent, we are obliged to say, "Even so." We cannot retort upon you, and say, "So are you." It is a coward's answer. We do not avail ourselves of any immoral *tu quoque*. We take the blame; we say, "You are right." The right word comes from bad lips. We cannot return the word as an unjust accusation; but may we beg, pray, entreat, that the Son of God be not blamed for our shortcomings! Does the sneerer come to us, and say, "Is this the profitableness of your religion then? Ha! you make a great profession of religion, yet look how narrow-minded you are! Is this what you call religion?" Our reply is, Do not talk to us so; it is insane talk, and it is animated by a diabolical spirit! Take us as we are; indicate our shortcomings and spare not the rod; but do not crucify the Son of God afresh!

There are persons in the world who will insist upon judging this great question of religion in the light of this inquiry—"What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" It is a vicious question; it is, as a piece of reasoning, unsound from beginning to end. Yet there is a solemn claim upon us to let our profiting appear unto all observers. We are to be living epistles, known and read of men. What a mighty change would take place in society, if we could point to ourselves as illustrations of faith; and as examples of religious love and consistency and devotion! Yet alas! every Christian has to say, "Do not look at me if you would know what religion is." And this will be so, more or less, to the end of life; because the holier a man is, the less does he feel inclined to exhibit himself as a pattern or

example to others. But that is no reason why he should be one whit the less the most loving man in his neighbourhood; the most noble man in his confraternity. It is not one whit the less a reason why he should not exercise the profoundest and most beneficent influence upon all with whom he may come in contact.

Now as to those who are observing Christians from a side point of view, and saying, "We are on the outlook to observe what your godliness does for your nature; our eyes are upon you, and if we see that you have a very great advantage over us, probably we may, by-and-by, come over to you." They will never come! They occupy a wrong angle of vision; they are pursuing a course of vicious reasoning. The question for such to look at is, not what advantage do professors seem to have, but, What is religion itself? How can I get to know its meaning? How can I put myself under its influence? Men must not look to a minister as an example and a model, nor base their reasonings upon his character and spiritual attainments. The hoariest saint goes home if he is to be dragged to the front, to be looked at as an exhibition of the advantages and the profitableness of religion. Look at the Son of God, God the Son, the one Teacher and the only Saviour; and we risk everything upon that look, if so be it be reverent, earnest, intelligent.

Those who are merely collateral observers, do an injury to themselves in supposing that Christians are to be looked upon as the only exponents and illustrations of the profitableness of religion. Such observers miss the whole question; they waste their energy; they toil in waters where there is nothing to be caught; they pursue where there is nothing to be overtaken. We would urge such to study religion itself, to pay earnest heed to every feature of the life of Christ. We turn away, that the Master alone may be left with you. Is there a man who has read the life of Christ, who will say that if society received that life and based its policy upon it, the most beneficent revolution would not gradually occur in society? When did the Son of God ever flatter a rich or great man that he might enjoy his momentary patronage? When did the Son of God set man

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against man in deadly hate or mortal strife? When did the Son of God interfere with the comfort of any home? Where is the family that can say, "Not until Christ came amongst us did we know the meaning of strife and bitterness"? Can one such family be found? But ten thousand other families can give the lie to the accusation, and say they never knew what home was, till they set up on the hearthstone an altar to the living God. When men, therefore, ask what is the profitableness of religion, we say,—Consider what would take place in every department of society, if the love of Christ were multiplied by the life of mankind. Then righteousness would walk in the middle of the highway; virtue would be no longer trampled in the dust, and as for oppression, its arm would be stayed; and as for cruelty its teeth would be broken with gravel!

How is this to take place? By individual inquiry, by personal consecration, by each heart looking at the question for itself and making its own decisions. May some young heart honestly say, "From this time forth I will look at the profitableness of religion in the light of Christ's life, and not in the light of the lives of the people that are round about me. I myself will give my days and nights to a study of supreme religious questions"? Will any young heart vow that hence on, throughout all his days, he will think, inquire, read, take courage and decide for himself in the light of God's book and Christ's life, upon all great questions? The man to fear is the man who supposes that he knows everything. The man who will do no good, is the man who dogmatically pronounces against everybody, who makes a profession of religion and who considers himself the censor of mankind. Have hope of men who think; though at first they may think crookedly, perversely, and indistinctly. Have faith in any sign of life. It is when men are stagnant that we may give up hope. It is when men have no questions to ask that we may pronounce them dead. When they receive everything, as the rock receives rain and the desert the great sunlight, we may pronounce them dead. Opposition is better than some species of consent. Have hope of men who will contend resolutely, intelligently, though they be fighting against us with every breath they draw, and every syllable they utter

be as a drawn sword. There is life, there is activity, there is desire to know and advance.

What profit should we have? Some of us never knew what life was, till we knew Jesus. We thought we knew life; but we saw it only on a cold, grey, wintry day. After we knew Christ, we saw it in summer blossom, in summer glory, in summer pomp! And we are not to be contradicted without thought and without care. Because, after all, we have this advantage over some persons, that we have tried the profitable-ness of sin and we have tried the experience of the religious life. Oh! imagine not that only the bad man knows the profitable-ness of the black art! We have been just where he is. Whatever his experience now, we know it. There is no hieroglyphic in the devil's writing we cannot spell out to its last throb of meaning. There is no cup in the devil's hostelry which we have not emptied, turned up, and called out for more! We have that advantage over our critics and our cruel censors; and having that advantage we say, That not until we knew Jesus, and loved the truth as it is in him, did we know the value of life, or the pain of life,—that pain which is the birth-agony of supreme and eternal joy!

We could take you to many scenes that would show the infinite profitable-ness of faith in God. We should not withdraw the flowered curtain behind which sinful life drinks its poisoned cups. We should take you to houses that have been desolated by misfortune, and show you the profitable-ness of religion in the sweet patience which it has wrought in sad hearts; we should take you to the house of affliction, where youth has been turned into old age by long-continued pain, and show how the fire has left the gold and only consumed the dross; we should take you to men who once were the curse and terror of society, and show you the light of Christian intelligence in their countenances and the love of Christian charity in their actions; we should take you to the chamber "where the good man meets his fate," and as he smiles at the last enemy, and passes upward to the quiet and holy place, calm, fearless, exultant, we should say, Behold the profit which comes of knowing and loving the Saviour of the world!

## Chapter xxii.

### THE LAST SPEECH OF ELIPHAZ.

THERE are two interpretations of Scripture. One is the critical and literal, dealing searchingly and usefully with the grammar of the text, seeking to know exactly what each speaker and each writer meant at the very time of his utterance and at the very time of his authorship. That must always be a work of high utility. We cannot, indeed, proceed legitimately until we have settled the grammar of the text. But we should not rest there. There is a second interpretation, which we may call the larger. That interpretation brings up the word to our own time, sets it in direct reference to our own thought and action—not by any violent process, but by a legitimate development. The question which the wise reader will put to himself in perusing the Bible is to this effect: What would these inspired men say were they living now, were they addressing me as they addressed their interlocutors and general contemporaries? This is not forcing meanings into their words; this is not an unnatural and perverting exaggeration of terms: this is what we have described as a legitimate development of the thought and purpose of the men. What Eliphaz said to Job was of the greatest possible consequence to the patriarch, and is of the greatest possible consequence to all ages. But is it not open to us to discover from what Eliphaz has said what he would say under modern circumstances and under our own immediate conditions? Is there not an enlarging faculty, a peculiar power of the mind which attests the operation of the Holy Ghost, by which we can definitely say what the Bible writers would have written now? If we have such faculty, if we enjoy such immediate ministry of God the Holy Spirit, we shall be able to verify it by inquiring how far what we now say, either in reasoning or exhortation, coincides with what is written in the book of inspiration. There must be

no difference of quality ; there must be no contradiction in moral tone or purpose ; conscience must not be disturbed by this larger translation, this widening and brightening of things said long ago—the root and the branch are really one ; we must not graft anything upon the old trunk, the tree of the Lord's right-hand planting, but we must watch its natural, legitimate, and purposed developments ; and thus we shall have an ever-enlarging Bible, a book old as the ink with which it was first written, yet new as this morning's dew, as this day's holy dawn. This is what the Bible is,—old and new ; coming up from eternity, yet descending upon every day of time, and leaving behind light and blessing. Never be satisfied, therefore, with the mere interpretation of the scribe. He lives in the letter. He would seem almost to pay homage to the ink. Up to a given point he may be right ; but there is a point beyond—the large interpretation, the moral meaning, the persistence of thought, by which thought urges its way through all coming days, events, circumstances ; proclaims the old commandments, and the old beatitudes, with new force, new sympathy, new considerateness. This is why we go back to the old speakers and old writers. We are not mere superstitious devotees. It is because the present coincides with the past, and the past dignifies the present, and because we perceive that God's providence is an organic whole, a grand beneficent scheme, that we revert to the olden time, and come up to the immediate day, feeling how true it is that God's thought is one, God's love is unchanging, God's mercy endureth for ever. Under the light of this canon, see how Eliphaz the Temanite sits down beside us to-day, and with what gravity he talks, with what pungent questions he pierces us, with what solemn appeals he challenges our attention. Have no faith in those easy and superficial critics who tell you to attend to the present time and think nothing of Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar, because they lived long ago. They did not—in any sense which has rendered them obsolete. There is nothing new that is true ; there is nothing true that is new. The Lamb slain for sin was historically crucified on Calvary : but morally, redeemingly, divinely, he died before the foundation of the world. We lose our dignity when we live within the present sunrise and sunset, when we sever the present day from the



fountains of history. Eliphaz will come to us, and like a seer will be quiet, like a prophet of the Lord he will burn, like an apostle who grasps the genius and the end of the present time he will flame, and appeal, and exhort, with heavenly eloquence. Let us hear him.

How he rebukes the supposed patronage which men would offer the living God!

“Can a man be profitable unto God? . . . Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?” (vv. 2, 3).

The legitimate interpretation of these words, their fair and honest enlargement, leads us to say: no man can confer patronage upon God, upon the altar, upon the cross, upon the church, upon the truth. We get all; we can give but little or nothing—so little, that giving it we do not know we are worthy of any honour. It is a matter of fact that some men do suppose they add something to God's greatness by according to him their patronage! They would not say so in words. Men are sometimes afraid of their own voices. Not on any account would they say so in so many sentences or phrases; but is there not working in the human heart—that marvellous webwork of mystery—some remote subtle thought that by going to church we confer some favour, not only upon the Church, but upon God himself? How curious in its working is the human heart! Some men seem to live to confer respectability upon whatever they touch. The Church is partly to blame for this. The Church is far too eager to put away the common people and bid them be quiet, in order that some uncommon man may come in and take his velvet-cushioned seat in God's temple. There are some who say that if such and such arguments be true, or such and such men have taken a right view, they will give up religion altogether. What a threat! How it makes the sun tremble, and sends a pain to the earth's very heart! A man who can give up religion has no religion to give up. What! Is religion something to be held in the hand, and laid down at will and pleasure? Is it a garment that is worn, and of which the body can be dispossessed? That is not the indwelling Spirit of God, the ever-living, ever-glowing soul

of goodness. Herein is true what has often been misunderstood by the expression of "the perseverance of the saints": they must be saints to persevere; if they do not persevere they are not saints. A man can no more give up religion than he can give up breathing; that is to say, when he gives up breathing he commits suicide. Religion is not a set of phrases, something in book form, a mystery that can be written down and cancelled by the hand that wrote it; it is the soul's life, the heart's sympathy with God, identity with Christ: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Who can separate the two? They are not two—they are one. When a man threatens to give up his religion, O Church of the living God, quiet thyself! say, as a great philosopher said to a too-excited man, "Why so hot, my little sir?" Really, no intolerable catastrophe will have occurred if such men—observe the emphasis upon the word such—should perpetrate the impossibility of giving up what they never possessed! There are others again who threaten the State in the same way. Truly we live in very anxious and solemn times. Some men threaten to abandon the service of the State if such and such a policy is pursued. The State will still go on! There are those who say, If this be done and said, we shall give up public life. By all means give it up; the threat does not make us much afraid. A man can no more give up patriotism than he can give up religion, regard being had to quality and degree. Patriotism is part of the man; it is mixed, so to say, with his very blood; he drew it in with his mother's milk; if he can give it up, he ought never to have avowed it.

To this solemn issue must we come—that men must recognise that religion is greater than they are, patriotism is greater than they are, and neither Church nor country ought to be under such obligation to any man as to be unable to do without him. We are honoured by the Church; but honour, how little we can give! We are honoured by living in the country; if we can give any little honour in return, God be praised! There are also some men who occasionally threaten to give up the ministry. Would God they would! If a man can ever threaten to leave the ministry, let him go! It is recorded that in an early Wesleyan Conference

Mr. Charles Wesley said that if such and such things were done he would leave the Conference. His elder and greater brother said, "Will some brother be kind enough to give him his hat?" That is not the way to treat great organisations, and sublime policies, and holy altars. What! a man leave the ministry, except through old age, failure of faculty, exhaustion of power? He cannot, if ever he gave himself to it at the cross, under the baptism of blood. We are not called to this ministry by men, nor by men can we be dismissed from it. If we be true ministers, we are the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and from him only can we obtain our release. That a man may throw himself out of it by giving Christ the treacherous kiss, by selling his Lord for thirty pieces of silver,—that a man may thrust himself out of it thus by unfaithfulness and unworthiness, is the very tragic point of spiritual history: but so long as the man is broken-hearted, penitent, contrite, loving, his whole soul set in the direction of heaven's beckoning hand, he will never think of giving up the ministry; when he dies it will be but to exchange the helmet for the crown. Let us live in the spirit of humility, true, genuine spiritual modesty, knowing that all the advantage of religion is upon our side, and that it is not in our power to add to God's dignity.

Whilst all this may be readily acknowledged, perhaps our consent may be more reluctant to the next point. Were Eliphaz amongst us to-day he would be what is termed a personal preacher. That preacher is never popular. If a minister would be "popular"—whatever the meaning of that word may be—he must preach to the absentees; smite the Agnostics, hip and thigh; pour lava upon the Mormons who are thousand miles away: but he must not speak to the man in the nearest pew. Eliphaz comes amongst us like a fire. He is skilful in the cruel art of cross-examination. To Job he said,—

"Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?" (v. 5).

The man who could preach so would not vary his method on account of circumstances. He addressed Job personally. The preacher who speaks to thousands of men must bring himself to feel that after all he is only addressing one man.

There is only one man, if we could see things in their reality; multitudinous are the details: but address the one man, aim at the one target. The more we become filled with the spirit of preaching, the less shall we care about the mere numbers who listen to us; we do not reject them, or undervalue them, but the more will the value of the one man rise, so that a little child shall be a congregation, one listener worthy of all the resources of learning and eloquence we may be able to control. The young preacher is afraid of the wet day, because he has written a most elaborate discourse which he intended the whole congregation to hear—and to admire. He will outgrow that. Be patient with him now. Efflorescence in youth is natural and seasonable. By-and-by he will not know whether it is raining, or shining, or thundering: the whole truth will be in him, and must be uttered to any soul that may be present to hear it.

Eliphaz accuses Job specifically. He says,—

“For thou hast taken a pledge\* from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry” (v. 6, 7).

Do not run off with the devil's suggestion that these are Oriental terms; they are modern words. The colouring may be eastern, but the genius of the accusation is eastern and western, northern and southern, wide as the world, detailed as the varieties of the human species. Is it possible that men may say, What is the meaning of taking a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripping the naked of their clothing? What is the meaning of not giving water to the weary to drink? Is it possible to grammarise these words, vivisect them, to understand their Oriental allusion, and to escape their immediate and mortal application to ourselves? We have not done this in the letter, yet every day we may be doing it in the spirit. Do we crush the poor? Do we make the poor man feel that his poverty is a crime? Do we snub him and humiliate him because he is poor? whereas we should crouch before the same man were he a millionaire,—the same man, without

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\* See note, page 224.

more mental capacity, literary resource, spiritual refinement! It is not enough to find out just what Eliphaz meant in these lines: what he meant in the spirit is what we ought to be in quest of. Have we contemned the weak? Have we turned our poor brother into an occasion of jibing and sneering? Have we been deaf to entreaty? Have we pleaded excess of business, extremity of position, dignity of office, so that we might turn away from him who had a prayer to breathe to our benevolence and clemency? Away with all merely literal orthodoxy, if it be not supported by the broader orthodoxy of love, sympathy, and sacrifice. Eliphaz would not hesitate to remind us of broken vows; he would give us day and date; he would remind us that we told God that if he would save us in a given extremity we would serve Him evermore; and Eliphaz would lay his hand upon us, and look at us as fire only can look, and ask us whether we have redeemed the vow. This is the only preaching worthy of any attention, namely, preaching that goes to the immediate case, the real, actual, concrete experience of the hearer. Nor will it always come with judgment and accusation; it will often come as the rain, as the dew, as a still small voice. We do injustice to God if we suppose that by personal preaching is always and only meant accusatory preaching. There is consolatory personal preaching. There are brave men who are fighting hard battles—at home, in the market-place, in their own hearts, in the Church, in the State; and he is the preacher sent of God who will recognise the existence and necessity of such men, and will make them strong by brotherly prayer, and by brotherly sympathy and exhortation. The preacher can never be wrong in speaking to broken hearts. There may be only a few learned men or critics in his congregation, but there are many blighted lives, broken hearts, wounded spirits,—men lost in thick fogs, mental and spiritual; souls tormented of the devil by unnamable temptations. Therefore in our personal preaching we must not always play the part of impeachment, but must remember the part of consolation and sympathy, sweet advice and generous comfort; then they that are ready to perish will bless us, and souls that came into the sanctuary weary and overborne, will return to their work nerved, and strengthened, and blessed.

Eliphaz, then, were he amongst us, would avail himself of history in support of the exhortation :—

“Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden ? which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood : which said unto God, Depart from us : and what can the Almighty do for them ?” (vv. 15-17).

That also is practical preaching. Eliphaz claims all history as his book of anecdotes. Why invent stories, when the whole experience of mankind goes to show that wickedness never comes to a good end, and that the way of transgressors is hard ? Let us keep to history, and then we cannot be dislodged from our position. Stand by the realities of life—not as seen within any given five minutes, but as spreading themselves through the length and breadth of history—and we shall find written upon all the pages of the past the fact that God is against the wicked man, the stars in their courses fight against wickedness, and that only judgment and fiery indignation can be the portion of those who violate the spirit of obedience and defy the spirit of law. Blessed be God, we need not trust to our invention in the discharge of this solemn ministry : all facts are ours, all history is our book of evidences ; we do not bandy opinions with men equally able or still more skilful than we are ; if they have discovered laws, so have Christian thinkers, and one of those laws is that God punishes iniquity with everlasting punishment, if the man guilty of it do not repent and seek the sanctuary of the cross. If any man had said so only yesterday, we should have said, Let time try him. It is not yesterday, as the last day gone, that speaks to us, but all time’s yesterdays, the thousands multiplied by thousands and millions,—they all stand, as it were, upon the horizon, and say, Preacher, speak up, fear not ; tell the wicked man that all God’s omnipotence is against him, and he must perish in the tremendous conflict. And is there not another side also to this ? Has history nothing to say about the good, the true, the pure, the wise ? Is not God a sun and a shield ? Will he withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly ? Has he not promised them an exceeding great reward ? And yet has he not wrought in them a miracle of grace that without thinking of the reward they would die for the cross of his Son ? This is our mission. If we cannot preach as Eliphaz preached, we ought to

vacate the pulpit, and leave stronger men to occupy it. We want no new inventions, no curiously coloured hypotheses; we want the old revelation spoken with the modern accent—eternal truth offered to men in language they can understand—the awful affection of God for the human race, represented in the cross of Christ, preached as a sweet gospel, always ending with a loving invitation, such as, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” Speak these words; the men may not be thirsting now, but when the fire burns them, memory will be awakened, they will say, Where heard we words about water that could quench this thirst? and when they ask the question, your opportunity will have come.

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#### NOTE.

The law of Moses did not contemplate any raising of loans for the purpose of obtaining capital, a condition perhaps alluded to in the parables of the “pearl” and “hidden treasure” (Matt. xiii. 44, 45). Such persons as bankers and sureties, in the commercial sense (Prov. xxii. 26, Neh. v. 3), were unknown to the earlier ages of the Hebrew commonwealth. The Law strictly forbade any interest to be taken for a loan to any poor person, either in the shape of money or of produce, and at first, as it seems, even in the case of a foreigner; but this prohibition was afterwards limited to Hebrews only, from whom, of whatever rank, not only was no usury on any pretence to be exacted, but relief to the poor by way of loan was enjoined, and excuses for evading this duty were forbidden (Exod. xxii. 25; Lev. xxv. 35, 37; Deut. xv. 3, 7-10, xxiii. 19, 20). The instances of extortionate conduct mentioned with disapprobation in the Book of Job probably represent a state of things previous to the Law, and such as the Law was intended to remedy (Job xxii. 6, xxiv. 3, 7). As commerce increased, the practice of usury, and so also of suretiship, grew up; but the exaction of it from a Hebrew appears to have been regarded to a late period as discreditable (Prov. vi. 1, 4, xi. 15, xvii. 18, xx. 16, xxii. 26; Psalm xv. 5, xxvii. 13; Jer. xv. 10; Ezek. xviii. 13, xxii. 12). Systematic breach of the law in this respect was corrected by Nehemiah after the return from captivity. In later times the practice of borrowing money appears to have prevailed without limitation of race, and to have been carried on on systematic principles, though the original spirit of the Law was approved by our Lord (Matt. v. 42, xxv. 27; Luke vi. 35, xix. 23). The money-changers (*κερματισται*, and *κολλυβισται*), who had seats and tables in the Temple, were traders whose profits arose chiefly from the exchange of money with those who came to pay their annual half-shekel (Matt. xxi. 12). The documents relating to loans of money appear to have been deposited in public offices in Jerusalem.—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

## Job xxii. 21-30.

21. Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.

22. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart.

23. If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles.

24. Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks.

25. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver.

26. For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.

27. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.

28. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways.

29. When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person.

30. He shall deliver the island of the innocent: and it is delivered by the pureness of thine hands.

## RECONCILIATION AND RESULTS.

THAT is all the three friends could, in substance, say. It is difficult to read the exhortation of another man. We are, indeed, apt to put our own tone into all reading, and thereby sometimes we may do grievous injustice to the authors or speakers whom we seek to interpret. Of one thing, however, we may be quite sure, namely, that when a man so seer-like, so prophet-like as Eliphaz, concluded his controversy with Job, observing the suffering and the sorrow of the patriarch, he would be certain to drop his voice into the music of consolation, and would endeavour, whilst speaking words of apparently legal and mechanical preciseness, to utter them with the tone of the heart, as if in the very sorrow were hidden a gracious gospel, and as if duty might, by some subtle power, be turned into the most



precious of delight. All hortatory words may be spoken with too much voice, with too strong a tone, so as to throw them out of proportion in relation to the hearer, whose sorrow already fills his ears with muffled noises. Let us imagine Eliphaz—eldest of the counsellors, most gracious of the speakers—laying his hand, as it were, gently upon the smitten patriarch, and approaching his ear with all the reverence of affectionate confidence, and giving him these parting instructions: then the exhortation becomes music; the preacher does not thunder his appeal, but utters it persuasively, so that the heart alone may hear it, and the soul be melted by the plea. May it not be so with us also? We do not need the strong exhortation, but we do need the consolatory appeal and stimulus. We may frighten a man by calling out very loudly when he is within one inch of a brink; the nearer the man is to the precipice, the more subdued, the less startling, should be the appeal: we might whisper to him as if nothing were the matter,—rather lure his attention than loudly and roughly excite it; and then when we get firm hold of him bring him away to the headland as urgently and strongly as we can. May it not be that some hearts are so far gone that one rude tone from the preacher would break up what little hope remains? Should we not rather sometimes sit down quite closely to one another and say softly, “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace”: think of what all thy life comes to, poor soul, and see if even now, just at the very last, the flickering lamp cannot be revived and made strong and bright: come, let us pray? Who can tell in what tone the Lord said, “Come now, and let us reason together,” as if we were equals; for the time being let us be as brothers; let the case be stated on both sides, and argued out with all the urgency and zeal of truest love? Never regard the Gospel as having come roughly, violently, but as always coming like the dawn, like the dew, like music from afar, which having travelled from eternity stops to accommodate itself to the limitations of time. Still the exhortation has the strength within it. Speak it as we may, it is the strongest exhortation that can be addressed to human attention. You may soften it as to tone, you may pray God for many days that when you do come to utter your message you may speak it without offence, lovingly, tenderly, with a voice full of tears; yet, even

when so spoken, the Gospel has within it fire and sword and force almighty. When the tone is softened, it is not that the law has given up the pursuit of the soul, or has ceased to press its infinite claims upon the trespasser. Do not mistake the persuasions of the Gospel for the weaknesses of the preacher, and do not regard the errors of the preacher as implying in any degree defect on the part of his message.

Eliphaz tells Job what he must do; let us read his bill of directions: "Acquaint now thyself with him." Here is a call to mental action. Job is invited to bethink himself. He is exhorted to put himself at the right point of view. Instead of dealing with social questions and personal details, the seer invites the smitten patriarch to betake himself to the sanctuary, and to work out the whole solution in the fear and love of God. There are amongst men questions that are supreme and questions that are inferior. Who would care for the inferior if he could solve the supreme, and fill himself with all the mystery of Deity? What are all our inventions, arts, sciences, and cleverest tricks, and boldest adventures into the region of darkness, compared with the possibility of knowing human thought—the power of removing the veil that separates man from man, and looking into the arcana of another soul? But this is kept back from us. We are permitted to dig foundations, to build towers and temples; we are allowed to span rivers with bridges, and bore our way through rocky hills; but we cannot tell what the least little child is thinking about. Given the possibility that a man may, by a certain process of study, qualify himself to read all that is in our minds, who would not avail himself of that opportunity with eagerness and gratitude! All other learning would be contemptible in comparison with an attainment so vast and useful. This is the explanation of men spending their days over crucibles, in hidden places, in darkened dungeons, seeking in the crucible for the particular Something that would dissolve everything that was hard, and reveal everything that was dark. This is the meaning of the quest in which men have been engaged for the Sangreal, the philosopher's stone—that marvellous and unnamable something which, if a man had, he would open every kingdom and be at home in every province of the universe. You cannot kill that

mysterious ambition of the human heart. It will come up in some form. It is the secret of progress. Even when men say they have renounced the quest, they may be most busily engaged in the pursuit; when they seem to be most practical and sober-minded, and to have given up all thought whatever of sitting upon the circle of the heavens, there may be something in their hearts which says, You are only resting awhile; even yet you will receive the secret, and turn it to highest uses. All this leads to the uppermost thought, namely, that if a man could acquaint himself with God, live with God, would not that be the very highest attainment of all? If he could enter the tabernacles of the Most High, and survey the universe from the altar where burns the Shekinah, what would all other attainments and acquisitions amount to? Yet this is the thing to be aimed at: grow in grace; grow in all life; for it means, in its fruition, acquaintance with God, identification with God, absorption in God; living, moving, having the being in God; taking God's view of everything; made radiant with God's wisdom, and calm with God's peace. Assuming that to be a possibility, how all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof, fade away into the dim distance! How grandly some of the old seers now and again touched the vital point; and how the ages have thrilled with their touch, knowing that at last they had left detail and cloud and mystification, and touched the very pulse of things! Here stands the great truth, the eternal verity: until we have acquainted ourselves with God, by means prescribed in God's own book, our knowledge is ignorance, and our mental acquisitions are but so many proofs of our mental incapacity. Eliphaz, therefore, lifts up the whole discussion to a new level. He will not point to this wound or that, to the sore boil or blain, to the withering skin, to the patriarch's pitiful physical condition; he begins now to touch the great mystery of things, namely, that God is in all the cloud of affliction, in all the wilderness of poverty, and that to know his purpose is to live in his tranquillity.

Then Eliphaz says—"Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth": do not have second-hand references, do not be content with what other people have said; but go straight to the fountain-head: there is a law—a law of event, accident, progress, providence,

retribution ; a law of light and darkness ; a law that comes and goes like the revolving seasons : there may be even now, poor Job, some scraps of written law : consider everything ; take in knowledge from every quarter ; if light shall shine from unexpected points, look for it, examine it ; if it be light indeed, receive it, and be thankful for it. We need the strong word Law—just as we need great corner-stones in the building, and solid beams here and there in the edifice. There may be in the building an abundance of colour, and gold, and fine artistic display ; but somewhere in the building, if it have to stand winter and summer, there must be iron, solid woodwork, massive blocks of stone, and great beams of wood. So in the life-house there may be decoration, intellectual accomplishment, all manner of fancy characteristics and advantages, but if that life-house is to stand when the sea roars, when the mountains shake, when all things are tried, there must be in it depth, solidity, massiveness, obedience to the geometry of the universe, complete harmony with all the forces that secure the stability and permanence of material things. We cannot escape this pressure. We speak about the law as if it infringed liberty ; whereas the law is the very secret of liberty, its security, and its crown. Is there any law in our spiritual life, any sovereignty in the very charity which softens our heart ? Is there any righteousness behind to account for the beauties that are scattered upon the surface ? Is the blossoming at the top of the tree fastened on artificially ? or does it come up from the black root and tell that its life is hidden in the sun ? We have read of men who, having received the word of God gladly, went out and forgot all about it, and became their old selves again, because there was no deepness of earth—let us say now, because there was no law, righteousness, sovereignty, government, founded upon wisdom and upon the innermost and completest knowledge of human nature.

“ And lay up his words in thine heart ” : dispossess the heart of all bad notions by filling it with all true ideas ; do not have one little corner in the heart where you can put a sophism ; let the heart be so stored with Christly words and Christly wisdom that there shall be no room in it for any superstition. That is the only plan of true education, and the only guarantee of

ultimate complete manhood. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Do not have part of God's word and part of some other word locked up in the heart together, like the ark as it was locked up with Dagon; but fill the whole heart with God's words: they are music, they are law, they are gospel, they are light, they are comfort, they are bread for the hungry, and living water for burning thirst. Feed upon the divine word. Lord, evermore give us this bread! Eliphaz is now a gospel preacher, a great evangelist; he cannot tell the whole range of what he is saying; the morning is not the midday, the spring is not the autumn; but it lies in the right line of it; the autumnal golden glory will come in due time; "in the process of the suns" we shall see the words of Eliphaz completed in the words of Christ.

"If thou return to the Almighty" certain results will accrue. What are those results? Reconstruction: "thou shalt be built up." Comforting word! We know what it is to be shattered, broken all to pieces, to have lost our squareness and completeness, our hold of things and our entire status, and we know by bitter experience what it is to be dashed to atoms. Sin leaves no man whole; evil-doing is destruction: it tears a man as it were limb from limb, and delights in seeing him broken up, thrown into hopeless incoherence. The very first thing true religion does is to gather a man up again; it seems to say to him, We must begin with reconstruction: what are you? where are you? let us grapple with the reality of the situation, however tragical, however hopeless it may be. To tell a man that he may be built up again is to give him hope. Say to some poor overthrown one, Come now! you are not always to live like this: there is hope for you; even you can be put in joint again, even you can be gathered up by the miracle of the Holy Ghost working within you, the miracle of grace: even you can be made a man,—and at first the answer may be sullen—not because of obduracy of heart, but because of hopelessness of spirit—but the man will turn the words over in his heart, he will take them home with him; when the feast spread for the body is all consumed he will say, I have bread to eat that these people know not of: a good brave man told me in the city to-day that I, even I, could be built up again: oh, God of heaven, is that true? is that a

possible miracle? can this bewildered head be made steady again? and can these lips pray any more? Who can tell what the angels may say to the soliloquist then? Man likes to think that he can be built up, re-established, and comforted with great consolation. This is what the Gospel says, or it is no gospel: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." What are they? that the lost may be found, that the dead may live: believest thou this? All things are possible unto him that believeth. Say, in all broken-heartedness—for that is the beginning of strength—"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Then Eliphaz, working according to the light of his time, makes Job a great promise of silver and gold; he says:

"Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir [see note, p. 234] as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver" (vv. 24, 25).

Was the motive a bad one? Nothing of the kind; otherwise the whole of the Old Testament is vitiated by the suggestion. The Lord has always worked upon this plan of promising men, what they could understand, of accommodating his kingdom to some form, parabolic or material, which might touch the imagination and even the senses of the people whom he addressed. Thus the Lord said unto Abram: Arise, come away, and I will give thee a land flowing with milk and honey. Was that an appeal to a selfish motive? Certainly not. It was the only appeal which Abram could then understand. The Lord promised the patriarchs length of days. Now we would not have length of days, for we are weary of old grey time. The period comes when a man says, When is the upper door going to be opened? I would not live alway; I have seen every revolution of this little wheel, and I am tired of watching the tautology; I know spring and summer, and autumn and winter, and birth and marriage, and death, and weal and woe, and loss and gain, and book-keeping and balancing, and profit and disadvantage, and sickness and recovery and dissolution: I am tired of watching that mocking monotony: when will the golden gates swing back, and let me pass where the light is purer, and where the service is without weariness? Did God, then, appeal to a poor motive when he promised length of days? The answer is, Certainly

not; he made the only possible appeal—that is, the only appeal that could be understood. When life was new, men liked to have plenty of it—an abundance of years; yea, life is represented in the ancient books as extending over centuries—four and five, and six and eight, and nine centuries, and one man lived nearly a thousand years! So Eliphaz was talking in Old Testament language, in ancient and early terms, when he promised Job heaps of gold and plenty of silver—"the gold of Ophir," or "Ophir," which is a symbolical term for gold which could be laid up like the stones of the brooks—great stones, small stones, thousands and countless numbers of stones of gold. Now we have come to know that we cannot take away one little pebble with us, that at best we have but the handling of the mocking stuff for a few years, and then, however anxious we may be to begin the next world rich with gold, we must start God's next world without a single penny. Eliphaz was not appealing to selfish motive, to mean ambition; nor was he degrading the kingdom of peace and light and pureness when he thus promised Job reward of gold and silver; he was speaking up to his last point of light and attainment. Now, what is promised to us? All heaven! Blessed be God, we have been born at a period when the next word is "heaven." That brings us very near to God's ultimate purpose. Abram was born in a time when a land flowing with milk and honey filled his imagination. Old Testament men lived in times when length of days was the only possible notion of duration. We live in a time when life and immortality have been brought to light in the Gospel, and now we want no lands flowing with milk and honey, or Ophir, or silver in plentifulness, except for immediate convenience and transient purposes. We seek a country out of sight. We attest the progress of spiritual civilisation by being afflicted with an ambition which nothing can satisfy but God's own dwelling-place—the very heavens of eternity.

Then Eliphaz promised Job a plentiful intercourse with God:—

"For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows" (vv. 26, 27).

There shall be a highway between heaven and the soul, and the commerce carried on shall be of the highest quality and the

largest degree: a prayer will mean an answer; a look shall mean an interposition in thy favour; a throb shall fill all heaven with the solicitude of love; for God will hasten to thee to perform the thing thou hast desired. Call this poetry, and you do but attest the coldness of your own temperament; regard this as spiritual romance, and you only betray your own carnality and materialism. It is romance to the deaf and dumb, and blind and dead. The summer is romance to the man born blind. He says to himself whilst you are enraptured with summer's parable of colour, How mad these people are, how wild, how exaggerated in expression! There is no bound or limit to their vagary; talking of nature as a parable, speaking of summer as the very kingdom and reign of colour; talking of heaven in ecstatic language, because it is so purple, so translucent, so opal, so beriched with many-coloured clouds,—as if the Creator had adorned it with a coat of many colours just to titillate their fancy: poor fools, how they rave where they do not understand! The man is right from his point of view, because he sees nothing but darkness, and dwells in perpetual night; but let those say whether summer is a romance who have gazed upon all her wizardry of colour and beauty, and who have listened to all her tones of music.

But Eliphaz also points out a result which is full of practical instruction:—

“When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person” (v. 29).

The meaning is, when you are right with God, you will be a fountain of consolation and strength to weak men. Why, here is an anticipation of the time when the whole commandment of God, ranging over every point of life, shall be divisible into two thoughts—the love of God, and the love of neighbour. “When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up.” And thou shalt prove it, for thou shalt say, I too was cast down, and behold I am lifted up; I too was broken in pieces, and now I am built and established, and I enjoy a sense of incorporation with the whole scheme of things planned, fashioned, and formed by the Living One. This is the test of our piety. How do weak men regard us? Do they say when listening to us, That is the man who will help me in trouble; that is the counsellor to



whom I should go were I in perplexity; that is the man to whom I would tell all the tale of sin and shame, had I such a tale to relate; I would seek him out, and he would receive me and listen to me; he might insist that I told him everything that is in my heart, but having done so, he would put his strong arms around me and say, Wanderer, prodigal, foolish soul, even yet there is hope for thee! Our piety is a pretence if it be not available to men who are in distress, in weakness, and in hopelessness. This is the mystery of the divine kingdom, that it does not run up into metaphysics only, and lose itself in transcendent thoughts, but that, having been up there amid the transfiguring glory, it comes down to heal the sick and show the wanderer the way straight home.

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#### NOTE.

Ophir is a seaport or region from which the Hebrews, in the time of Solomon, obtained gold in vessels which went thither in conjunction with Tyrian ships from Ezion-geber, near Elath, on that branch of the Red Sea which is now called the Gulf of Akabah. The gold was proverbial for its fineness, so that "gold of Ophir" is several times used as an expression for fine gold (Psalm xlv. 10; Job xxviii. 16; Isa. xiii. 12; 1 Chron. xxix. 4); and in one passage (Job xxii. 24) the word "Ophir" by itself is used for gold of Ophir, and for gold generally. In addition to gold, the vessels brought from Ophir almug wood and precious stones.

The precise geographical situation of Ophir has long been a subject of doubt and discussion. The two countries which have divided the opinions of the learned have been Arabia and India, while some have placed it in Africa. There are only five passages in the historical books which mention Ophir by name; three in the Book of Kings (1 Kings ix. 26-29, x. 11, xxii. 48), and two in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chron. viii. 18, ix. 10). The latter were probably copied from the former. In addition to these passages, the following verse in the Book of Kings has very frequently been referred to Ophir: "For the king (*i.e.* Solomon) had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks" (1 Kings x. 22). But there is not sufficient evidence to show that the fleet mentioned in this verse was identical with the fleet mentioned in 1 Kings ix. 26-29, and 1 Kings x. 11, as bringing gold, almug trees, and precious stones from Ophir. If the three passages of the Book of Kings are carefully examined, it will be seen that all the information given respecting Ophir is that it was a place or region accessible by sea from Ezion-geber on the Red Sea, from which imports of gold, almug trees, and precious stones were brought back by the Tyrian and Hebrew sailors.—SMITH'S *Old Testament History*.

Job xxiii.

**JOB'S REVIEW OF THE CONTROVERSY.**

WITH the exception of a short interruption by Bildad, the Shuhite, the great conference is at an end. In the twenty-third and through several succeeding chapters, Job conducts a very striking and instructive colloquy. The three comforters have practically said all they have to say, and they have left Job very much as they found him. They have eloquently expressed all that they knew of the way and purpose of God. And we must not hold them guilty of ignorance; they were true up to the time in which they lived; they did the best they could for their friend. It is easy to go back from the end of the book to the beginning, and to chastise them with rods; but this is not, from a literary point of view, fair or just. If they had wilfully kept back anything, then we might have charged them with selfishness and with injustice to the spirit of truth and the ministry of sympathy; but having made their speeches, one by one, and word by word, we are hardly going too far in saying that they had evidently told all they knew. There is a good deal in seeing a witness, in hearing the tone of his voice, in observing how he conducts himself under examination and cross-examination. This, of course, is a condition we cannot now enjoy: but all the words are here, singular words they are, full of colour, full of life, ardent, resolute, fearless; there is no sign about them of anything being wantonly or purposely withheld. It is sad to see men turn away who came to do us good, and who have failed in their purpose. Watch them retiring! They would have healed Job if they could, but they did not know the cure for this malady, it was wholly unfamiliar; maxim, and nostrum, and moral law, and well-ascertained precept, went for nothing in the fierceness of this unknown distress. It seemed as if they were throwing pieces of paper into a furnace: the paper was written all over

with good words, but the fire crinkled and cindered it. The men had not instruments adapted to their work. Who could empty the Atlantic with a thimble? Their hands were too short; they could not reach the reality of the case. Many short-handed comforters there be; men of little strength, little knowledge; men of letters; men of information but not of inspiration; men who know only what they have been told, who have never by some marvellous spirit of strength forced themselves to new positions along the line of human wisdom. But a very good thing has been done: Job has been driven back upon himself. He has said, No: these men have not touched the reality of the case yet: they have had surgical instruments enough, liniment enough, nostrums enough, but they did not know what disease they were treating; so their wisdom became folly, and their energy wasted itself in well-meant exertions. It is something when a man is driven back upon himself to think religiously. Herein is a happy effect of an imperfect sermon: the hearer can always profit himself by delivering a better, silently—if he can. Herein is the advantage of reading books that were written under the impression that they would solve everything and have ended by solving nothing. Could the preacher but drive the hearer back into his own consciousness, into the sanctuary of his own thought, into the mystery of his own being, and get him to ask great questions, there would be some hope of the Christian ministry even yet. Job said in effect: You have not touched me: you have made a false diagnosis of my disease; you have been like doctors who have been treating asthma as if it were a case of rheumatism; you have been wrong in all your inferences regarding my state; in a sense I could condemn you and sneer at you: miserable comforters are ye all: the moment you showed anything like coarseness and impertinence I felt angry with you; only when your voices fell into soft and tender tones did I say, These men mean well, I had better hear them; but they do not know my case, and therefore I must look elsewhere for help. It is in that “elsewhere” that we find our subject.

Job looks round for God, as a man might look round for an old acquaintance, an old but long-gone friend. Memory has a great ministry to discharge in life: old times come back, and whisper

to us, correct us or bless us, as the case may be ; old hymns and psalms that now in our higher culture we despise and quote with suggestive emphasis,—even these sometimes come singing round the corner, as if they would attract our attention without being rude or violent ; sometimes in the aching heart there comes up a longing to get back to the old altar, the old sanctuary, the old pastor ; after listening to all new doctors the heart says, Where is your old friend ? where the quarter whence light first dawned ? recall yourself : think out the whole case. So Job would seem now to say, Oh that I knew where I might find him ! I would go round the earth to discover him ; I would fly through all the stars if I could have but one brief interview with him ; I would count no labour hard if I might see him as I once did. We are not always benefited by a literally correct experience, a literally correct interpretation even. Sometimes God has used other means for our illumination and release, and upbuilding in holy mysteries. So Job might have strange ideas of God, and yet those ideas might do him good. It is not our place to laugh even at idolatry. There is no easier method of provoking an unchristian laugh, or evoking an unchristian plaudit, than by railing against the gods of the heathen. Job's ideas of God are not ours, but they were his ; and for a man to live out his own ideal of religion is the beginning of the right life : only let a man with his heart-hand seize some truth, hold on by some conviction, and support the same by an obedient spirit, a beneficent life, a most charitable temper, a high and prayerful desire to know all God's will, and how grey and dim soever the dawn, the noontide shall be without a cloud, and the afternoon shall be one long quiet glory. Hold on by what you do know, and do not be laughed out of initial and incipient convictions by men who are so wise that they have become fools.

Job says, Now I bethink me, God is considerate and forbearing :—

“ Will he plead against me with his great power ? No ; but he would put strength in me ” (v. 6).

It is something to know so much. Job says, Bad as I am, I might be worse ; after all I am alive ; poor, desolated, impover-

ished, dispossessed of nearly everything I could once handle and claim as my own, yet still I live, and life is greater than any life can ever have: so I am not engaged in a battle against Omnipotence; were I to fight Almightyness, why I should be crushed in one moment: the very fact that I am spared shows that although it may be God who is against me, he is not rude in his almighty, he is not thundering upon me with his great strength; he has *atmosphered* himself, and is looking in upon me by a gracious accommodation of himself to my littleness. Let this stand as a great and gracious lesson in human training, that however great the affliction, it is evident that God does not plead against us with his whole strength; if he did so, he who touches the mountains and they smoke has but to lay one finger upon us—nay, the shadow of a finger—and we should wither away. So, then, I will bless God; I will begin to reckon thus, that after all that has gone the most has been left me; I can still inquire for God, I can still even humbly pray; I can grope, though I cannot see; I can put out my hands in the great darkness, and feel something: I am not utterly cast away. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness? Shall not the riches of his goodness lead thee to repentance? Hast thou forgotten all the instances of forbearance? Is not his very stroke of affliction dealt reluctantly? Does he not let the lifted thunder drop? Here is a side of the divine manifestation which may be considered by the simplest minds; here is a process of spiritual reckoning which the very youngest understandings may conduct. Say to yourself—Yes, there is a good deal left: the sun still warms the earth, the earth is still willing to bring forth fruit, the air is full of life: I know there are a dozen graves dug all around me, but see how the flowers grow upon them every one: did some angel plant them? whence came they? Life is greater than death. The life that was in Christ abolished death, covered it with ineffable contempt, and utterly set it aside, and its place is taken up by life and immortality, on which are shining for ever the whole glory of heaven. Job will yet recover. He will certainly pray; perhaps he will sing; who can tell? He begins well: he says he is not fighting Omnipotence, Omnipotence is not fighting him, and the very fact of forbearance involves the fact of mercy.

Will he grow from this point? will he advance? He will. We shall see that he distinctly advances in his argument:—

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (v. 10).

When a man says that, he *has* come forth; the miracle is done. Why wait for the completed miracle of the universe? It is finished in every grass-blade, in every fowl that flies in the open firmament, in every breath that is in our nostrils. Having given us life, he will never see us die, but by our own rashness; he will not be guilty of manslaughter: the gift of life pledges him in that direction. Hear the patriarch—had he lived now he could not have been wiser—“He knoweth the way that I take”—the dark, sinuous way; not one straight mile in it; sometimes uphill, so that my very strength gives way, and I would almost return to the starting-point, and then suddenly down a deep and threatening declivity, the end of which no eye can see; and then off into stony places, and across broad wildernesses; and then up to the very lips in cold, cold rivers: but he watches all the way; the light and the darkness are both alike unto him; he knoweth my down-sitting and mine uprising, my going out and my coming in; he watches me as if I were an only child: blessed be his name for ever: when he hath tried me, tested me, pierced me through and through, thrown me into the fire, watched the burning in all its effect upon me—when he has got out the last speck of dross, he will put me into his crown; I shall be for the King’s use through eternal day. Who says that Job has fallen, taken the wrong view, lapsed into infidelity? He is now hiding himself in rocks; he is now standing in the very sanctuary of God: see how he pulls himself together! God is forbearing, because he is not issuing against me all his strength: God knows the way that I take, and he is trying me: he knows there is some gold in me: who would try dross, knowing it to be dross only? The very fact of the trial means that there is something to be tried, and something worth saving, and something that God can turn to high uses. Is this an ancient lesson? Are there men who can jeer at this as something spoken three thousand years ago, or five thousand years ago to some poor sorrowing old sheik in the Eastern land? Why, this is the very speech we need. We are

being tried. Every man is undergoing a process of investigation, scrutiny, trial, education, drill, evolution, development,—call it what you please, there is the substantial truth : nor have we yet found than any one great fact in all the evangelical theology has to be changed in view of the lights that are now shining from real or artificial heavens. We are being chastened, mellowed, really and vitally tried. Is it not so ? Look at experience. Let the apostle state it in his Greek way : “No chastening”—or trial, or affliction, or temptation, or sorrow—“for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless, afterward——” there is the unknown sphere, the unending time, the ineffable sanctuary of real issues and abiding realities. We are singing a hymn, and that is the refrain ; a poet has not yet arisen to put it into form, to yoke it to fit letters, but the hymn is in us, and singing in us, and singing around us, and the refrain is—“nevertheless, afterward.” How well it comes in ! How happily it terminates each verse ! “Nevertheless, afterward.” We rise from the bed of affliction saying so ; we come back from life’s daily battle in the market-place saying so ; we close the letter that has crushed our last hopes saying so ; we return from the black churchyard, the pit of bodily death, hardly saying so articulately, but saying so in the heart, so that friends can understand the motion of our lips, saying, Being interpreted, that motion is, “Nevertheless, afterward.” The whole creation is saying this, whilst groaning and travailing in pain ; it is sustained in its agony by the “nevertheless, afterward” of an eternal promise.

Does Job advance ? He strikes again upon the right chord :—

“Lo, these are parts of his ways : but how little a portion is heard of him ? but the thunder of his power who can understand ?” (xxvi. 14).

In other words, These are the lower endings of his ways : this is the ladder-foot ; it rests upon the earth, but where is its head ? In other words ; These are whisperings of his ways, the silences of his going, the mere appearances and throbbings of a mysterious motion : but the fulness of God, in all his meaning, and love, and strength, and redemption, who can tell ? That must always be so. There must always be an unknown quantity in God, and we must always be moved by a desire to know that unknown element and force ; yet we rejoice that we cannot know God in

all the fulness of his being. We know him sympathetically: we know him, as it were, intuitively. If he will not come to us, we will carve a marble slab, and write upon it a Bible of our own. We must have him. If things did not take shape, we should be able to dismiss the idea of God more readily; but events form themselves: there is a building behind us. Our life is not a gathering up of unrelated ideas and circumstances, a mere association created by proximity; life is coherent, symmetric, a palace-like structure, strange in architecture, wonderful in elevation. We see it now! For a long time we thought that one day had no relation to another; that one event was altogether independent of another; we have now discovered the law of sequence, the law of attachment—shall I say?—the law of chain-making; call it by any name you please,—only the result of your naming must be that God's purpose in life takes shape, form, and appeals by its very symmetry and completeness to our highest consciousness, and calls for the confirmation, not of genius, which is rare, but of experience, which is universal. We are dwelling in the lower parts of things, seeing but their beginnings, hearing but their whisperings; we shall be wise when we know that we are ignorant; we shall begin to be great when we know that we are nothing. If any man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself, and nobody else: and self-deception is the profoundest humiliation of mankind. We shall grow in knowledge when we grow in reverence,—when we stand before a sunrise or a sunset and fail to see the glory because our tears blind us. Reverence, veneration, sense of infinity, will help any man to grow, to become strong and wise and healthy.

We shall yet see Job released from his captivity. He says that his character is good though his life is troubled. That pains him very much:—

“My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live” (xxvii. 6).

“If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Job has lived for us this mystery, namely, that a man may have a perfect integrity (using



the term in its human sense) and yet have an afflicted life. We need some men to do things for us. It is not in the power of any one of us to sweep the whole circumference of human experience. We live in one another, and for one another, and we have typical, emblematical men to whom we point, saying, This man has proved it; that man is the evidence of it. Solomon has returned from his voluptuous journey; he sits down in disappointment, in shame, and says, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." We are, therefore, entitled to look at the examples of wicked men, the examples of good men, and to draw inferences bearing upon the whole system of things from what they have seen and been and done. It is something to know that we have maintained our integrity, and yet may have been seized by great temptations, and be subjected to intolerable trials. Such is the mystery of human life—"so abject, so august"; so like a tragedy; sometimes fraying itself down into comical associations and relations: still, a wondrous life; its very pain signifying its dignity, its very ambition testifying to its immortality.

So Job lived in a universe that was large, secure, well-governed, and a universe that would consummate itself in goodness. Job has said to us so far in his colloquy—for we have confined ourselves to one point—The universe is a roomy place, and is not measured by any one man's estate; it is larger than any one man has yet reckoned, and is well-built; its pillars are firm. There is a spirit of righteousness running through all the universe, a spirit of judgment, a spirit of pure criticism that cannot be deceived, and that will not rest until all things fall into massive harmony, or stand up in speckless beauty and purity. Job thus became more and more contented with the world, and being contented with that, it was easy to descend into the little details of his own life. Why not reason so? The argument *à fortiori* may begin at one of two opposite points; we may reason upward from the little and the known to the unknown, and be pressed with all logical strength to conclusions that seem to baffle us; or we may come from the other end and say, The sky is so secure that probably the roof built over my head by God, which I cannot see, is quite as secure: the laws of nature, so called, whatever they may be, are firm,

beneficent, inexorable, and yet not wanting in a kind of weird compassionateness : it may be, therefore, that there are other laws,—within those of nature—gracious, tender, redeeming, dealing with sin, and dealing with every mystery that makes life sad. So the very heavens may help us, and the strong earth may minister to our spiritual security. It is something to live in a society about whose security we have no doubt. It is something to know that there is a court of law in which justice will be done, whoever falls. This is the comfort of every citizen. Once let there be a doubt about this, and citizenship is fraught with peril and distrust. But in a well-ordered community there is this central feeling : justice will be done ; whatever the controversy is, it will be settled in the long run fairly and equitably ; criticism will be brought to bear, and learning, and righteousness, and all that dignifies human life, and the issue in this commonwealth will be justice to rich and poor, to strong and helpless. It is surely something to know this about a mere social state. Amplify and spiritualise the argument, and it becomes this : all things are done in righteousness : God sitteth upon the throne : nothing escapes His attention : all things work together for good to them that love God : there is a spirit of redemption in the universe, as well as a spirit of righteousness. The Judge of the whole earth will do right. Time is not reckoned by to-day, or to-morrow, or the third day : God keeps the time, and when he says, "It is finished," we shall answer, "It is well."

Job xxiii. 3.

“Oh that I knew where I might find him!”

MAN DESIRING GOD.

**G**OD comes only into the heart that wants him. Every man keeps the key of the door of his own heart, but God will not wrench that key from his hand. The Almighty has great power, but he never uses it to break down the will of man, and say, “You shall love me, in spite of your own will and prejudice.” All that God—though he be clothed with omnipotence and have at his girdle the keys of all worlds—says is, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and will open the door, I will come in to him.” God does not force his way into the human heart, saying, “I have made the heart and I will reign in it, and subdue your will to mine, so that you shall have me as God, whether you will or not.” He is God in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, and he gives to none the glory of his name; yet it is in the power of the obscurest man that breathes to shut God out of his heart and to say, “I will not have the Holy One to reign over me.”

Everything depends upon the tone and purpose of the heart. Do we really, with the whole heart, desire to find God, and give ourselves wholly into his hands? That is our starting point. If any man, really and truly, with all the desire of the soul, longs to find God, there is no reason why he should not be found. How is it with our hearts? Do they go out but partially after God? Then they will see little or nothing of him. Do they go out with all the stress of their affection, all the passion of their love,—do they make this their one object and all-consuming purpose? Then God will be found of them; and man and his Maker shall see one another, as it were, face to face, and new life shall begin in the human soul. But except a man desire

with his whole heart and strength to find God, no promise is given in the living word that God will be found. It is possible to desire God under the impulse of merely selfish fear, but such desire after God seldom ends in any good. It is true that fear is an element in every useful ministry. We would not, for one moment, undervalue the importance of fear in certain conditions of the human mind. At the same time, it is distinctly taught in the Holy Book that men may, at certain times, under the influence of fear, seek God, and God will turn his back upon them, will shut his ears when they cry, and will not listen to the voice of their appeal. Nothing can be more distinctly revealed than this awful doctrine,—that God comes to men within certain seasons and opportunities, that he lays down given conditions of approach, that he even fixes times and periods, and that the day will come when he will say, “I will send a famine upon the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” When men are in great physical pain, when pestilence is in the air, killing its thousands week by week, when wheat-fields are turned into graveyards, when God’s judgments are abroad in the earth, there be many who turn their ashen faces to the heavens! What if God will not hear their cowardly prayer? When God lifts his sword, there be many that say, “We would flee from this judgment.” And when he comes in the last, grand, terrible development of his personality, many will cry unto the rocks, and unto the hills to hide them from his face; but the rocks and the hills will hear them not, for they will be deaf at the bidding of God! We wish to make this dark side of the question very plain indeed; because there are persons who imagine, that they may put off the greatest considerations of life until times of sickness, and times of withdrawal from business, and times of plague, and seasons that seem to appeal more pathetically than others to their religious nature. God has distinctly said, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind: Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer.” Let no man rest under the impression that he can

call upon God at any time and under any circumstances, for there is a black mark at a certain part of your life; up to that you may seek God and find him,—beyond it you may cry, and hear nothing but the echo of your own voice! How then does it stand with us in this matter of desire? Is our desire after God living, loving, intense, complete? That desire itself is prayer; and the very experience of that longing brings heaven into the soul!

Let us now turn from this sombre part of the subject. Yet if I had not declared this, some soul might have spoken to me some day, bitterly and keenly. If I had allowed any man to escape until I had told him this, with piercing accents, might he not by-and-by have turned round upon me and said, "You did not tell me about times and seasons; you left me under the impression that I could put this thing off until the latest hour of my life, and just when I was drawing up my feet to die, I might pray, and I should be taken into heaven"? No man can charge the preacher thus. There is a period, there is a day of mercy; and "the sun of mercy once set, shall rise no more!" Whatsoever, therefore, our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might. We must work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work. We speak these words with the solemnity of the heart, and the pathos of a man who is trembling upon the brink of eternity himself; and if any man take them in a flippant spirit, the iniquity be upon his own head,—the wickedness he perpetrates shall come down upon his own heart!

This desire on our part is in answer to the desire of God. There is more or less of mystery about this part of the question. Still it is a mystery we are capable of grappling with, in all the practical bearings of the case at least. The desire after God does not begin on our part. God has not hidden himself from man for the purpose that he might allow his creature, his lost child, to cry after him. We love God because he first loved us. If we desire God it is because God first desired us. God asks for our heart as his tabernacle; he surrounds us night and day with tender, pathetic appeals; he says, "If any man love me, I will

come in, and make my abode in his heart." He plies us, as mother never plied her prodigal child to come home again; and there is not one word of grace, or pathos, or tender entreaty, which he has withheld from his argument, if haply he might find his way with our glad consent, into our heart of hearts. Do we desire God? Then it is because God first desired us. Do we feel kindlings of love towards him? Our love is of yesterday; God's love comes up from unbeginning time, and goes on to unending eternity! There is nothing in his teaching that is likely to feed the self-sufficiency of men, or to put men into a false position, or to degrade the sovereignty and wondrous grace of God. For there is nothing at all in our hearts that is good and true and tender, that is not inspired by God the Holy Ghost!

Do we really desire to find God, to know him, and to love him? If so, that desire is the beginning of the new birth; that longing is the pledge that our prayers shall be accomplished in the largest, greatest blessing that the living God can bestow upon us. Still it may be important to go a little further into this, and examine what our object is in truly desiring to find God. It may be possible that even here our motive may be mixed; and if there is the least alloy in our motive, that alloy will tell against us. The desire must be pure. There must be no admixture of vanity or self-sufficiency; it must be a desire of true, simple, undivided love. Now, how is it with the desire which we at this moment may be presumed to experience? What is our object in desiring to find God? Is it to gratify intellectual vanity? That is possible. It is quite conceivable that a man of a certain type and cast of mind may very zealously pursue theological questions without being truly, profoundly religious. It is one thing to have an interest in scientific theology, and another thing really and lovingly to desire God for religious purposes. It is possible, to take an interest in the human frame, to be an ardent student of physiology, and yet not to have one spark of benevolence towards humanity, individual or social, in the heart. Is it not perfectly conceivable that a man shall take delight in dissecting the human frame, that he may find out and understand its structure; and yet do so without any intention ever to heal the sick, or feed the hungry,

or clothe the naked? Some men seem to be born with a desire to anatomise; they like to dissect, to find out the secret of the human frame, to understand its structure and the interdependence of its several parts. So far we rejoice in their perseverance and their discoveries. But it is perfectly possible for such men to care for anatomy, without caring for philanthropy; to care about anatomy, from a scientific point of view, without any ulterior desire to benefit any living creature. So it is perfectly conceivable that a man may make the study of God a kind of intellectual hobby, without his heart being stirred by deep religious concern to know God as the Father, Saviour, Sanctifier, Sovereign of the human race. We therefore do not make any apology for putting this question so penetratingly. It is a vital question. Do you seek to know more of God simply as a scientific theological enquirer? Why do you desire to know God? Is it to solve the problem of rulership and sovereignty? It is very possible that men may put to themselves such a task as this: "We have heard a great deal from men of science about cause and effect; the law of continuity and the law of succession. Now I intend to find out whether it is a law—a dead law—that is behind all this phenomena, or whether it is a living being." A man may start out on his journey after God with a purpose like that, and the probability is he will not find the God of the heart, the God of grace, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why then do you desire to find out God? Is it to be delivered from some immediate difficulty? Some of us become very religious in proportion as our difficulties increase around us. We say that if God would only deliver us out of this perplexity, we should surely begin to pray unto him, and love him and serve him. When we are weak, when we are in pain, when days are long and nights are wearisome, because of some oppressive disease or affliction, then we say, "If God would raise me up from this bed of affliction, I know I should give the remainder of my days to him." Is it in this spirit that we are seeking God, and desiring the Living One? Is there some great shadow lying over to-morrow? Are we almost afraid of Monday morning coming, because the pressure of great difficulty will be felt by us in our family relationships, or in our business responsibilities; and are we now saying, "If God would lift

me over this great wall, on the other side I should fall down before him and pray, and nevermore would I leave his feet" ? Are we quite sure that we mean what we say under such circumstances ? We have experience to guide us upon this matter ; we have observation to consult upon this case. There are many men who can plead guilty to the charge, that in certain crises, they professed and vowed that if God would deliver them they would be religious ever after, and they can also confess how far it is possible to desire God in that way and to be false to the solemn vows spoken in the most critical hours. What does your experience say upon this matter ? You know how ill you were,—you know when the physicians shook their heads and said they could do no more for you, when you family gathered around you, and were about to bid you farewell,—you said in your heart, " If I could but be raised up again, I should be a new man, and have a desire after better things. If God would but spare me and recover my strength, I know I should be a good man." You said that, and you were raised up again. How long did the vow keep you under its discipline ? How long did that pledge, extorted in such pain, rule your life and control your purpose ? A day ? Yes. A week ? Perhaps. A year ? No ! Where are you now ? Perhaps farther off than ever ; because slighted mercies mean harder hearts,—neglected opportunities mean blinder eyes. How is it with you now ? We repeat, that it is possible for a man to be desiring God because he is under the pressure of some peculiar difficulty and obligation, and his desire simply means this : If God would deliver me I think I would serve him, but all the probabilities are, that as soon as I enjoy the blessing I should forget my vow. Is the ground now tolerably clear of difficulties ? Have we said sufficient about the danger of merely selfish fear and cowardly concern in this matter of seeking after God ? Have we shown with sufficient suggestiveness that it is possible to seek after God from an intellectual point of view, and to care little or nothing about him religiously ? That it is possible to seek out rulership and sovereignty, without going in quest of Fatherhood and redemptiveness ? Is it clear to us by experience, as well as by exposition, that many a man, made a coward by affliction, has sought to make himself a saint through cowardice, and has turned



out to be an arrant liar or a horrible hypocrite? If so, we may advance to our third enquiry, How then may I seek God so that I may find him religiously and know him as he is in his heart, and feel the redeeming grace and power of which I hear much in the gospel of his Son? We will answer that enquiry with a full, glad heart.

We are to seek God as men who know there is no other help for us. If there be the least distraction of feeling or affection on our part as to this point, we cannot find God! If we suppose that God is to be found in any other way than that in which he himself has revealed, all our enquiry will end in the bitterest disappointment. If we think that God is one among many,—that there be many solaces and many sources of strength in human life, and that God is but one of them, even the chief of them,—he will not show the lustre of his face, or the grace of his heart to us. We must come to him as men who can say, “We have tried every other source of strength and consolation, and behold, they are broken cisterns that can hold no water. We have consulted other physicians; we have spent all we have upon them, and have become worse rather than better; now we come to thee, God of salvation, God of grace, that we may find healing and recovery.” How is it with us at this point? Have you still some lingering feeling that there is a complement to religion, a supplement to it, something that is required to round it off and make it complete? Then do not be surprised that you do not find God, and do not know him, in the truly Christian sense of the term. No man can know God, until his heart has been emptied of every desire but a desire after Christ; and of every conviction but a conviction that God alone can meet faith in himself by the life that is eternal. See the poor woman in the crowd, who has spent all her living on seeking health, and has spent that living in vain. She comes behind the Great Teacher, in the crowd secretly, saying, “If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole.” She had tried every other resource, gone to every professed healer, had been filled with disappointment, and she was about to give up in despair; and in that critical hour of her experience, she touched the Saviour and was healed. It must be literally so

with us. We must shut every other book, turn from every other teacher, forsake every broken cistern and every shallow fountain, and come to God and say, "We find life nowhere else; can we find it in thee, thou living One?" When a man is shut up to this course, pressed down to this point, and goes in quest of God in this spirit, he will return from his investigation filled with the grace and love of God, and made bright and joyous with the hope of the gospel. If we would really and truly find God, we must go to him as men who have lost all right of standing before him. No man is allowed to stand before God on equal terms. No sinner is permitted to go to God and say, "I come with a case, part of which I can meet myself; I wish to discuss this thing in thy hearing, and take thy counsel upon it." That is not religious language. That is the language of pride, it is the language of self-sufficiency, it is the language of sin. How, then, are we to go? Not as the Pharisee went. The Pharisee went to the temple, but he found no justification there. He went to the right place, but he went in the wrong spirit. He prayed, but his prayer was rather to himself than to God. It was an exhibition of himself in set, stiff, religious language; a prayer, in the true sense of the term, it was not, and it never entered heaven. How then are we to go? As the publican went. He went and lifted not up so much as his eyes unto heaven; he smote upon his breast; he condemned himself; he had no status in the house of God; he had no right to be there. But he came on the ground of mercy; and his beautiful prayer—which a child might store in its young heart, and the most ignorant might learn in a moment—was this: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" That man went from the temple to his house justified, forgiven, pardoned. If he had stood upon one speck of his own right; if he had laid but a finger-tip upon any one virtue he had ever exhibited; if he had said, "I make this the ground of my claim, I put this in as a right and title to thy consideration,"—God would not have regarded his prayer. But self-renouncing, self-distrusting, hungering and thirsting after mercy and righteousness, God heard his cry, and he left the temple without the burden he took to the holy place.

**It is thus we must desire God; as the one object of life's hope,**

as the one life without which we cannot live, as the one grace and comfort without which the heart would perish. We may put it into what words we please; select our own phraseology, but it comes to this,—that except we renounce every other help, and renounce the conviction that we can do anything of ourselves on the ground of righteousness, we never can find God as the Redeemer and Saviour of our souls. What then is wanted? This: that we should now empty ourselves of everything that is of the nature of self-flattery; that we should view our own resources with contemptuous self-distrust, and look upon our own life with hatred and abhorrence, and then say, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" We should open our eyes after that prayer and see God! Where? At the cross? Yes. But why at the cross? Because *on* it! It is God that is on the cross; it is God that dies for the sinner; it is God that brings our peace by righteousness, purity by holiness. We shall see them there, and the sight will be to us the beginning and the pledge of heaven.

But what is that exercise of the heart or of the mind by which we lay hold of religious things, livingly and with advantage, so that we derive from them strength and comfort and hope? It is a religious word. It is a word of one syllable. The youngest may remember it. It is *faith*. We are saved by faith. It is trust; it is the casting of the heart upon these things, and living according to them; the life coming out of faith being nothing in itself, but as it comes out of that divine eternal root, faith in the Son of God. Jesus always insisted upon having faith. When the very poorest man came up to him, he said, "Dost thou believe?" When the man wanted his withered hand healed, he said, "Dost thou believe?" When the leper came to him, he said, "Dost thou believe?" He never said, "Dost thou fear?" but always said, "Hast thou faith?" He never said, "Hast thou dread of God?" He never said, "Art thou so afraid of God's power that thou desirest to run away from it and hide thyself?" He always put one question—he never changed his question—"Hast thou faith; dost thou believe; is it thine heart's desire that this should be done unto thee?" In some places he could not do many mighty works because of the

unbelief of the people. The question then comes to be this: Have we faith? We can only receive God through the medium of our belief. God enters our heart, because we open the door of our trust. He does not come to us with difficult propositions and hard questions, and set us perplexing and baffling tasks. He says to the heart, "Art thou broken?" He says to the desire, "Art thou complete?" He says to our faith, "Dost thou rest on me?" And in so far as we can say, "Yes, Lord," he will give us the blessing we need, and dwell in the heart that is prepared for him! Men find God in different ways. Some find him in great pain and affliction; and others never would have found him but for fire and loss and death and desolation! Others have been drawn to him by the kind ministry of loving parents, or brothers, or sisters. There is an infinite variety in the details, but there is no variety in the principle. We must desire God with a true heart, with an unmixed love, and then he will come to us and be our God.

It is possible to resist all appeals. I am not so sanguine as to imagine that any appeal of mine, or any other man's, is irresistible, if so be you set your mind to resist it. A man may put his fingers into his ears and resolutely say, "I will not hear this." Or he may listen with his ears, and stop the hearing of his heart, and say, "Not a word of this shall sink into my being." It is perfectly possible for a man to answer arguments, and to bandy objections, and to criticise positions, and yet know nothing of the reality and sweetness of the gospel and grace of God. Do you really desire God to dwell in your hearts? That desire is prayer. Do you say, I wish I knew how to pray? The desire of your heart is the best prayer; it is the only true prayer. You may not be able to utter a word, or if you do utter words, you may stumble and blunder in every sentence; but God looks at the desire of the heart and the purpose of the soul; and the sighing of the wounded and the contrite brings him from his hiding-place, and to the trouble of the heart he extends his strength.

To the Christian let me say: No man can find out God unto perfection. You will not suppose that you have concluded your studies of the divine nature. In proportion as you are really

religious, you will be the first to resent the suggestion that you have done more than just begun your studies of the divine Person, the divine law, and the divine grace. Let the word of God dwell in you richly. But some may need an exhortation: those who once did desire to know God, and who once professed to have found him, and who united themselves with the children of God, and made open profession of the gospel of Christ. Where are they now? They began enthusiastically; there was emphasis in their early testimony; there was holy boldness in their early declarations and first efforts in Christian service. Where are they now? "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, I will receive you graciously and love you freely!" That is God's word to the backslider. Knowing the power of temptation, and by how many ways the devil may come into one's soul and steal the good seed, and harden the opening heart, and destroy religious impressions, and quench and stifle aspiration, we send after you the cry of the Living One, whom you have deserted, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings!" Come to us again. Be not ashamed to excess; be ashamed of your sin, but do not let your shame destroy any hope that is in you, or any good desire that stirs your heart. Do not let the shame that you ought to feel kill you! Feel ashamed—burn with shame; feel agony of contrition; put your head in the dust. Come amongst the people of God again, owning your sin, your evil behaviour, and, knowing what you have done, you will walk the more softly and cautiously in years to come. Do not be criticising the finger that points the road, and forget to take the journey. Do not say to the finger-post, "You should have been higher and broader." Go the road! That is what you have to do. The devil could have no greater joy—a grim and terrible joy is his—than to find you quarrelling with the guide, quarrelling with the index finger and not walking one step of the road. Rise, thy Father calleth thee! Go to him and say, "Father, I have sinned before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And, ere thou hast gone so far, he will lock thee in his heart,—he will give thee home in his love!

Job xxiv.

MORAL ANTIQUITY.

HERE we have a wonderful portrayal of wickedness. Some men attach great importance to antiquity: why should the theologian be excluded from that field of interest and study? Literary men often have a passion for antiquity,—to discover a new word, or to be able to discover possible relations of old words, makes them wild with delight; to know that some book has been exhumed which only scholars can read is indeed a festival to the truly literary mind. This love of antiquity operates in various ways. Some men are fond of old coins. Half-crowns have been purchased by numismatists for as much as fifty sovereigns. So old age has some advantages. We must have antiquity. This love of antiquity shows itself sometimes in quite frivolous ways; but, still, there it is. There are persons who write their names with two little f's. They think it has quite a Plantagenet sort of look about it, not knowing that in the antiquity which they all but adore men wrote two little f's because they did not know how to write a capital. What matter? There is an antiquity about it that is quite soothing, and deeply satisfactory. Some persons like to trace their origin far back into historical times; others are bold enough to go back as far even as Adam and Eve; and there are others of another mental metal who are not content with that origin, and who go immeasurably beyond it, sacrificing family pride with the most abject humbleness. But what does it amount to, so long as there is the charm of antiquity, the hoar of countless ages, the moss which only rocks could gather? Why, then, should the theologian be excluded, let us ask again, from this field of inquiry, so broad and charming?

The Book of Job is confessedly one of the most ancient books in all literature; it cannot, therefore, fail to be interesting to

know the character of wickedness as drawn by so ancient a portrayer of manners and customs. Is wickedness the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? Did it begin quite innocently, so to say, and as it were by incalculable accidents fall into evil behaviour? Is its evil reputation rather a misfortune than a fault? Or was it always as bad as the devil could make it? Did it start badly? Is it a hell-flower? Are its roots fed by forces that minister in perdition? If some modern man had sketched the character of evil we should have said, History is against him: if you search back into the far-away ages you will find that the portraiture is overdrawn, it is an exaggeration amounting almost to an injustice. Here, however, we have Job as a witness. As to the antiquity of this testimony, there is no doubt amongst any body of intelligent men. It is something, therefore, to have a worm-eaten document, the ink almost faded, and yet the letters quite traceable, so that there can be no dispute as to what it really says. It comes to us with the authority of thousands of years. Let us look at it a little.

Though the testimony is ancient, yet it is modern. See what wicked men did long ago—

“Some remove the landmarks: they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge.\* They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together. . . . They reap every one his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor” (vv. 2-9).

And so the evil testimony rolls on like a black and pestilent stream. In all our development we keep closely to this line. We know it. We do not turn from this portrait as from a caricature that shocks our sense of justice and truth; we read the words as if we had written them. Who ever stands aghast at the delineation, and protests in the name of human nature that such things are impossible to man? No critic has ever done so; no etymologist has ever so changed the terms as to change the reputation; no moralist has ever said that he could not read the

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See note, *ante*, p.224.

delineation of wickedness in the Book of Job without feeling that it was overwrought, untrue, and unjust. Let us see what they did. "They drive away the ass of the fatherless." The sting is in that last dreary word. They would not have ventured to drive away the ass of those whose father was living. A beautiful word is the word "father." It has been traced back to two little letters pronounced by sweet children now, and sometimes unwisely smiled at or put down. The root of the word is *pa*. Let us be etymologically correct. What does "father" mean? It does not signify mere descent of a physiological kind, as father and son, but it signifies protector, defender; it bears with it the meaning of might that can resist all assault, security that will itself die before the thing secured can be violated. But in ancient times wicked men drove away the ass of the fatherless: the protector was gone, so the property must follow; there was no strong man to stand in the front, and say, No: not until you have overthrown me can you touch that which belongs to my children. The great hedge of security was broken down, and strong wicked men had rushed in upon the defenceless, and wrought havoc amongst those whose father was dead. Is that done now? Are any liberties taken now with the fatherless? Has a child to pay for orphanage? Has the devil changed his character? Then again—"They turn the needy out of the way." It is always the needy man who has to suffer: he cannot conduct a long fight; he cannot run a long race; his poverty always comes to stop him, entangle him, and otherwise render him a prey to those who are rich and proud. This miracle of poverty, this eternal mystery of want,—what is it? We cannot be lectured out of it, economised out of it, scientifically conducted out of it; there stands the ghastly spectre, age after age, an apparently immovable and indestructible presence. A man may be wise, but he suffers through his want of means; he may have genius to plan a bridge that should span a broad river, but he has no money with which to dig foundations and throw the arch across the running flood. A poor man may have books in his head, whole libraries of thought and poetry, vision and dream that would bless the world; but the publisher politely, time permitting, shows him to the door because he cannot pay for paper and print. The needy man must have his day. Surely there



will come a time when he will be able to stand up and state his cause, and plead it, and show that he could have done greater things in the world but for his poverty. Is any advantage taken of the needy now? Are they all spoken to with courteous civility? Do men move to them as to equals? Are they invited to the feast? When thou makest a feast, who are thy guests, thou Christian man? Is there boundless room outside, in the snow of the winter and the floods of the autumn, for the needy, and must they make their bed in the morass and cling to the rock for shelter? Has the Ethiopian changed his skin? Is wickedness the same now as it was in ancient days? Let facts bear witness. There is no originality in wickedness; in substance it is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The Bible has named every sin. Invention is dead; novelty is impossible; you cannot originate a new sin. If there is one man above another, prince of the philologists of the day, it is Professor Max Müller. He says that language as to its root and core has never changed. Whoever the first speaker was, we are speaking his language now. Say Adam was our ancestor in speech; then, says the Professor, we are speaking Adam's language now. Say that we trace our language back to Shem, Ham, and Japheth; then we are speaking their language at this day. There is no novelty in the roots of the language. Declensions, conjugations, variations, accidental changes—many, showing themselves fruitfully in all advancing civilisation; but the root is the same; there is no substantial novelty. You may have thrust the accent forward or backward; you may have added syllables; you may have twisted words, and changed their momentary colour or their passing value: but as to the root of the language, he who spoke first speaks now. There is a great moral in that philological lesson. The core of wickedness never changes. We can invent new accidents, new circumstances which endure but for a moment, we are cleverer in secondary matters; but we cannot invent a new sin, as to its root and core and plasmic meaning; these you will find in the Bible, and when the Bible reports them, it does not appear to be making a new language, but simply to be taking down a speech which filled the air even in the remotest days of biblical antiquity. It is something to know, therefore, that we have testimony to go upon that is irrefragable. We are not

leaning to broken evidence, or to a chain of events in which there are faulty links ; every link is faultless, strong, distinct, in its right place ; so that he who would rise now and make an impeachment against wickedness has evidence enough : if he fail, blame his ineloquent tongue, and do not charge the failure upon want of proof.

How noticeable it is that crime has from the beginning been perpetrated by men from whom better things might have been expected ! Take critical notice of this one fact, that the crimes which are set down here are crimes which only rich men could have committed. Such a fact is not to be passed by lightly. Only the strong men of the time could have removed the landmark, or taken away violently the flocks, or turned the needy out of the way, and driven the poor of the earth to huddle in some cold and barren obscurity. Let that fact always be remembered in speaking about the crimes of any civilisation. The greatest crimes of the world have been done by the strong, the rich, and the proud. That these crimes would have been done by the weak and the poor and the abject had circumstances been different is perfectly indisputable ; the question is one of human nature and not of accidental circumstances. Is this true to-day ? Are our rich men all refuges to which the poor may flee with hope of asylum ? Are our strong men always alert, self-surrendering, never considering themselves when the cause of oppression is to be treated, and when those who would assail liberty make their boastful voices heard ? Can we gather ourselves together in sacred counsel and say, Whatever happens our rich men will be at the front, and our strong men ; all the men who lead us by social status, and ought to lead us by generous example, will be in the van, so that before any of us who are blind, halt, maimed, can be touched, all our foremost men must be mowed down by the scythe of the enemy. Has wickedness changed its character ?

How several popular fallacies fall before such testimony as is to be found in these chapters,—for example, such a fallacy as that good circumstances make good character. Give a man plenty of wealth, give him flock and herds, give him ample estates, and he will be good ; he will make his fields churches, he will make his

piles of gold altars, at which he will fall, that he may there offer praise to the Giver of every good gift: men would be better if they were richer, stronger. That is a deadly sophism. Look at the Bible for proof to the contrary, and at the Bible not as a professedly theological book but as a literary history, as something written by the pen of man, no matter who that man was as to his religious relations. That such wickedness as this which is detailed in the Book of Job could be dreamed, and then could be published without the author being torn to pieces by an outraged public, is a fact to be reckoned with in all this historical estimate. Then there is the fallacy that poverty and ill-behaviour always go together. There again the poor man is at a great disadvantage. It is supposed that if a man cannot read and write, therefore he must be vicious. Young reformers arise, and say, Put a school-house at the corner of every street, and then the magistrate will have nothing to do. It is a misrepresentation of the poor. The rich man can do more mischief by one inscription of his pen than all the little thieves of a city can do in seven years. But how we spring at the poor man when he does anything wrong, how we hale him before the judge, and how we suppose that because his coat is torn therefore his character is bad. It is not so. The men who have most intellect and least morality can do most harm in the world. Then there is the sophism that justice is a natural instinct. It may be said to us, who are religious moralists, Trust the justice of humanity: man knows right from wrong; natural instinct will guide him: let a man yield to his instincts, and you will have no oppression of the poor, no driving of the needy into desert places, no removal of the landmarks: justice is a natural instinct; trust it. It may be a natural instinct, but it has been greatly depraved. Who has known an instance in which it has stood well to the front without having a background sufficiently mysterious to be designated religious? No, not until *he* came who touched the sphere of motive, the region of spiritual thought, were men really just to one another. Even those who profess his name and pray at his cross often fail now, but what would they have done but for such association with his kingdom and such sacrifice at the tree on which he died! We have no justice. If we ever had it we have lost, so to say, its very instinct and use. We need to be recovered from the error

of our ways. Our very morality may have been an arrangement, an investment, a new game in doing the work of life. To be real we must be born again; to be truly just we must adjust our relations with God and to God. No man can love his neighbour as himself until he loves God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. Prosperity divorced from morality is the curse of any age and people. Riches are only blessings when they are held by the hand of justice and controlled by the spirit of benevolence.

Here, then, is the character of wickedness. An old character. Who will adopt it? Who will wear these ancient clothes? Come, ye who are fond of antiquity; you like old hoary time: who will adopt this moral antiquity, and wear it, and be proud of it? Who will set this cap upon his head, and say, Behold me, venerable in unrighteousness? Is there any man who will voluntarily take up this character and say it is his? Do we not rather seem to read it as an old piece of literature, a very vivid and graphic story, with which, however, we would have no connection, further than a mere perusal of the dreary tale? When the wicked man plays his evil pranks, let him know what his character is; it is not for him to write it—history has undertaken that work for him: every line of his character is already written, and he cannot change it. Why, as we have just seen, we cannot change a word radically and substantially: how then can we change a moral act? In law the sound rule is, that which was bad at the beginning is bad through all the process, and in theology and morals the same law holds good. Wickedness cannot change itself, cannot invent for itself a new speech or a new hypocrisy; from the beginning the father of the wicked was a liar and a murderer. A very broad and true saying that which is found on the highest authority in the Book of God: from the beginning he was a murderer: he could not *become* a murderer; he was at the beginning, in his very genesis, in his very protoplasm, a man-slayer, an enemy of human life. Behold the chivalry of wicked men, the bravery, the generous civility, the signature of heaven,—this, as recorded in history, is what they are and what they have done! The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leper his spots, and if

ever this wickedness is to be rubbed out it must be by the blood—the life—of God with us. Can we overturn old history in one day? Is all this ancient stream to be cleansed out of human history by some majestic waving of the hand on the part of some inexperienced or adventurous reformer? Why dwell upon this iniquity, upon the blackness and the depth of this horrid stream? To show that the gospel spreads itself over the whole occasion, and comes to it clothed with the almightiness of God. Blessed be God, if we speak of the antiquity of sin we can also speak of the antiquity of grace: where sin abounded grace did much more abound, even in this matter of antiquity. We know that antiquity, and its value; we are not about to dispute it; old age must always be spoken of with carefulness, and sometimes it may prove itself to be worthy of honour: therefore, make it a question of antiquity, and how well the gospel stands! Does sin abound in antiquity? Grace aboundeth much more. How can that be proved? Because the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. He died in the unreckoned eternity. He foresaw all the evil. He anticipated it. The cross was a historical event, but the sacrifice was old as eternity—as venerable as unbeginning time.

## Chapters xxv.-xxvii.

### QUIET RESTING-PLACES.

**I**T is a curious speech with which Bildad winds up the animated colloquy between Job and his three friends. There is a streak of failure across the face of the speech, notwithstanding its dignity. Indeed, the dignity is somewhat against the speech. Bildad is as ignorant of the reality of the case in the peroration as he was in the exordium. If this is all that can be said at the close of such an intellectual and spiritual interview, then some of the parties have grievously misunderstood the case. Taken out of its setting, read as a piece of religious rhetoric, it is good and noble; but regarded in its relations to the particular case throbbing before us with such suffering as man never bore, it seems to be impertinent in its dignity, and to aggravate the wound which the man ought to have attempted to heal. These grand religious commonplaces which Bildad utters are right, they are stately, they are necessary to the completion of the great fabric of theological and spiritual truth; but how to bring them down to the immediate pain, how to extract sympathy from them, how to make all heaven so little that it can come into a broken heart, has not entered into the imagination of this comfortless comforter.

Was there an undertone in his voice, was there anything between the lines in the curious speech with which he concluded the conference?

“How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (xxv. 4).

Is there not more than theology in that inquiry? Perhaps not to the consciousness of the speaker himself. Yet we often say things which we do not put into definite words. There is a region of inference in human association, and fellowship, and

education. Was the inquiry equal to saying, We have done with thee; we cannot work this miracle of curing thine obstinacy, O thou woman-born; thou art like all the rest of thy race; thou hast thy mother's obstinacy in thee—a stubbornness that nothing can melt, or straighten, or in any wise be rendered manageable: how can he be clean that is born of a woman? how can a man such as thou art, and, indeed, such as we ourselves are, be set right if once wrong in the head and in the heart? Bildad did not say all that in words; yet we may so preach even a gospel discourse as to lead men to think that we have formed but a low opinion of them, and have no expectations as to their graciousness of reply. We may be evangelical, yet critical. We may ask a question in a tone which conveys the reply. Bildad would hurl the stars at Job, and pluck the fair moon—that goddess of the dead in Oriental dreaming—and throw it at the suffering patriarch, that they might all wallow in a common depravity and corruption—a heap of things unclean! We should be careful how we pluck the stars. Better let them hang where God put them, and shine as much as they can upon a land that is often dark. Our little hands were never meant to gather such flowers and present them even as gifts of fragrance to other people. Let us keep steadfastly within our own limits, and talk such medicable and helpful words as we can out of our own sympathetic hearts, measured and toned and adjusted by a mysterious and subtle sympathy.

Now Job becomes the sole speaker. We have now to enter upon a wonderful parable. He has lost nothing of eloquence by all this controversial talk. He speaks the better now he has shaken his comforters from him, and he will deliver a great parable-sermon, apparently miscellaneous, yet not wholly unconnected. The marvellous thing is that this man has lost everything but his mind. Is there a drearier condition on earth, when viewed in one aspect? Do we not sometimes say, Thank God, he was unconscious; he did not know what he was suffering; the medical attendant says he could not feel the pain; his poor mind, his sensibility, quite gone: that is something to be thankful for. We had a kind meaning in that comment. But here is a man whose mind is twice quickened—more a mind

than it ever was. He feels a shadow; a spirit cannot pass before him without some sign of masonry, without some signal which the too-quickened mind of Job would instantly understand. All gone: the grave all set in order before him: the remembered prosperity hanging like a great cloud all round about him: not a child to touch him into hopefulness of life; not a kind voice to salute him, saying, Cheer thee! the darkest hour is just before the dawn; the angels are getting ready to come to thee on their wings of light, and presently heaven's own morning will dawn over thee in infinite whiteness and beauty. Yet his mind was left. How eloquent he was! He could set forth his sorrow in something like equivalent words. He knew every pain that was piercing him. The river of his tears hid nothing from him as to the fountains whence they sprang. Is not misery doubled by our sensitiveness as to its presence? Do we not increase our suffering by knowing just what the loss means? This is one of the mysteries of Providence, that a man should have nothing left but his sense of loss; that a man should find himself in a universe of cloud, crying, without even the friendship of an echo to keep him company. To such depths have some men been driven. Do we not thank God for their experience now and again, because it shows us how in comparison our grief is very little, our complaint is not worth utterance, our condition is blessed as compared with their sorrow-stricken hearts? On the other hand, is it not comforting that the man's mind should have been left? There is something grand even in this agony. A man who could talk as Job talks in this elaborate parable is not poor; his riches are indeed of another kind and quality, but they are riches still. "Oh, to create within the mind is bliss!" To have that marvellous power of withdrawal from all things merely outward, or that more marvellous power of seeing things merely outward as stairways up to celestial places, is to have wealth that can never be lost, so long as we are true to ourselves and anxious to respond to the responsibilities of life with faithfulness and diligence. Thank God for your senses that are left. This is true even in the deepest spiritual experiences. A sorrowing soul says—I feel as if I had committed the unpardonable sin. What is the pastor's answer to such complaint? An instantaneous and gracious assurance to the contrary, because



the very feeling that the sin may have been committed is a proof that no such sin has been done. He who has committed the unpardonable sin knows nothing about it; he is a dead man. Who feels the traveller trampling over his grave? Who says, There is a weight upon me, when he is buried seven feet deep in the earth? The very action of sensitiveness is charged with religious significance. When you are groping for God and cannot find him, know that even groping may be prayer; when you are filled with dissatisfaction with your condition, and when you have to betake yourselves even to despised interjections, as Job has had to do now and again, know that even interjection may be theology of the best kind, poetry, prayer, worship. Woe be unto him who would seek in any wise to diminish the hope of souls that feel their need of God.

In all his tumultuous but noble talk Job now and again opens a great door as if in a rock, and enters into a sanctuary perfect in its security; then he comes out again, and plunges into clouds and wintry winds; then suddenly he enters a refuge once more, and praises God in an asylum of rocks; yet he will not abide there: so in all this parable he is in a great refuge and out of it; he is resting upon a pillow made soft by the hands of God, and then he will perversely wander amongst speculations and conjectures and self-criticisms, and come home with head fallen upon his breast, and tears stopping the hymn of praise. This parable is true. Whether spoken in this particular literary form or not, there is not one untrue line in it. It is the parable of the earnest soul in all ages, in all lands. It would fit the experience of men who have never heard of the Bible. It is a great human parable. When the Bible itself becomes special its speciality acquires most of its significance from the fact that the larger part of the Bible is itself commonplace—that is to say, adapted not to one community or another, but to man in all his conscious want of strength and light and peace.

Job comes as it were suddenly upon an idea which sustains him.

“Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is

not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent" (xxvi. 6-13).

Here at all events is a sense of almightiness, sovereignty, something that can be got hold of. We must beware how we credit Job with true astronomical ideas as to the poising of the north over the empty place, and the hanging of the earth upon nothing. Let us call it Hebrew poetry. We must be careful how we seize any one point even that is exact, and make that too much of an argument, because when we come upon points that are not so applicable how can we refuse their being turned as against the biblical contention? There is no need to make this a merely astronomic discovery: but poetry does sometimes outrun science, and get the truth first of all. The expression may have to be dressed a little, modified somewhat, perhaps lowered in temperature; but even poetry is a child of God. The idea that abides is the conception of the almightiness that keeps things in their places. Who can turn the north into the south? Who can take the earth out of the emptiness which it apparently occupies, and set it upon pillars? On what would the pillars stand? How do the stars keep in their courses? Why is it they do not break away? If heaven should come down upon us we should be crushed: what keeps the great, blue, kind heaven up where it is, as if for our use and enjoyment only? Suppose we cannot tell, that does not deprive us of the consciousness that the heaven is so kept, because there stands the obvious and gracious fact. What, then, has the soul to do in relation to these natural supports, these proofs that somehow things are kept in order and are set to music? The conception coming out of this view is a conception of omnipotence. The soul is intended to reason thus: Who keeps these things in their places has power to guide my poor little life; whatever ability it was that constructed the heavens, it is not wanting in skill and energy in the matter of building up my poor life into shapeliness and utility; I will, therefore, worship here if I cannot go further; I will say, O Great Power, be thy name what it may, take me up into thy

plan of order and movement; make me part of the obedient universe: art thou deaf? canst thou speak? I know not, but it does me good to cry in the dark and to tell thee, if thou canst hear, that I want to be part of the living economy over which thou dost preside. Disdain no pagan prayer. No prayer, indeed, is pagan in any sense that deserves contempt. Our first prayers have sometimes been our best; blurred with tears, choked or interrupted with penitential sobbing, they have yet told the heart's tale in a way which could be understood by the listening Love, which we call by the name of God—sometimes by the name of Father. Seize then the idea of Omnipotence; it covers all other conceptions; it is the base-line of all argument; it gives us a starting thought. Do not be particular about giving a name to it, or defining it; enter into the consciousness of the reality of such a Power, and begin there to pray—at least to stumble in prayer.

Then Job utters a word which will be abiding in its significance and in its comfort—

“Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?” (xxvi. 14).

The man who said that was not left comfortless. Sometimes in our very desolateness we say things so deep and true as to prove that we are not desolate at all, if we were only wise enough to seize the comfort of the very power which sustains us. He who has a great thought has a great treasure. A noble conception is an incorruptible inheritance. Job's idea is that we hear but a whisper. Lo: this is a feeble whispering: the universe is a subdued voice; even when it thunders it increases the whisper inappreciably as to bulk and force: all that is now possible to me, Job would say, is but the hearing of a whisper; but the whisper means that I shall hear more by-and-by; behind the whispering there is a great thundering, a thunder of power; I could not bear it now; the whisper is a gospel, the whisper is an adaptation to my aural capacity; it is enough, it is music, it is the tone of love, it is what I need in my littleness and weariness, in my initial manhood. How many controversies this would settle if it could only be accepted in its entirety! We know in part, therefore we prophesy in part; we see only very little portions of things,

therefore we do not pronounce an opinion upon the whole; we hear a whisper, but it does not follow that we can understand the thunder. There is a Christian agnosticism. Why are men afraid to be Christian agnostics? Why should we hesitate to say with patriarchs and apostles, I cannot tell, I do not know; I am blind, and cannot see in that particular direction; I am waiting? What we hear now is a whisper, but a whisper that is a promise. We must let many mysteries alone. No candle can throw a light upon a landscape. We must know just what we are and where we are, and say we are of yesterday, and know nothing when we come into the presence of many a solemn mystery. Yet how much we do know! enough to live upon; enough to go into the world with as fighting men, that we may dispute with error, and as evangelistic men, that we may reveal the gospel. They have taken from us many words which they must bring back again. When Rationalism is restored amongst the stolen vessels of the Church, Agnosticism also will be brought in as one of the golden goblets that belong to the treasure of the sanctuary. We, too, are agnostics: we do not know, we cannot tell; we cannot turn the silence into speech, but we know enough to enable us to wait. Amid all this difficulty of ignorance we hear a voice saying, What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter: I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now: if it were not so, I would have told you,—as if to say, I know how much to tell, and when to tell it. Little children, trust your Lord.

Now Job gathers himself together again, and coming out in an attitude of noble gracious strength, he says—

“I will teach you by the hand of God: that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal” (xxvii. 11).

Who is it that proposes to teach? Actually the suffering man himself. The suffering man must always become teacher. Who can teach so well? Now he begins to see a new function in life. Hitherto he has been “my lord.” He says,—I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: when I passed by the elders rose up and saluted me, and young men fled from my path: I was a prince amongst men. The talk was indeed haughty, as became a fine sheik, a gentleman of Eastern lands, overloaded

with estates ; but now, having passed through all this sorrow, he says, "I will teach you." Not only so, "I will teach you by the hand of God." Sorrow is always eloquent. True suffering is always expository, as well as comforting. Have we not seen that there are many chapters of the Bible which a prosperous man cannot read ? He can spell them, parse them, pronounce the individual words correctly, but he cannot read them, round them into music, speak them with the eloquence of the heart, utter them with his soul ; because they can only be read by the lame and the blind, and the sorrow-laden and the poor : but oh, how they can read them ! Keep away the rhetorician from the twenty-third Psalm ; the fourteenth chapter of John ; the Lord's Prayer. For a man who knows nothing but words to read such passages is blasphemy. Sometimes they cannot be read aloud ; they can only be read to the heart by the heart itself. So it is with preaching. Here it is that the older man has a great advantage over the young man. Not that the young man should be deprived of an opportunity of speaking in the time of zeal and prophetic hopefulness. Nothing of the kind. The young man has a work to do, but there are some texts which he must let alone for a good many years ; they do not yet belong to him ; when he reaches his majority then he will have his property, so to say, given to him, and he can use it in harmony with the donor's will. The young man must be zealous, perhaps efflorescent, certainly enthusiastic, occasionally somewhat eccentric and even wild : but was not Paul himself sometimes a fool in glorying ? He would have been a less apostle if he had been a more careful man. He plunged into the great work ; he leaped into it, and seemed to say to the sea, O sea, thyself teach me how to swim, that I may come right again to the shore. So we need the young, ardent, fearless, enthusiastic, chivalrous ; but at the same time who can teach like the man who has suffered most ? He knows all the weight of agony, all the load of grief, all the loneliness of bereavement. He tells you how deep was the first grave he dug. Then you begin to think that your grief was not quite so deep as his. He has lost wife, or child, or friend, or property, or health, or hope. He tells how the battle went, how cold the wind was, how tempestuous the storm, how tremendous the foe, how nearly once he was lost, and was saved as by the last and

supreme miracle of God. As he talks, you begin to take heart again ; from providence you reason to redemption ; and thus by help of the suffering teacher the soul revives, and God's blessing comes upon the life. Young persons should be patient with men who are talking out of the depths of their experience. It is sometimes difficult to sit and hear an older man talk about life's battles and life's sorrows, when to the young hearer life is a dream, a holiday, a glad recreation ; the ear full of the music of chiming bells, wedding metal clashing out its nuptial music to the willing wind to be carried everywhere, a gospel of festivity and joy. We would not chill you, we would not shorten the feast by one mouthful ; but the flowers that bedeck the table are plucked flowers, and when a flower is plucked it dies.

Sorrowing men, broken hearts, souls conscious of loss and desolation, the story of the patriarchs will be lost upon us if we do not apply it to ourselves as a balm, a cordial, a gospel intended for our use and privilege. Risk it all by taking the comfort. But are we worthy of the comfort ? Do not attempt too much analysis. There are some things by which analysis is resisted ; they say, If you thus take us to pieces you will lose the very thing we meant to convey to you. We have heard of the patience of Job, we have listened to his colloquies with his friends, and seen how they have been puzzled and bewildered ; Job has now come into the parabolical period of speech : presently another voice will come across the whole scene—a young voice, bell-like in tone, incisive ; a young man who will take up another tone of talk altogether, and then the great whirlwind platform will be erected, and from its lofty heights there will come a tempest of questions ; then will come the long eventide—quiet, solemn, more hopeful than a morning dawn. Meanwhile, at this point, here is the feast of comfort. The suffering man says, We only know a part, we only hear a whisper : the great thunder has not yet broken upon us because we are not prepared for it. Let us stand in this, that God is working out a great plan, and must not be interrupted in the continuance of his labour, in the integrity of his purpose. O mighty, gracious, miracle-working Son of God, help us to wait !

## Chapter xxviii.

### WHAT IS WISDOM P

**W**HEN Job says "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it" (v. 1), many persons cannot see the connection between this part of the speech and the verses with which the twenty-seventh chapter concludes. The speaker seems to break away entirely from the main current of his discourse and to begin a totally different subject. He does so, however in appearance only and not in reality.

The patriarch has been talking about the rich man—"This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty." He pictures the rich man as heaping up silver like the dust, and preparing raiment as the clay. Now he says, All that the rich man has is known as to its origin and weight and value; there is nothing mysterious about him; that is to say, there is nothing spiritual or ghostly: whatever he has we can take back to the very place it came from, and can say to it, You originated here; you were cut out from this vein or seam, or were found in this quarry, or were brought from this forest or garden, or were lifted out of this river or sea: we know all about you; you are quite a measurable quantity; you are lacking in the subtle value and suggestiveness of mystery: you are all surface; you can be weighed, measured, appraised; your place is in the market where things are bought and sold; so much gold will buy you every one, however great and brilliant soever you may be: there is no mystery about the rich man's possessions. This is a fact full of significance. Job takes it in that light wholly. He acknowledges that man can do many wonderful things. We are not reading about God but about man when we read—

"He putteth forth his hand upon the rock ; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks ; and his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing ; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light" (vv. 9-11).

Man is a digger. Man is a miner by nature. Man cannot live upon surfaces. Even when he is not religious he is explorative : even when he will not pray he will dig. You cannot keep him to the surface. He has a prying spirit ; he has a knocking hand ; if he cannot analyse he will tear to pieces : but bind him upon the surface you cannot. It is one of two things with man : either he will mount up with wings as eagles, seeking home and rest away where the morning is born ; or he will go the other road, and dig into the earth to find what may be locked up there. Is there not a beginning at least of religious life even in this desire to find out what is under the surface of things ? We find our way from the known to the unknown. We find bread in the earth. It is wonderful that man will insist upon breaking open the iron safes of nature and enriching himself with boundless wealth. Is he a thief, or is he a student ? Is he to be branded as a felon, or to be congratulated as being under the inspiration of a discontentment which will not rest until it has made further acquisition ? Let us understand our own nature. We may be religious when we do not think we are so. There is a worldliness that is not without its religious aspect. He who wants to go further and further may be really obeying a religious impulse. A man stands on the shore and says—I know there is something beyond that water : nothing can persuade me to the contrary : beyond that lake there are shores and wildernesses and boundless spaces. When a man talks thus he is talking religiously, though he may not be talking theologically. Let us bring as many people as we can under this great dome of the sanctuary ; it should never be ours to make the number less, but always to make it more,—to tell men that really whatever they are doing with an honest heart and a determined mind, if it tend to the enlargement of knowledge, the extension of liberty, the advancement of progress, it is in the soul of it religious. So there are two aspects to this picture drawn by the hand of Job. In one aspect the rich man is seen but to be a possessor of things



measurable, numerable, and estimable; he has nothing but what is self-contained: on the other hand, the picture may present the aspect of men who are discontented with things they find to their hands; men who ask for something more than they have yet gotten; digging men, mining men; and the religious teacher should be the first to say, If there is not enough on the surface of things for you, then by your very digging you are beginning to pray: search on: we do not arrest you in boring the earth; we rather congratulate you, and would facilitate your progress; as a matter of fact, there is not enough upon the surface of the earth for you: break open the rock, overturn the roots of the mountain, and see if there be under all these weights and pressures the thing which will really satisfy you. Why, then, be impatient with men who cannot read our religious books? They will read other books. So far, so good. Let them do so. The time will come when they will want the upper book, the larger writing, the fuller scroll. But it is just possible, such being their temperament and quality of mind, that they will not come to the upper and better things until they have outwearied themselves in lower researches or in initial enterprises. Whoever is seeking honest bread is a religious man. He may never have been to church, or bent his knee in prayer, or looked up searchingly to the heavens if mayhap he may have overlooked something shining there: but the very search for honest bread, bread that shall be an equivalent for honest labour, is itself a moral action; and there never was a moral action that had not in it the beginning or suggestion of a religious life.

Now Job points in another direction; he says—

“There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen: the lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it” (vv. 7, 8).

What is the meaning of this? There is an unknown road which has not yet been discovered; there is something beyond, or something more: we know it without knowing it; that is to say, we know it without being able to explain it or set it forth in words; we feel it, we are sure of it. Why should there be any difficulty in accepting this doctrine? This is a doctrine which holds good in philosophy, in science, in commercial

progress, in the whole range of education. Men have not gone forth to find out something in whose existence they had no belief. When the miner first struck his iron into the surface of the earth, he seemed to say by that very act—I know I shall find precious things below. If he had had the assurance that the further he went his findings would be less valuable, he would certainly lay down his instrument, for he would have no time or taste for vain inquiries and prosecutions; but when the strong man took his iron in hand and struck the face of the earth with it and went further down, wounding the earth as he went, he was saying to himself after every blow—I shall come to the gold presently, or the silver, or the precious stone: all this energy means result of a precious kind. So when the astronomer has turned his telescope in this direction, or that, he has said by the very action, I know there is something there, in this very line, which we have not yet found out, and night by night, and year by year, I will watch until I find what it is that causes these perturbations, or flutterings, or vibrations, or shadows: that mystery I will have. Why, then, all this hesitation when the mystery lies in a religious direction, when men say, There is something yet unknown: a bright eye has the vulture, but something has escaped it; a fierce glare, even in the darkness, has the lion, but there is something which has not yet come within the lion's ken,—a path we could not travel; invisible, impalpable, intangible, but there it is, a road away upward and onward into things infinite and eternal. We have just said that there is a Christian agnosticism; we have determined that the word agnosticism shall not go forth alone without limit or definition; the Christian claims it as certainly as any other man; the Christian is the first to say, Certainly there is a great unknown force in the universe: unquestionably God himself cannot be known intellectually to perfection: undoubtedly there are many points at which Christians must stand and say, Let us wait here, not with impatience, but with religious quietude and with the certainty of a glorious hope: the gate will open presently or ultimately, but until it does open we must not use violence; we must, as it were, overcome God by growing up to him and by the impotency of patience. Throughout the Bible this acknowledgment of the unknown quantity is found, page after page. All things

are not known in the Church. It is when the Church assumes to have finality of knowledge that it becomes the representative of the most vicious and destructive of despotisms. When the Church is humble, modest, self-controlled, it will say,—We know in part, and we prophesy in part, and until that which is perfect is come we cannot know in fulness of detail. So long as the Church will say,—There are a thousand mysteries of which we have no explanation—the Church will acquire greater credit for the maintenance of those points upon which she is happily and graciously certain; but when the certain and the uncertain are talked of together with equal glibness, what wonder if scepticism should at least be encouraged or suggested? In the highest religious thinking we have rock enough on which to build a grand house; we have cloud enough to hide a universe: let us build where we can, and pray when we can no longer build.

Now Job turns in a third direction; he says—

“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” (v. 12).

We have found the gold, and the silver, and the jewel, and the crystal, “but”—How modern is this very ancient book! Cannot man be satisfied with gold and silver and jewel, with ruby and sapphire? He cannot. He thinks he can; he says if he had another handful of diamonds he would be quite satisfied; he no sooner gets the handful of precious property than he says, It was not this that I wanted, but something other and different. There is no contentment along the line material; no resting-places have been provided in the line of material substance and enjoyment: it is all fatigue, vexation, disappointment, vanity; it is always the next thing that is going to bring the sabbath of the week, the benediction that should rest upon labour, but that thing never comes along that weary line. We know it. Not the moralists or pietists have told us this; we have found it out ourselves. When the preacher says, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” we say Amen, for the very truth has been spoken.

Look at this “but” in the twelfth verse—“but where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” Men have begun on the surface of the earth in one hemisphere,

and on the surface of the earth in the other hemisphere, and they have, so to say, met in the centre, and, lo, the dwelling-place of wisdom has not been discovered, nor has the temple of understanding been made manifest. What is wisdom? Has it shape? Shape it has none. Is it a coloured thing? Of colour it is destitute. Has it wealth? Not one shilling. What is it? That is the question. It must always remain a question, because after it has been partially answered it seems to grow up into larger dimensions; every answer is the beginning of a new difficulty, every taste of wisdom is the creation of a new appetite. Still man feels that he must have it. There is a spiritual, ghostly, mysterious thing that we are sure exists, but cannot tell where. Take spade and mattock, and go out on summer's longest day, and at eventide meet us somewhere, and tell us the result of your quest. What is it? Where is it? It calculates, foretells, predicts; it corrects mistakes, it heightens and controls instinct; it whispers to the soul; into the very ear of the heart it says, That is right: That is wrong. Who has ever seen this angel? Is it the first angel? Was it present when the foundations of the earth were laid, and the morning stars sang together for joy, so pleased were they with their light? Is it a woman-angel? Is it a child-angel? On what terms will the angel come to us? These questions may be put into a variety of terms, but they are questions still, and they haunt the life, and challenge the imagination, and suggest our best ambitions. Here is a book which grapples with the inquiry.

How impossible it is to estimate the value of wisdom :—

“It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies” (vv. 15-18).

It has no material equivalent. Gold can be balanced by gold, so that the one scale shall be as valuable as the other; estates may be brought into equipoise by gold, so that men shall be as willing to accept the one as the other, for the one is equal to the other in value: but put wisdom in the scale, and try to find a

counter-weight. How haughty is Wisdom! To gold and silver, and jewel and crystal, and onyx and sapphire, she says, Go back: ye may not touch this holy ground! They have gone far, but she will not allow them in her presence; they have been in palaces, but they shall not go in the sanctuaries: all these precious, fair-faced, sweet-voiced things have gone almost wherever they pleased to go, and they have been welcomed by standing men; but when they have gone up to the angel Wisdom, that angel has said—Back, rude vulgarity! She has no price in the market-place. No man can set a value upon an idea, an inspiration, a great mental awakening, a spiritual flash, a divine instinct which marks off right from wrong by an eternal definition. How difficult it is to impress ourselves with this conviction! We still hug the material; we are still the victims of bulk and nearness and weight. The spiritual is always undervalued. The man who has something in his hand is welcomed: the man who has something in his mind must wait downstairs until my lord is ready to give him short conference. It cannot always be so. Every schoolhouse helps the spiritual; every child that learns to read learns to vote for the intellectual as against the merely material. The hope of the world is in the schoolhouse. Every good book that is sold is a step on the upward road. Every healthy lesson that is learned by the mind is a blow dealt in the face of despotism, tyranny, oppression, bondage, drunkenness, wrong. Circulate the elements of wisdom. Open a fair, broad way to the gates of understanding. Have no fear of any child or man who reads, thinks, and is true to deeper and broader thought. How haughty is Wisdom! She says to all these applicants, and they are many—gold, silver, gold of Ophir, precious onyx, sapphire, gold and crystal—I do not know you, and as for the topaz of Ethiopia, throw it away; it is of no value in the house kept by Wisdom and lightened by Understanding. On the other hand, how condescending is Wisdom! How willing to come to the humble, the teachable, the obedient, the broken heart! “Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;”—“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Wisdom will come to the teachable. Wisdom loves little children. Not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the lowly, the

feeble, and the poor, that out of them he might build himself a worthy temple. We should know more if we knew less. We should be nearer heaven if we committed ourselves to the great heaven-thought and heaven-instinct. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." They who are meek and lowly in heart shall find rest at the centre of things; they shall be no longer driven about by wind, tossed by angry waves, but shall rest and find peace in the heart of God. How, then, shall we become more wise? By becoming more humble. How shall we grow in knowledge? By growing in grace. How shall we become mighty men, giants, and princes? By becoming little children, trustful because helpless, confiding because self-deficient, upward-looking because made in the likeness of God. Christ will have no proud men about him. The proud he sends empty away, because they are rich in their own esteem and their hands are buried in plentifulness; but those who come humbly, broken-heartedly, contritely, without self-help or self-hope, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he will send away with all heaven at their command for all possible exigencies.

Where, then, is wisdom to be found? and where is the place of understanding? The great revelation we find at the close of the chapter—

"God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (vv. 23-28).

The text is true to reason. It must be wise to be right with the Creator. Whatever that Creator is, we must fit in with him harmoniously, if we would be wise. What name shall we give the Creator? Choose your own name, but in order to be at rest you must be in harmony with the Thing which that name signifies. Call it Force,—you must not oppose it, or you will be ground to powder. You must never meet the stars; you must always go along with them; if you meet on the same road they never give way, you then must surrender. Call it "the fitness of things." So be it. Let that be God—"the fitness of things,"—everything

in its own place, everything doing its own work, everything in its own order; even if that be so, you must comply with it; you must take your own place and not another man's, if you would be at peace in a creation of order. Choose you own name. Do not let us quarrel about "God," "Law," "Force," "Necessity," "Secret," "Harmony," and "Fitness of things": fix your own point where you may, and still the text is true to reason, that you cannot be right with yourself until you are right with the central Thought—Force—Being—that made and controls all things. So even the atheist cannot escape; the agnostic must submit. We have been chaffering about words, and neglecting the reality of things. Whatever—we will not now say whoever—made the universe must control it. That Spirit—Force—Necessity—is a tremendous Thing, whatever its name; if dead, more awful than we thought it was, for we regarded it as living and merciful, as well as just.

Not only is the text true to reason, it is true to experience. "To depart from evil is understanding." Evil blinds the mind; evil dethrones the judgment. The bad man cannot have a fully impartial and independent intellect. He has sinister ends in view; he is seeking issues that do not lie within the scope of right and justice; he hears with one ear; he sees but one aspect of things. Evil denudes the soul of majesty and justice. We know this to be the case. Find a judge in a court of law who takes a bribe, and instantly society rises against him and says he cannot judge the case justly. Why not? May not a man fill his right hand and his left with the gold of the parties and still be just? No. Who says so? Enlightened conscience says so, civilisation says so; that inscrutable thing within a man which you may call instinct, if you like, says so. He is distrusted who palters with the parties. So it is through and through life. Wherever there is a bad man there is a bad judge, a bad genius, a bad philosopher, a bad friend. Where, then, is wisdom to be found? Can you find wisdom by digging for it with spade and mattock? Did mere genius ever find true wisdom? Did simple intellectuality ever come back saying—I have found all that is meant by understanding? Never. How, then, is wisdom found? **By the heart. How, then, does faith come? By the heart. How, then,**

do men learn to know themselves? By studying the heart. The heart has its own genius, the heart has its own implements of digging. Digging there must be and searching, yea, a searching such as no miner ever employed in searching for gold and silver; but the whole inquest is made by the heart. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "Son, give me thine heart." A man cannot work with his hands. A hireling may do some duty with his hands, and receive adequate pay for it, but unless the hands are ruled and directed by the heart, they do nothing really well. Blessed is he who has his understanding, and his physical faculties, and his social position, and all his personal resources under the sovereignty of a soft, tender, pure, loving heart!

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#### NOTE.

There is one book in the Old Testament collection that is commonly acknowledged as being of unrivalled sublimity; this is the Book of Job, which treats of the very highest moral problems that can exercise the mind of man. . . . It is virtually the one problem of life which meets us at every turn; which out of the pale of revelation is enveloped in impenetrable obscurity; and which, even with the light shed upon it by the promises of the Gospel, is by no means devoid of profound mystery, namely, the unequal distribution of suffering in the world, and the blindness with which the righteous rather than the wicked appear to be selected as its victims. This verily was a theme well worthy of the noblest composition of the noblest literature in the world to deal with. No literature could lay claim to being really sacred or divine, to have truly come from God, that did not deal with it.

The poetry of the Book of Job, however, has suffered more than any poetry of the Old Testament from the deficiencies of the translation, . . . and yet, notwithstanding the rendering which is oftentimes so inadequate, how many there are who have been enabled to discover in the book of Job the very noblest of poems; and, as it is, it is not possible to disguise the sublime beauty of such a passage as the twenty-eighth chapter and others. And, after all, it is the argument rather than the poetry that has suffered in the authorised translation. The grandeur of the plot is sufficiently manifest. The spectacle of a man of consistent and exceptional righteousness being subjected to altogether exceptional suffering, to the despair of his wife, and the dismay of his nearest friends—of his nevertheless holding fast his integrity through the strength of his faith in the righteousness of the unseen, till at last he is vindicated by the voice of God uttered through nature out of the whirlwind and the storm, showing him that if the principles of the moral government of the world are dark, those of its physical government are by no means clear, and till the tide of his prosperity returns in yet greater fulness than before, and he dies in extreme old age, full of riches and honour,—is one of the greatest interest, and fraught with lessons of the profoundest wisdom.—*The Structure of the Old Testament*. By Professor STANLEY LEATHES, M.A.



## Chapter xxix.

### SUNNY MEMORIES.

THIS chapter is a kind of spiritual inventory. Job begins to enumerate the blessings which he once had, and as he sets them down in order they seem to multiply and brighten in the process. We all know what that means. Blessings seem to brighten as they take their flight. We did not know how precious they were at the time; we were partially contented with them; probably they were all we needed just at that particular moment, but we had no special or exuberant joy in their possession; after they all vanished we began to think how truly good they were, and precious even to invaluableness. We do so with our friends now. Verily we praise the dead more than the living in more senses than one. Men whom we treat but unkindly or thoughtlessly now we shall one day speak of as wonderful men, men who deserved all confidence and honour and love: how much better rightly to esteem the blessing which is in hand which constitutes the immediate joy of life, than to neglect that blessing and only revere and value and regret it long months after it has gone! He that hath ears to hear let him hear. Let us have no more vain lamentations, for they may but express a form of hypocrisy, inasmuch as it is just possible that were the blessings to return we should set as little store by them the second time as we did the first. Let us avail ourselves of the present moment, and be kind to every one, and value and appreciate every one highly and justly and generously; thus shall we do good to ourselves, so marvellously are things constituted that we cannot allow ourselves to go out in blessing others without preparing ourselves for a redoubled blessing in our own hearts. He that watereth others shall be watered himself. With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. Your appreciation is not wasted;

it enlarges the heart that encourages it ; it purifies the lips that express it ; it returns to its source, a blessing for the man who sent it forth. Job is not speaking of romantic losses. When he sets down in his catalogue loss after loss we begin to feel that the loss was real and disastrous. He has lost what to-day we call religion. He has lost the consciousness he used to have of the divine presence and nearness and love ; he has lost the light ; in place of the great sun he seems to have a greater cloud ; he does not know where the altar is, or if he could find the rude pile no flame would burn upon it, and there would be nothing round about it to certify the divine recognition and benediction.

The first loss of Job is an infinite religious loss—

“Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me ; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness ; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle ; when the Almighty was yet with me ” (vv. 2-5).

The patriarch did not feel that the loss of religion was the gain of liberty ; he does not testify that in proportion as he got away from religious centres and religious obligations he got into freedom and light and enjoyment. Let this man's experience go for something. There is a common sophism that if we could only get rid of religion we should all be free and happy, unobscured by a fear, undeterred by a single menace. Granted that that may be our opinion, yet we must set side by side with it the testimony of men who have lost religious consciousness and gone away into more or less of melancholy, depression, gloom, and religious solitude. Who would not have expected Job to say, Now I have entered upon the real meaning of life : up to this time I have been superstitious, spending my reverence where veneration was not valued, throwing my best faculties away ; but now, having abandoned the book and the altar and the religious vow and the whole spiritual life, why, I am a man ? Job bears no such testimony. Rather he says—I want the old days back again ; they rose in brightness, they increased in glory, and when they went down at sunset the death was as precious as the birth, for it held within

it all the hope of a new morning: once I could pray, and heaven seemed to meet me half-way when I said I will supplicate the throne that is unseen; my mouth was full of song and sacred laughter, and my heart pulsed like music, and all things bore testimony to the benediction of God. Is it so with us? It will be one day if we live a neglectful life and so forfeit our religious privileges. Now and again it does seem that if we could destroy the Bible, obliterate the Sabbath, forget the Cross, escape the Church, we should spend the remainder of our lives in green pastures, in drinking wine that would exhilarate us, and in dwelling under fruitful trees, the very produce of which would drop into our open mouths and melt there and nourish us, without trouble or effort. But men come to a better mind; they long even for the old familiar tunes; they desire but one vision of the ancient times when they assembled with the people of God in the sanctuary, and kept holy-day with the great multitude, and were interested in all holy services and sacrifices. What would the flowers say, if they could speak, did the sun not come back punctually to them with his blessing? Hanging their heads on the second day they would say—Oh that it were with us as it used to be but a few hours since! We are cold, we are heart-struck, we are without joy: Oh that the sun would come back again and bless us, and we would answer his light with all our love! What would the picture say in the Royal Academy if the sun did not go before any other visitor went? Suppose he should tarry—a day, a week—and leave them there on their decorated walls? Could they speak, what would they say? Surely they would say, We are nothing without the light; we cannot be seen, we cannot show ourselves, we are not self-illuminating: oh that it were with us as it used to be! Then we could see one another; we could look across the hall, and salute one another in all the enthusiasm of mutual appreciation: we were modestly proud of our colour: but what are we without the sun? Nothing. We are not pictures; we might as well be empty canvas; it might as well be with us as if the hand of genius had never touched us; we seem now to see what the sun really is; the sun is more than mere light; light is the artist, light is the revealer, light is the great medium, the holy messenger: oh that it were with

us as when the sun filled these rich halls and made every wall eloquent with colour and suggestion!—so it is with the soul. Man cries out for the living God. For a time he is joyous enough without him in a superficial way; presently we shall hear a voice saying, “As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” We were made for God. It was meant that we should love him, and live in him, and be his sons and daughters evermore. Under any other thought we are not ourselves: we are wild men, we are decentralised, we are cut off from the mountain spring, we shall soon be dried up and withered; let us cry mightily for the days that have gone.

A wonderful thing Job says, almost incredible indeed to modern readers. We find this singular expression in the fourth verse, “As I was in the days of my youth.” Who can utter that prayer? Tell us where youth has not been misspent. Point out a man who has found in his youth all that was pure, lovely, and beautiful, and given his heart to it, and has not grown away from that youthhood which was nearly heaven. Other men have said they have been made to reap the sins of their youth: Job desires to be in his older age as he was in his early days. A sweet memory that! We are not now speaking of childhood—innocent, prattling, trustful, musical, happy, all-holiday childhood, but of a more advanced youth. Are there not some men who would evermore forget their youth if they could? It is a blot, a wound, a shame, a blasphemy. Let others take heed, and live their youth well, so that when old age comes it may return in sweet and tender memory to make old age green, vernal, flowery.

When Job lost religious consciousness he lost something that was vital, he lost companionship. He says, “The days when the Almighty was with me.” He complains of loss of light, loss of communion, loss of the divine “secret”—“when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle,”—when God hung the key upon my tabernacle wall, the key of all things,—that mysterious, marvellous, beneficent secret which is with them that fear the Lord: call it by what name you please; sympathy will do, so

will insight, prevision,—that prophetic power that sees over the intervening hills of time away into fruitful plains and gardens far beyond, yea, into millenniums. Now the secret has gone, and Job becomes a common man, who could but talk upon the topics of the day; he who was wont in his own degree to handle eternity is left with the bone and crust of time; he who once spake noble words, poems, prophecies, whose rhetoric was wisdom, whose eloquence was a revelation, now chatters the commonplaces of common men. To part with God's own secret is to part with all that makes life powerful, real, beneficent. Job had lost his companion; he had no spirit that understood him to talk to any more: when he spoke it was to unsympathising listeners, when he poured out his complaint he was pouring the river of his sorrow into the empty air. There was none that understood him; there was none that could do him good. Take care how you lose God. Let us beware how we part with our Father—the Father of our spirits. That loss cannot be expressed in words: it is the loss of self, the loss of heaven.

Job does not lower his key much when he bemoans the second loss in the cry, "When my children were about me." He had not been used to live alone. The children were so many that he became one of them; their dispositions were so varied that he became self-multiplied; he had to listen to so many tones, pleas, supplications, definitions, arguments, that he himself was enlarged by the very process of listening and replying. No man liveth unto himself. No man is really happy who is left to his own individuality. He must have another self, somewhere, in some form; it may be a self in childhood, in work, in service, in thought, but there must be another self in which every man must live, if he would live his full life, and enjoy all the advantage God intended him to reap from being. "When my children were about me:" they seemed to divide the very burden which they created: if I had difficulty with them, I had more enjoyment: when they were very little they gave me pleasure enough for a lifetime; even if they proved in after life what I did not want them to be, yet when I think of their early existence and their early gifts of joy to me, I feel as if I had at the beginning my share of heaven: would, said Job, we could all

be at home again—the grand old home! We perhaps have no palace such as Job had, but every man's home is a palace, if it be watched by love, if it be filled with prayer. Value home. Count the children one by one. When was there one too many even for the poorest man's one loaf? When did not the loaf multiply when cut by the hand of love? It will be worse than useless to lament and regret and pine and whine over things that are gone if we do not *now* make home the gladdest place on earth. To find a man's character inquire about him at home. Do not ask what he is in the market-place, or on the platform, or in the church, or what he is when he has his professional robe upon him, or when he goes forth for the purpose of cutting and being a figure in society. Read his character on the hearthstone; inquire what he is amongst his nearest ones; then advance to his dependents, and see what view they take of him; and if a man can stand that test, he need not care much what critics say, who never spent an hour with him, and who know nothing about the innermost qualities of his loving heart. Make home precious now. Make it so precious that it can never fade out of the memory. And do not imagine that home can only be made precious by great deeds, by romantic actions, by great, splendid, dramatic efforts to make one day in the year a very red-letter day. Home is made precious by little acts, thoughtful deeds, quiet attentions, patient endurances; by smile, and grip of hand, and word of cheer, by a thousand little things that go without name but all minister to the upbuilding and comforting of family life.

Then Job tells us what he was socially, and wants to be the great man he once was amongst his fellow citizens. He used to be the principal man of his time. His steps were washed with butter; and the rock poured him out rivers of oil.

"The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth" (vv. 8-10).

He was a great man then. Now everybody sees that providence is against him. It is precisely the same in modern days. Given, a man rich, prosperous, influential, quite a noble figure in the

social sphere, and it is easy to think that he is a favourite of heaven. Let him come to ill-health and poverty and abandonment of a social kind, and there will not be wanting those far-sighted owls who think that they see that God has turned from the man in anger because of the man's wickedness. But Job was not only a great man socially; he was a great man amongst the poor as well as amongst the princes—

“When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. . . . I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth” (vv. 11-17).

We may pardon a man some egotism who had done this all. He might remind himself of how the princes stood and bowed down to him, when he remembered that he was the friend of the poor, and that whenever he met oppression on the high road he rent it in twain, and left the two sundered pieces to come together again if they could. Now what Job says he was personally, religion, as represented by Christ, ought to be influentially. We cannot indeed be all these in the letter, for every man is not a Job in mental capacity or in material possessions; but the Church can be what Job was in its unity. The Church must play the Job of this twenty-ninth chapter of his book. Religion should be the greatest figure in society: it should be the great voice in council; it should represent what we find Job was in the twenty-fifth verse—“I . . . dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners.” The Church that is not all this is not Christ's Church, or if it be Christ's Church it is ungrown, undeveloped, unaware of its privileges and responsibilities. Do not let us lose the golden thought of the occasion by imagining that there was but one Job, and that when he died all the actualities and possibilities of this chapter died along with him. What the one man was the one Church may be. Imagine a Church that can say, “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because”—not, because I made great theologies, but—“because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him.” What

will come upon the Church by way of crown and honour and robe of primacy and monarchy?—"The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy."

"My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. And they waited for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain," (vv. 20-23).

There is a career for the Church! The Church is to be a friend of the poor and the helpless and the destitute; the Church is to be the terror of oppression; the Church is to be the chief figure in all the social economy. Not the Church as a piece of mechanism and organisation and institution, but the spiritual Church, the Christ-loving Church, the Church born at the cross and crowned in heaven. Where is the Church now? Meek with modesty! Where is she? She ought to be at the front. She begs to be permitted to live! She spends her life in elaborate apologies! She is edged out by all manner of rivals and competitors. We wrong the Church if we deny her the first place, and she wrongs herself if she does not claim it. Now she has to go behind, when she ought to go before; she has whispered where she ought to have thundered; she has kissed the hand of the oppressor, when she ought to have smitten his cheekbone. There is no Church! She is indeed not dead, but she sleepeth. The time of her awakening must come. Lord Jesus, come and awake her out of sleep! If she had not a public holiday in the week called Sunday she would die utterly. She lives on the advantage of a public holiday! The people have then nothing else to do, or they weary in the doing of it, so they make the Church a kind of recreation: but if the Church had not this Sunday she would be swallowed up in the muddy river of the common times. She lives upon this holiday! She does not live in the week-time; she could not live then: Art, Business, Pleasure would laugh her to scorn; the theatre could outshine the sanctuary, and the reciter of poems would put the preacher down. We cling now to this one little day in the week, and that is fast going. When that goes the Church will go, and the pulpit, and all religious organisation. Lord Jesus, thou still



dost work miracles—oh, work a miracle in thine own Church! Arouse her; vitalise her; quicken her. She ought to be first in music, in art, in literature, in science; she ought to pull down her walls, and extend her boundaries, and heighten her roof, and kill the fatted calf, and bring forth the gold ring, and the best robe, and all good things, and make her house a place of feasting and banqueting. She is getting old, and economical, and poor, and toothless, and fearful, and decrepid, and men are laughing at the ancient heroine that struggled with the lion and beat him, that lived on the mountain and grew strong on the air of the hills, that found home in the fissures of the rocks and in the caves of the earth. Now she has been brought into the city, and she is giving way under the blandishments of civilisation, the seductions of luxury and fashion. May she not be recovered from the error of her way? Then come thyself, O Christ, and “dwell as a King in the army, and as one that comforteth the mourners”!

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#### NOTE.

In chapter xxix. (a fine specimen of flowing, descriptive Hebrew poetry) Job recalls the honour in which he used to be held, and the beneficent acts which he was enabled to perform. Modesty were out of place, for he is already in the state of “one turned adrift among the dead” (Ps. lxxxviii. 5). In chaps. xxx., xxxi. he laments with the same pathetic self-contemplation his ruined credit, and the terrible progress of his disease. Then by a somewhat abrupt transition, he enters upon an elaborate profession of his innocence, which has been compared to the solemn repudiation of the forty-two deadly sins by the departed souls of the good in the Egyptian “Book of the Dead.” The resemblance, however, must not be pressed too far. Job’s morality, even if predominantly “legal,” has a true “evangelical” tinge. Not merely the act of adultery, but the glance of lust; not merely unjust gain, but the confidence reposed in it by the heart; not merely outward conformity to idol-worship, but the inclination of the heart to false gods are in his catalogue of sins. His last words are a reiteration of his deeply cherished desire for an investigation of his case by Shaddai. With what proud self-possession he imagines himself approaching the Divine Judge! In his hands are the accusations of his friends and his own reply. Holding them forth, he exclaims,—

Here is my signature—let Shaddai answer me—  
and the indictment which mine adversary has written,  
Surely upon my shoulder will I carry it,  
and bind it as chaplets about me.  
The number of my steps will I declare unto him;  
as a prince will I come near unto him (xxx. 35-37).

—*The Wisdom of the Old Testament.* By the Rev. CANON CHEYNE, M.A., D.D.

## Chapter xxx.

### CHANGES OF FORTUNE.

**J**OB has been comparing his past and his present from a personal and social point of view. Hear his words in the twenty-ninth chapter,—“The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth” (vv. 8-10). That was the past condition of affairs in Job’s social circle. He was chief, king, dominant at all times and under all circumstances. Job was the towering and overshadowing figure wherever he went. He remembered all that perhaps too vividly. Compare what you find in the thirtieth chapter—“But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock” (xxx. 1). That is the present report.

Verily Job is a man who has seen the extremes of life. One of two things must be the result of this double experience: either he will be soured, and come out of the whole process with a bitter nature, an unkind, unresponsive heart, he will shake off the very kind of people to whom he once responded benevolently and liberally; or this other thing will happen: he will be a richer man, riper, larger; he will understand human speech more perfectly, see into the condition of human life more vividly; if he shall survive this storm, he will be a man worth talking to: a new tone will come into his voice, mellow, rich, tender,—a tone with history in it, charged with the music of sympathy. Here we ought to learn a lesson. How many of us come out of our sufferings embittered, soured, resentful! We say we will bide our time, and then draw the bow and let the arrow fly where it may: we are going to be even with men; we are going to take thunder

bolts into our own hand, and sit down upon the throne of judgment. Then is affliction lost upon us. God himself—let us say it with reverence—has sown seed upon the wind or in stony places, and nothing has come of it; or the tares sown by the enemy put out the wheat sown in the providence of God, and at the last nothing is seen in all the field but poisonous weeds. We may be the better for our losses; we may be the tenderer for our afflictions; we may come out of the furnace saying, We went in the larger part of us dross, but by God's grace and wisdom and loving discipline we have come up out of the furnace all gold, meet for the master's use: "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Here we have an opportunity of working miracles; here the dumb man can speak eloquently for God: gift of argument he may have none; his speech may be marked by the utmost poverty of expression; he may fail for want of words; but his character may be so eloquent, graphic, expressive, that people will take knowledge of him that he has been with the master, that he has come home from the sanctuary to tell good news, and vindicate by solidity of life, by completeness of patience, by tenderness of sympathy, a great verbal argument for God, and providence, and redemption. We want advocates of that kind. The Church has never lacked eloquence; her trumpets have always been a thousand in number, and her trumpeters have always been strong enough to use the instruments: but her sufferers who have conquered in the strife, her brave hearts that have carried heavy burdens mile after mile, and never complained impiously,—these must come to the front, and say with simplicity but great emphasis and strength, One thing I know: nothing but the grave could have created for me a light in the valley, nothing but the almightiness of love could have protected me in the wildness of the storm.

Let us look at Job's comparison of his past and present. He speaks of the very same men, sometimes directly and definitely, and always by implication, and he says, Circumstances have developed them: I did not know them in the day of my prosperity; I thought they were all good and true, and right valiant, but now what bounds they are! What base men! I should

never have known these men but for my afflictions. So it is all through society. We never know ourselves but by our afflictions: how, then, can we know other people except by the same severe infallible test? Let a man succeed: "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself;" they will say, He **must be good or great, ingenious, inventive, have wonderful forcefulness and energy of character**; there is more in him than we at first supposed or suspected: verily he is a chosen child of God, and will go forward to enthronement and coronation. Vain babblers! They read nothing but the vulgarist print of circumstances and events; they have not that keen inward vision that reads character, purpose, moral quality. Let the same man fail, then what will the same people say? That they always prognosticated the failure: what else could be expected? Anybody whose eyes were open could see how things would eventuate,—and thus they assume prophetic dignity, as if they had known it all the time.

Circumstances develop men, reveal character, and show us the real quality of things all round. It is thus with religion itself. Any religion that is sustained by flattery or custom will come down, no matter how elaborate the creed, or how profound the claim to immediate attention. Any religion or religious institution living by patronage, fashion, custom, the spirit of the hour, will come down to ruin and to shame. So will any orthodoxy that lives upon majorities. We cannot tell righteousness by numbers. Were the test numerical, at how many points in human history would righteousness have gone down and virtue have been sent a-begging! Let us remember, then, that there is an inner quality of things, and that not until we have pierced to that innermost quality, do we know any man, faith, church, family, or institution. We must count our friends in the storm; we shall know what they are worth when we need them. What do you know about the man you praise so much? Let us hear all you know. Do you answer, He is so pleasant, so agreeable, so friendly, so social, so condescending; there are **no airs about him or sign of superior claims**? Have you ever been in real distress and invoked his aid? Have you ever attempted, honourably, to borrow money of him? Have you ever sent for him

when all the winds of heaven had seized the tower of your life and shaken it? Have you ever been in a position to say to him—I am no longer popular, or esteemed by my fellow-men: you now find me solitary and wobegone, and if you can put your hand in mine and let me feel a friend's strong grip I shall be glad? If in that hour he answered bravely, with an affirmative generosity, with a self-surrendering liberality, then grapple him to thyself with hooks of steel: he is a child of truth and of God. Men are tested by opposition. The man you find so agreeable has a piety exactly skin-deep. Refuse him his requests, oppose him in his notions, separate yourself from him in his most ardent thinking, forget to answer his letter, and the revelation will surprise you. If otherwise, then esteem him highly; write him down in the record you prize most, and which you will read in your latter days as a kind of second Bible, chronicling things that were good amongst men and helpful along all the school-road of life. The preacher must count his congregation on wet days. It is nothing to gather a crowd when the crowd can go nowhere else. It is a pitiable thing to take Sunday statistics of church-going. We must go to church or not go anywhere. Nothing else is open on Sundays. Count your flock mid-week; count them when the attractions round about are many and strenuous. Poor creature! and yet so kind he is and fond of setting down on private papers whole catalogues of friends. He says, They will support me when I am old; they will remember me when I was in my prime, when they waited for me and welcomed me with the fervour of enthusiastic love. Do not spoil his monologue: it is a generous self-deception. Love him when he is old? Need we reply to the suggestion? Remember him when he was young, radiant, tuneful, strong, leaping into the breach, leading the host? What is forgotten so soon and so completely as the preacher's influence and benediction? Here, again, we must put the other side, for blessed be God there is another side. There are people who grow old along with the preacher, and they remember all the yesterdays, and to the last are as faithful as at the first; yea, if they cannot be more faithful they are more tender, and tenderness added to faithfulness makes a great virtue.

**Job now began to know his friends and what they were**

worth. But let us be just in our judgment, and being so we cannot acquit Job altogether. He who takes notice of praise will miss it. We thought Job was taking no notice of anybody who had for him adulation, obeisance, and every expression of almost servility; we thought his chin was so high in the air that he did not see who rose, who bowed down, who passed by: it turns out now that he saw all the trick. What if we, too, see something of the whole game of life, and yet apparently in a kind of religious haughtiness walk about as though we saw nothing of it? He who notices praise, we repeat, will miss it; he will say, The papers are not so cordial, the applause was not so enthusiastic. What! then you read the columns of adulation and listened to the boisterous roar of welcome which you always expected in the crowded house? We thought you so absorbed in your work that you did not hear a single note or blast of it, and now you sit and whimper as though you had valued it supremely. He who lives upon approval will wither under neglect. What, then, are we to do? We are to serve the Lord with faithfulness; we are not to be men-pleasers; we are not to work as with eye-service, calculating upon reward and applause and abiding human friendship. Who is sufficient for these things? None. Nevertheless we must hold up the ideal. We must pray great prayers even whilst we are living unworthy lives. The prayer is the life we would live; the actual experience is the life we are able now to live. We ought not to care for human applause, otherwise we shall be setting our course accordingly. We shall say, Will this please? Will this be accounted orthodox? Will this suffice the congregation? Will this propitiate the critics? There is but one critic, and that is God. Could we live in his sight, and for his glory, and in all the inspiration of his love, whilst not defying men we should be independent of them, and whilst most pleasing God we should in the long run most satisfy all the men who are worth satisfying. Poor Job, then, was but human at the best. He reveals his own quality in thus deploring his own change of social fortune and social esteem. With all due respect for Job, it must be admitted that he did not conceal his sufferings. A wonderful gift of rhetoric was bestowed upon him. He may have been a very silent man in the days of his prosperity,

but affliction made him right eloquent in words of woe, in threnodies solemn and awful; he became the poet of grief, the very seer and sage of the school of sorrow, so that we all go to Job when we want to utter complaint or sadness or write some epitaph on departed worth and loveliness. All that grief ever needs in the way of language can be found in the book of Job. Out of that book the biggest cemetery on earth could be filled with epitaphs, with suitable monumental inscriptions and passages. He did not, then, hide his woe; he uttered it.

He brought charges against God; he says that God had forsaken him—

“I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me” (vv. 20, 21).

This is true, and not true. When Job said that God answered not his cry, Job spoke the truth; when he inferred that God would not answer his cry or could not, he did injustice to God. It may be perfectly true that God has not answered a single prayer that we have ever offered to him, and yet what if the blame be in the prayer and not in the hearer? Who thinks of fastening the controversy upon the prayer? In all the argument against the uses of prayer, who has fixed himself with deadly criticism upon the prayer? Who has not rather knocked at the door of heaven, and said, It is fastened on the inner side, and all the bleeding hands that ever knocked upon it in earnest entreaty spent their strength in vain? A truer voice says, “Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss.” Let the criticism begin at the right point, and spend itself upon the right centre, then we have no fear of the issue. Judge the earth by winter, and you will say, Thou rebel earth, thou sinning clod, thou guilty star, thy sun hath forsaken thee; he would never allow this snow and ice to lie upon thee and cover thee with this white pall if he cared for thee: thou art a sinful earth. Judge the earth by summer, and how different! a flower blooming at every corner, every pore of the earth an outlet of life and beauty. Which is the right standard of judgment? Neither. How then are we to judge? By taking both into account. God moves in circles; he sitteth upon the circle of the earth; his eternity is a circle, significant of completeness, inclusiveness,

incapability of amendment. What then must we do with all these unanswered prayers to which Job calls attention? Better blame the prayer than blame the Lord to whose mercy-seat it was addressed. We have a thousand unanswered prayers. Are there not men who can bless God that some prayers were never answered? Do we not live to correct our own supplications, so that if we had life to live over again there are some prayers we would never repeat? There is but one prayer; we find our way to that by many different roads: but the real prayer is the Lord's prayer,—not as commonly understood, but that final prayer, that Gethsemane cry—"Not my will, but thine, be done." *That* prayer is always answered. What know we as to the petty supplications Job may have addressed to the throne of grace? What if we turn the complaint back upon the suppliant and say, Thou didst not pray aright, thy heart was wrong; thou wast embittered, ungenerous, resentful, narrow-minded; thou didst not see the whole outspread purpose of love: fix thine eyes upon thyself, thou critic of God, nor charge the Almighty foolishly. There have not been wanting men of greatness and repute who have contended that God cannot be almighty or he would not allow certain evils to exist. Some of the greatest philosophers of our time have made that their creed. Speaking even reverently of God, they have said, Nothing can be clearer than whatever attributes he may possess he cannot be omnipotent, or he would destroy evil, disease, and every form of vice and mischief. The argument does not commend itself to me as sound or good in any sense. There is more than almightiness in the providence that rules us. Who could worship sheer power, naked strength? who could live if there were nought but omnipotence? "Power belongeth unto God: also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." God is not only all-mighty, he is all-wise; he is not only all-wise, he is all-patient; not only all-patient, but all-loving. We must not fix, therefore, the attention upon a single attribute, and argue from its singularity; we must not tear one attribute of the Almighty from another, and reason about it in its separateness. We ought to resent with some measure of indignation anything like a vivisection of God, a cruel and impious analysis, though done not irreverently; at the same time we must remember that God is all-mighty,



all-wise, all-loving, according to the Christian conception of him. This being the case, he does not hurl his almightiness against his universe, or universe there would soon be none, for the heavens are not clean in his sight and his angels are charged with folly. Along with almightiness—not above it, but concurrently with it, giving it atmosphere, attempering it,—we find wisdom, love, patience, grace, compassion, and viewing God thus in the completeness of his personality, we must give him time to work out his designs. In proportion to our littleness we are impatient. Ignorance cannot wait. There are men amongst us who display the very vice to which this argument is directly pointing; they want to have everything done in one little hour,—because whatever they do is done upon the surface and done for the moment; it does not take in the whole purview; it does not balance all influences, ministries, and issues of things; their action is crude, partial, and often self-defeating. God moves by a long line. He takes a long time in the development of his purpose. He sitteth in eternity, and with him a thousand years are but as one day, one day is as a thousand years. We have made a clock, but he never looks at it; we have cut up duration into moments, but the trick is ours, the philosophy of it is not in God. The All-Being can know but one time, and that is eternity; but one continuance, and that is infinity. We have ourselves, in a largely secondary degree, constructed time, and made false calculations by the very chronometers we have invented.

There are Jobs in the world; there are down-trodden righteous men; there are misunderstood children of virtue; there are saints who have apparently incurred the frown of God; there are unanswered prayers; there is a devil; there is a bottomless pit: all these things would seem to throw into doubt the almightiness of God; thus are we who accept the revelation of his word in the holy Bible, constrained to say, Wait for the end; let God take what period of duration he pleases for the accomplishment of his purposes; it is ours, children of yesterday, to wait and believe, to live in holy, loving confidence. One thing is certain, if Job lived in social opinion, social criticisms and estimations; if Job trusted to uncertain riches; if Job thought

to die in a nest because it was large and warm, he has taught us by his experience not to put our trust in these things, but to look elsewhere for security and rest. But where shall rest be found? Here we are brought by all human history, by all personal experience, by everything we see of the discipline of life, to cry great cries after the Everlasting, the Complete, the All-Blessed and All-Blessing. We are forced into our greatest prayers. We, who would palter with words and manufacture syllables and make a plaything of supplication, are made to pray, are scourged into penitential crying, are compelled to say, Can this be all, this measurable, empty thing,—call it earth or time, or load of the flesh,—can it be all? Then verily its pain is greater than itself; death is greater than life. In that mood there may come sweet gospels to us saying, Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise him: hold fast to the skirts of the Almighty and the Eternal, for even yet he may turn his kind face upon thee: wait in reverent love and patience, and thou shalt see that this little time-world is but a gate into the infinite spaces and the eternal liberties: wait thou at the gate, saying to thyself, It will soon be opened. It is always right to wait until the gate is opened from the inside; it must not be forced violently; at any moment it may open, and when it opens we shall see the explanation of every mystery, the meaning of every pain that has tortured and tried our groaning life.

## Chapter xxxi.

1. I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid? [Some think that Job's wife was now dead.]
2. For what portion of God is there [would be] from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high?
3. Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?
4. Doth not he [emphatic, meaning God] see my ways, and count all my steps?
5. If I have walked with vanity [inward falsehood], or if my foot hath hastened to deceit;
6. Let me be weighed in an even balance [in a balance of righteousness], that God may know [will know] mine integrity.
7. If my step hath turned out of the way [the narrow way of righteousness], and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands,
8. Then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out.
9. If mine heart have been deceived [befooled] by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door;
10. Then let my wife grind unto another [perform all menial offices like a slave], and let others bow down upon her.
11. For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges.
12. For it is a fire that consumeth to destruction [the same thought in Deut. xxxii. 22, 23], and would root out all mine increase.
13. If I did despise [an answer to chap. xxii. 5] the cause of my manservant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me [so slaves had rights which honest men recognised];
14. What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?
15. Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?
16. If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail;
17. Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof;
18. (For from my youth he [the fatherless] was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;)

19. If I have seen any perish for want of clothing [any wanderer without clothing], or any poor without covering ;

20. If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep ;

21. If I have lifted up [waved] my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate [in the court of justice] :

22. Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone [the charnel-bone].

23. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure [I was unable to act thus].

24. If I have made gold my hope [referring to the admonition of Eliphaz, chap. xxii. 23, 24], or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence ;

25. If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much ;

26. If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness [Job seems to have known only one kind of idolatry] ;

27. And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand :

28. This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge [probably, *my* judge, meaning God] : for I should have denied the God that is above [star-worship was a legal offence].

29. If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him :

30. Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.

31. If the men of my tabernacle said not, Oh that we had of his flesh ! we cannot be satisfied.

32. The stranger did not lodge in the street : but I opened my doors to the traveller [the wayfarer. Compare Gen. xix. 2, 3 ; Judges xix. 20, 21].

33. If I covered my transgressions as Adam [as man], by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom :

34. Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out of the door ?

35. Oh that one would hear me ! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book.

36. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me.

37. I would declare [I would readily give an account of all my actions, and meet him with alacrity and perfect confidence] unto him the number of my steps ; as a prince [conscious of inward and inalienable dignity] would I go near unto him.

38. If my land cry against me, or that the furrows likewise thereof complain [a strong impersonation to express the consequences of oppression and wrong-doing] ;

39. If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life :

40. Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

### JOB'S RETROSPECT AND PROTEST.

JOB is now winding up his wonderful parable, and is about to retire from the fray of words. It will be curious to notice how the great sufferer closes his review. Will it be as dark at the end as it was at the beginning? Can mere controversy ever illuminate the providence of God, or must God himself always dissolve the cloud which hides his love? Looking over the whole ground which we have traversed, it cannot be said that the case has been imperfectly stated: eloquence was never sublimer, frankness was never more explicit, consciousness of integrity was never more stoutly maintained. What then, can man do with any divine riddle; or how can he settle the tumult and uproar of human life? Verily man can do nothing, and this is the lesson he is meant to learn. He will not learn it by mere exhortation; he must fight his way to it. Every man must, as it were—though that is a hard word to use—eat of the forbidden tree for himself, and die in his own person. To have begun with the exhortation,—“Man can know nothing as it really is, and must wait for all divine solutions,” would have been to mistake human nature, and to waste patience and time. Men will not believe. Experience goes for next to nothing with most of us. We always think that we ourselves could do better. We see a thousand men fall, and yet we criticise them and say, If we had made the attempt certainly we should not have fallen. So we go boldly to the front, and fall down dead just as they did, and all the generations come on after us—dying, always dying. History is thus lost upon us, as we have had occasion many times to remark. We learn nothing by what happened in our neighbour's house. We have seen what has come of ill-assorted marriage or partnership, or adventurous speculation; yet we have gone and repeated the very thing, with our minds full of knowledge, and our hearts warned with ghostly advice. What, then, will the end of the review be? Simply silent despair or silent waiting.

Let us look at the kind of life Job says he lived, and in doing so let it be remarked that all the critics concur in saying that this chapter contains more jewels of illustration, of figure or

metaphor, than probably any other chapter in the whole of the eloquent book. Job is, therefore, at his intellectual best. Let him tell us the kind of life he lived; whilst he boasts of it we may take warning by it; the very things he is clearest about may perhaps awaken our distrust.

Job had tried a mechanical life:—

“I made a covenant with mine eyes” (v. 1).

The meaning of “a mechanical life” is, a life of regulation, penance, dicipline; a life all marked out like a map; a kind of tabulated life, every hour having its duty, every day its peculiar form or expression of piety. Job smote himself; he set before his eyes a table of negations; he was *not* to do a hundred things. He kept himself well under control: when he burned with fire, he plunged into the snow; when his eyes wandered for a moment, he struck them both, and blinded himself in his pious indignation. He is claiming reward for this. Truly it would seem as if some reward were due. What can a man do more than write down upon plain paper what he will execute, or what he will forbear doing, during every day of the week? His first line tells what he will do, or not do, at the dawn; he will be up with the sun, and then he will perform such a duty, or crucify such and such a passion: he will live a kind of military life; he will be a very soldier. Is this the true way of living? or is there a more excellent way? Can we live from the outside? Can we live by chart, and map, and schedule, and printed regulation? Can the race be trained in its highest faculties and aspects within the shadow of mount Sinai? Or is the life to be regulated from within? Is it the conduct that is to be refined, or the motive that is to be sanctified and inspired? Is life a washing of the hands, or a cleansing of the heart? The time for the answer is not now, for we are dealing with an historical instance, and the man in immediate question says that he tried a scheduled life. He wrote or printed with his own hand what he would do, and what he would not do, and he kept to it; and though he kept to it, some invisible hand struck him in the face, and lightning never dealt a deadlier blow.

Job then says he tried to maintain a good reputation amongst men,—

“If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out” (vv. 5-8).

That was a public challenge. There were witnesses; let them stand forth: there was a public record kept; let it be read aloud. This man asks for no quarter; he simply says, Read what I have done; let the enemy himself read it, for even the tongue of malice cannot pervert the record of honesty. Will not this bring a sunny providence? Will not this tempt condescending heaven to be kind and to give public coronation to so faithful a patron? Is there no peerage for a man who has done all this? Nay, is he to be displaced from the commonalty and thrust down that he may be a brother to dragons and a companion to owls? All this has he done, and yet he says—“My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat. My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep.” This is not what we have thought of Providence. We have said, Who lives best in the public eye will be by the public judgment most honourably and cordially esteemed: the public will take care of its servants; the public will stand up for the man who has done all he could in its interests; slave, man or woman, will spring to the master's rescue because of remembered kindnesses. Is Job quite sure of this? Certainly, or he would not have used such imprecations as flowed from his eloquent lips:—If I have done thus, and so, then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out: let my wife grind servilely unto another: let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. So then Job himself is speaking earnestly. Yet, he says, though I have done all this, I am cast into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes: though I have done all this, God is cruel unto me, and he does not hear me: I stand up, and he regardeth me not: with his strong hand he opposeth himself against me: he has lifted me up to the wind, and he has driven me away with contempt: he has not given me time to swallow down my

spittle: I, the model man of my day, have been crushed like a venomous beast. Job, therefore, does not modify the case against God. He misses nothing of the argument and withholds nothing of the tragic fact. He makes a long, minute, complete, and urgent statement. And this statement is found in the Bible! Actually found in a book which is meant to assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to man! It is something that the Bible could hold within its limits the book of Job. It is like throwing one's arms around a furnace; it is as if a man should insist upon embracing some ravenous beast and accounting him as a member of the household. These charges against Providence are not found in a book written in the interests of what is called infidelity or unbelief; this impeachment is part of God's own book.

But do not interrupt Job; let him tell us more of the tale of his life. And next we shall find him claiming to have lived a deeply beneficent life. The proof is in verses 13 to 22:

"If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (for from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone."

So Job had not lived a luxurious life at the expense of the public comfort. Job kept a large table; his feast overflowed the bounds of his house, and took in a large outside space, and there the stranger, the fatherless, and the helpless were welcome. Judged by the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, this testimony would be a passport to heaven. Compare the passage now before us with the passage in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, which shows the ground on which heaven is apportioned, and you would say, Job must go in first; no man could compete with him; rivalry is out of the question here; Job did everything with



a princely hand ; there was not a mean thought in all his intellectual range ; how to do good and to do it to the most undeserving seems to have been his supreme thought : stand back, and let Job go up to heaven first. Yet Job says there was nothing for him but shame and sorrow : he was abhorred ; his cord was loosed ; he was afflicted ; upon his right hand youth rose up, and pushed away his feet, and his path was marred. This overturns all our conceptions of a beneficent Providence. What spoils this ointment ? Who can name the dead fly that is in it ? Was it self-consciousness ? Had Job after all kept a record of what he had been doing ? Did he put down in the twilight of evening all the good things he had done during the day ? Was he self-congratulatory as well as self-condemnatory ? Did he in effect write every day at the foot of the page in his diary, Behold, how good a man I am : when these words are read after my death all the world will be amazed at my munificence and philanthropy ? Was this an investment ? Was this a plume worn only upon ornamental occasions ? Did Job say, I will have my horse ready, and if any challenge be made as to my reputation you will find me at the front, well-mounted, white-plumed, going right out at the head of the procession, challenging the loudest, meanest, most malignant critic to tell his tale, and I will devour him as he proceeds in his vicious accusation ? The people in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew were surprised to hear how good they had been. Not a word did they say about themselves. They were told they had been beneficent, and they said, We have no recollection of it. Is it possible for men to be laying up good works, hardly knowing that they are doing so ? Is there after all a papal doctrine of supererogation written in every heart ? Is there a temptation which says, If you do double good to-day you may take fine holidays with the devil to-morrow ? We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Do we ever go to the bank of our beneficence and draw upon it, that with its sacred wealth we may feast at the devil's table ? We can but put these questions to ourselves, thrust them into ourselves like two-edged swords. Do we buy ourselves off for the week by going to church on Sunday ? Do we make bargains with Fate ? Do we whisper to that great Force—whatever it be, God or Fate, Jehovah, Jove, or Lord—and say, Take this, and allow me a little more liberty ?

No man may answer these questions, because no man can reply to them without cutting himself to pieces. Yet it is well to put them searchingly to the heart, to strike the heart dumb: well to take the hymn sometimes from our lip, to strike it speechless, that the mouth may learn to utter condemnation as well as praise. Still, there is the mystery. Do not try to lessen it, to modify it, to evade it. It stands before us as a fact, that men have prayed, and have been smitten down at the altar; men have done good, and have been left with an empty hand; saints have been tried by fire. All this must be cleared up, and no doubt all this will be elucidated; in the meantime we lose nothing by looking at the mystery in all its proportions, in all its darkness—yea, in all its apparent cruelty. Who are the sick to-day? Do we find any real Christians amongst the poor? Are there honest souls that hardly know where to get the next mouthful of bread? Are there lives, that appear to be lived for others, by way of example, they having to endure all the excruciating pain, and to be lifted up, whilst others look, and wonder, and learn?

Then Job says he was not only living a mechanical life and a beneficent life, and trying to maintain a good reputation amongst men, but he was constant in his religious fidelity.

“If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge” (vv. 26-28).

Job knew of only one kind of idolatry. He seems not to have been learned in the idolatrous corruptions of the time. It was a beautiful idolatry. What act could be so nearly religious as to fall down before the sun, and hail that majesty of light with hymn, and psalm, and praise, sometimes so intense as to be mute? If any man may be forgiven idolatry, surely he will be forgiven who saw in the sun a kind of deity. Or, Job said, If I have kissed my hand to the moon—fair moon, leaf of purity, banner of heaven, most lovely of all the night-shining ones—if I have done this, I am willing to be punished: but I have never played the Babylonian idolater, I have never followed sun or moon, I have been constant in my aspirations after the living God; and yet the men who have beheld the sun, and nightly kissed their hands to the moon, are rich and fat and strong,

and I am a heap of corruption. Surely God has not been careful to maintain his supremacy by patronage of those who have believed in him! He has not supported his throne by always crowning those who acknowledged it and received their laws from it; that is to say, judging between given points of time, they in some cases seem to have been the despised and rejected of men. Yet—let us repeat, for there is something of the nature of an argument in the admission—all this is found in the Book of God! What a clearing-up there will be! When the sun does come he will shine in his strength. Meanwhile, the night is seven-fold in darkness; no candle of men's lighting can have any effect upon this gloom: surely some new sun must be created to dissolve this night and restore the dawn. But believing as we do in God, we have confidence in the end. "Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." But who can tell how the light will come? Will a sun be sent, or will God come himself? Are there occasions in history in which preacher, minister, priest, officer, annotator, must all stand back, whilst God takes the case into his own hands, and speaks audibly to those who have been long waiting for the revelation of his law?

Job, however, reserves the severest point to the last; he calls God "his adversary." We never thought that he could have done that. He began by saying, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"; but now he calls God his foe, his enemy, and he says, "My desire is that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book." How often is this text misapplied! How often is it made almost to point a jest? What does the suffering patriarch want? He wants the case written down that he might have it examined in some court of justice. He is dealing with anonymous charges. He says in effect, Would that God would state in plain terms what he has against me, for I do not know what he can have against his servant: I have never wandered from him, I have never worshipped sun, or moon; I have been kind to the poor, gracious to the friendless, my house has been an open house to every traveller who cared to come that way and take its bread; I have attended to my morals, I have been scrupulous

about my conduct ; I have written a law for my eyes, my hands, my feet : oh that mine adversary, accuser, judge, punisher, would write a book, would put down upon a scroll in plain letters that I could read what it is that has come between him and me! Yes, there we all sometimes stand. We cannot tell what it is that we have done. We go over our prayers and say, They were at least well meant if not well expressed. We review our Church relations, and say, We have been faithful to our bonds and obligations and promises ; we have loved the house of God, and longed for the opening of its gates: and now, behold what a black procession comes into the house—loss, pain, poverty, affliction many-coloured and many-shaped, and death : were the charge written in black ink upon white paper we could see it, and measure it, and answer it ; but it is the air that accuses us, it is the darkening heaven that fills us with dismay ; it is an anonymous contempt under which our soul withers. So we will not diminish the mystery one whit ; we will read it as an infidel might read it in all the letters which are before us by way of historical statement. We will not speak it as if it were some light thing, frivolous in its suggestions and easily borne as to its penalties. We will read it as an unbeliever might read it : we will read it with a vicious accent ; we will exhaust our ingenuity of emphasis, in order to make out this mystery in all its bulk and blackness. Better it be so. The answer is not in diminishing the mystery, but in bringing to bear upon it such light as will banish it, drive it away like a shadow that seems to be afraid.

" God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform ;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm."

Every age has seen this. Faith has had no easy time of it. There have always been innumerable stones lying at hand which men could throw at faith. Here the mystery rests. Wait awhile. Perhaps the patriarch may yet sing, and rejoice, and bless God loudly in the hearing of all people.

## Chapter xxxi. 40.

"The words of Job are ended."

### ENDED WORDS.

WHAT have they come to? What can words come to at any time? What lies within the scope of the most eloquent controversy? Yet the Almighty permits us now and again to talk ourselves right out. By no other method can he teach us so clearly and effectually how little we can do for ourselves when we come face to face with the great and solemn mysteries of life. Observe, we can speak; we have that sometimes unhappy and fatal gift. Notice also how providence arranges for us opportunities of telling all we know, speaking all we think, and arguing about all the facts which lie within our cognisance. The question is, What does it amount to? The great wind of controversy has passed: what is left behind? The facts are very much where the speakers found them.

Observe the limit of words; and see how difficult it is for us to accept that limit as indicating a providential design and a method of instruction. How eloquently the comforters began after their seven days' silence! They opened well. Truly they were gifted speakers. There was no want of language. Now the whole speech has been made—many-coloured, many-toned—what does it come to? How soon we reach the point of agnosticism! Yet agnosticism is paraded before us as quite a new invention, something perfectly novel, and not without a certain degree of bewitchment to certain peculiarly constituted minds. We do not come upon that point in theology only. We soon come upon it in materialism. We see nothing as it really is. There is a point of agnosticism in the plainest piece of wood we ever had in hand. The philosophers themselves acknowledge this. They do not claim to be agnostics only in theology,

or in spiritual thinking, or in metaphysics of any name or degree: they say plainly, We are also agnostics in matter: we do not know everything in the wood we handle and in the stone we tread upon. Surely this is not the very last idea in Christian or general civilisation. This supposedly novel idea runs through the Bible from end to end. We see a notable illustration of its action in this controversy as between Job and his three friends. We cannot call them ineloquent men, and say, Had your gift of words been greater, your discoveries would have been larger and brighter. We have been amazed at the copiousness and dignity of their eloquence; yet when such speakers have ended, what has all the conference amounted to?

Notice the despair of words as well as their limit. All has come to nothing. Yet how many weapons have been used, and used with masterly skill! They were not inexperienced controversialists; they represented the highest debating power of their age. We might name some of the weapons in order to assure ourselves that nothing was wanting in the armoury: there was eloquence, abundant; self-accusation, tipped with criticism,—an accusation that spared no feeling, that could not be turned aside by any pity or clemency or regard for human sensitiveness; a style of impeachment that struck right home. The men were not afraid to tell Job what an evil life he must have lived, and on Job's part there was abundant self-defence. All the weakness he suffered in his body did not prevent him, so to say, standing mentally erect and returning blow for blow every charge that was made against him. He held to his integrity. He was skilled, too, in recrimination. He did not allow the *tu quoque* argument to remain unused. He was as skilled a fencer as any of his friends. And now the whole fray is over what does it amount to? This point may be worth insisting upon as showing how little can be done by words, even in argument, in persuasion, in the counter-action of sophistical reasoning, and in the education of prejudiced minds. Have we not had sufficient argument in the Church? Is it not now time we took to some other course—mayhap of action, or dignified suffering, to the cultivation of fraternal sentiments, to the expression of religious solitudes? **Is it not time to cease the argument and begin the mighty prayer?**

What has ever been settled by words? The settlement has been momentary, has been expediential, has been of the nature of compromise too often. Whoever had exactly the same meaning attached to the same word, when it came to argument as between two men or two typical sets of mind? Silence is sometimes more eloquent than speech, and prayer is often mightier than controversy. It must always be allowed that there must be individuality of speech; that every man is, so to speak, his own interpreter of his own words; that we do not understand the speech until we understand the speakers; that we know nothing of the words until we know the very soul of the man who uttered them. Here, then, must be liberty, so long as it does not infringe the rights of integrity, absolute consecration to the very spirit and genius of truth. How pleasant is this silence! Now we can look back and review, and estimate, and infer, and conclude about things, with all the evidence before us.

See what it is to endure unexplained misery. Job was doing this. He was unaware of the concert or compact which had been entered into at the beginning of the book which records his experience. So long as we can trace causes we find in that very tracing some elements of comfort. When we can explain how it is that we have come to pain, loss, sorrow, we fall back upon the explanation, and turn it into a species of solace: but the unexplained miseries of life make us tremble as with a double distress,—first the actual pain of bodily or mental suffering, and, secondly, the mysteriousness which is ever coming round about us, descending upon us, and touching our imagination as with the sting of fire. When not one sound can be heard in the still night, and yet in the morning the tower of life is found rent, yea, thrown down in one shapeless ruin, the very silence of the process adds to the pain of the result. Could we have felt the shock of an earthquake, could we have seen the flying thunderbolt, could we have heard the mighty tearing tempest, we should have said, The downfall of the tower is no mystery: verily it can be accounted for precisely and completely: what could survive the storm which raged in the night-time? But all was quiet: the night was never more silent: not a voice could be heard, not the faintest breeze seemed to be stirring; and yet

the tower has fallen down. Are there not men who are enduring unexplained miseries? We should have said, looking upon them from the outside, They do not deserve all this discipline: surely some great mistake is at the root and bottom of all this difficulty; the men are sober, honest, upright, God-fearing; they sanctify every morning with prayer, and they pass into their rest every night with a hymn of praise upon their lips; and yet they suffer like lepers; they are impoverished, baffled, disappointed: who can explain this great sorrow? There is nothing romantic in the history of Job. In the mere letter, in the transient colour of the occasion, there may be a good deal that is special or unique, but in the substantial meaning of the history we ourselves can sympathise with Job: for who can tell how that great loss was incurred? Who can explain the sorrow that fell upon us so swiftly and shut out all God's bright sky? We have criticised our history, examined ourselves clearly and unsparingly; our scrutiny has been pushed almost to the point of cruelty, and yet we have not been able to detect an adequate reason for all this sudden gloom and overwhelming judgment; and if through the cloud we have cried, Oh, that we could tell why this distress has fallen upon us! God has not chided us for expressing a wonder that is religious, a surprise ennobled by reverence. See Job, then, living a life of unexplained misery. We cannot account for Job's misery by the general law of apostacy. We might say, All men have sinned, and Job is only enduring the proper rewards of sin. That reasoning proves too much, and therefore proves nothing. There is a point of speciality as well as a point of generality in human experience. If this be the general law of human apostacy, then why were there comforters as well as a comforted man? why were they not in the same state? Why not all moaning because of a common sorrow? We must beware how we attempt to meet specific cases by merely general laws. Such an application of general laws divests our speech of that sweetest of all music, the tone of sympathy,—unless indeed it seal our lips in silence, or reduce us to the necessity of saying, We also endure the same pain, for we are in the same condemnation.

**See how man can be talked to by comforters who do not**



understand him. The three comforters were well-disposed, but they were not on the same level; they were kindly in spirit, but they were wanting in similarity of experience. Only he can exhort to courage who has himself felt the need of such exhortation. Only he can sympathise who has suffered. The sufferer knows when the really sympathetic voice is addressing him. Somehow it is not in the words that the sufferer finds the truest comfort, but in the words as spoken by a particular tone: the words themselves may be right, may be chosen from the very volume of inspiration, but if they be not uttered with the tenderness of simplicity, with the ardour of a fellow-feeling, with all the music of remembered pain, they will fail of their happiest effect. Here is the power of the pulpit. The man who preaches must be the man who has suffered: then he will preach well,—not, perhaps, according to some canon of preaching as laid down by mechanicians and formalists, but well in the sense of touching the inner line of experience, now and again coming down with gracious power upon special suffering, unique necessity; and the common people will hear the preacher gladly, because he knows how broken is the human heart, how self-helpless is the general spiritual condition of man. Now there have been comforters who have sought to address the distressed. We know their modern names. We do not resent their approach, but we know in a moment that they do not understand us. They do not speak our language. If they speak the words of our mother tongue, they speak them with a foreign accent. But these very words they often decline to use. Has not Science come to speak with some measure of comforting to the world? Let us hear what it has to say. What is the disqualification of science for speaking to the common experience of the human heart? It is wise, it is learned, it abounds in information; yet when it attempts to comfort the world it fails. Why? Because science has never had a broken heart. What, then, can it do to broken hearts? It speaks loftily, it sets its mouth against the heavens; it hardly ever speaks but in ponderous polysyllables: but science never cried, science was never blinded with tears, science has not lived the life of sorrow, and therefore taken up the language of sorrow. Herein the Son of God stands without rival or equal or approach; when we hear him we wonder at the gracious words which

proceed out of his mouth ; we say, What wisdom, what tenderness, what pathos, what knowledge of the human heart ! oh ! never man spake like this man : continue thy healing speech, oh thou Saviour of the world ! Then Political Economy has come to rectify us and to comfort us : but political economy never buried a child, political economy never dug a grave. Let it deal with averages, with supply and demand, and with comings, and goings of produce ; let it elaborate all its calculations, and we shall be thankful for what measure of help it can render to the living of this multitudinous life ; but when it comes to darkness, sorrow, bereavement, heart-ache, how dumb the thing is ! It cannot speak to such agony ! See it gathering up all its papers and calculations, and hastening away affrighted because of the heart-break that came for one moment into the darkened human face. And Philosophy has come to adjust our relations, and to account for our condition, and to supply a high basis of reasoning : but philosophy never had a guilty conscience. Philosophy also talks well. Indeed all these comforters are gifted speakers. But how well they look ! Not one of them ever had a head-ache that sprang from real pain of heart ; when they have been weary it has been with high intellectual pursuit, and they will soon recruit their energy and renew their youth. With what dignity they walk ! They have never been bowed down with burden-carrying of the kind which the heart knows but too well. Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar,—and Science, and Political Economy and Philosophy, if you so please to change their names—are gifted ; yea, they are not without genius itself ; they are noble-minded, they are welcomed and honoured within proper limits : but they do not know what a guilty conscience is—that fire within which will not allow the life one moment's rest. So then, in asking for comfort we must always insist upon a similar experience as the necessity of fundamental, complete, and permanent sympathy. Where do we find this similar experience ? Nowhere so fully as in the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ : there it grows like a flower in its native soil ; there all men may listen to profit and edification. We are well aware that there are times when this sympathy is not needed ; when men are young, radiant, hopeful, successful ; when wherever they walk flowers spring up in their footprints : what do they want

with sympathy? They want high converse, intellectual dignity, philosophic speculation. That is right. The pulpit has nothing to say in condemnation of one set of circumstances being met by a similar set of circumstances: nay, that is the very point of our immediate argument, that similarity is essential to true fellowship. Now comes the Job period: the wind has struck down the house, all the sons are dead, all the cattle taken away; the flesh smitten with sore diseases, the very breath turned into a vapour of corruption, the whole life become a burden, a pestilence, a living pain: now who can speak? Given a world in which there is no experience, and you have given a world in which you need no New Testament; but dealing with facts as they are, and as we know them to be, and as we represent them, we are aware that there are moments in human life when no man dare speak to us but one who has been sent from God. Here, let me repeat, is the power of the Church, the power of the Bible, the power of the true ministry—a human ministry, rich with human sympathy, quick with human sensitiveness, and yet baptised, yea, saturated with the very spirit of the Cross of Christ.

Here is a man also who is representing in his own individual experience an aspect of the providence of God which could not be otherwise made clear. There are various kinds of what may be called vicarious suffering. What if sometimes one man has to suffer in a way which can teach the whole race what suffering really is, and to what sources of consolation suffering should retire? God may be using some men for the illustration of personal integrity. Each sufferer should say, Perhaps God is teaching the world through me: all this calamity has not fallen upon me personally because of immediate sin, but through me God is revealing his providence and kingdom; he is saying in effect, This is the child of my family who can best represent this particular aspect of discipline: many other children have I, but this one could show best what it is to suffer and be strong, to have no day but only night in the weary, weary life, and yet all the time to be able to show a faith which never falters, and to glorify God in sevenfold darkness. Perhaps some of our suffering may be used for this public purpose. We may be called to preach illustratively. We may have no words; we may be

without argument, or learning, or power of exposition, and yet by suffering, as if in fellowship with Christ, we may be revealing to other men sources of truth undiscovered and unsuspected by them. Let us, then, take the largest view of life, and not the smallest; let us bring in the whole to assist the part; let us bring within our purview the great field of time in order to illustrate the immediate moment.

The sublime lesson is that we need some one who understands us all and who can talk to us all. The preacher, be he ever so able, can often but speak to one class of mind, but the Son of God can speak to all mankind, to men, to women, to little children, to learned scribe, and rabbi, and pompous Pharisee, to self-smiting publican, and wandering woman, and wondering little child. The Son of God can confound the wisdom of the wise, and take the crafty in their own net, and send them away crestfallen, wondering that they have been in the presence of one who overwhelmed them with a new and uncalculated dignity. And little children can be with him, so that they want to come back again, and remain there always, for never saw they so sweet a smile, never felt so gentle a touch, never looked upon such a face. We bear witness to this. We have been in many moods, but never found Jesus Christ unequal to them. Sometimes men have been intellectual; they have felt a conscious elevation of mental faculty, so that really they began to think they could do something in pure intellect, and when they came to the Son of God they found that his sayings were unfathomable and his suggestions were infinite philosophies. They have said so; they have uncovered themselves in the presence of the great Teacher, and said with reverence, Lord, evermore give us this bread. Sometimes we have been blinded with tears; we could not read our own mother's handwriting; we could see nothing but threatening clouds: then the Son of God has spoken to us, and soon the rain was over and gone, the voice of the turtle was heard in the land, and the soul rejoiced with gladness celestial. We have gone to him when we had none other to go to, and he has opened his heart-door to its full width, and made us welcome to the heaven of his peace. We have tottered to him from the churchyard, where we have laid all that was dearest and had nothing left;

then in our weariness, and reeling, and deprivation, and darkness we have groped for him, and found him, and he has not let us go until he has enriched us with a new hope, and made us strong with a new comfort. We have not read this, or you might dash the book out of our hands; we have felt this, known this. To destroy its power you must destroy our recollection. To take away this evidence of Christ's deity, sonship, priesthood, you must first destroy our consciousness. Let those who have profited by Christ speak for their Lord. Let those who have been benefited by his word and thought and comfort, stand up and say so. The enemy is bold with impertinence and defiance: let the friends of Christ be bold with reverence and thankfulness.

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#### NOTE.

In the third dialogue (xxii.—xxxii.) no real progress is made by Job's opponents. They will not give up, and cannot defend, their position. Eliphaz (xxii.) makes a last effort, and raises one new point which he states with some ingenuity. The station in which Job was formerly placed presented temptations to certain crimes; the punishments which he undergoes are precisely such as might be expected had those crimes been committed; hence he infers they actually were committed. The tone of this discourse thoroughly harmonises with the character of Eliphaz. He could scarcely come to a different conclusion without surrendering his fundamental principles, and he urges with much dignity and impressiveness the exhortations and warnings which in his opinion were needed. Bildad has nothing to add but a few solemn words on the incomprehensible majesty of God and the nothingness of man. Zophar, the most violent and least rational of the three, is put to silence, and retires from the contest.

In his two last discourses Job does not alter his position, nor, properly speaking, adduce any new argument, but he states with incomparable force and eloquence the chief points which he regards as established (xxvi.). All creation is confounded by the majesty and might of God; man catches but a faint echo of God's word, and is baffled in the attempt to comprehend his ways. He then (xxvii.) describes even more completely than his opponents had done the destruction which, as a rule, ultimately falls upon the hypocrite, and which he certainly would deserve if he were hypocritically to disguise the truth concerning himself, and deny his own integrity. He thus recognises what was true in his opponent's arguments, and corrects his own hasty and unguarded statements. Then follows (xxviii.) the grand description of Wisdom, and the declaration that human wisdom does not consist in exploring the hidden and inscrutable ways of God, but in the fear of the Lord, and in turning away from evil. The remainder of this discourse (xxix.—xxxii.) contains a singularly beautiful description of his former life, contrasted with his actual misery, together with a full vindication of his character from all the charges made or insinuated by his opponents. Thus ends the discussion, in which it is evident both parties had partially failed. Job has been betrayed into very hazardous statements, while his friends had been on the one hand disingenuous, on the other bigoted, harsh, and pitiless. The points which had been omitted, or imperfectly developed, are now taken up by a new interlocutor (xxxii.—xxxvii.) Elihu. [See note, *post*, p. 328.]—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

## Chapter xxxii.

### THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.

#### I.

**T**HIS is the beginning of Elihu's declaration. It is quite a new voice. We have heard nothing like this before. So startling indeed is the tone of Elihu that some have questioned whether his speech really forms part of the original poem, or has been added by some later hand. We deal with it as we find it here. It is none the less welcome to us that it is a young voice, fresh, charming, bold, full of vitality, not wanting in the loftier music that is moral, solemn, deeply religious. It appears, too, to be an impartial voice; for Elihu says—I am no party to this controversy: Job has not said anything to me or against me, therefore, I come into the conference wholly unprejudiced: but I am bound to show my opinion: I do not speak spontaneously; I am forced to this; I cannot allow the occasion to end, though the words have been so many and the arguments so vain, without also showing what I think about the whole matter. Such a speaker is welcome. Earnest men always refresh any controversy into which they enter: and young men must speak out boldly, with characteristic freshness of thought and word; they ought to be listened to; religious questions are of infinite importance to them: sometimes they learn from their blunders; there are occasions upon which self-correction is the very best tutor. It is well for us to know what men are thinking. It is useless to be speaking to thoughts that do not exist, to inquiries that really do not excite the solicitude of men. Better know, straightly and frankly, what men are thinking about, and what they want to be at, and address oneself to their immediate pain and necessity. Elihu will help us in this direction.

"Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu . . . against Job was his wrath kindled. . . . Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled" (vv. 2, 3).

Elihu is full of wrath. This is right. Wrath ought to have some place in the controversies of men. We cannot always be frivolous, or even clever and agile in the use of words, in the fencing of arguments; there must be some man amongst us whose anger can burn like an oven, and who will draw us away from frivolity, and fix our minds upon vital points. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath"; "Be ye angry, and sin not." There is a holy anger. What can make men so wrathful as to hear preachers, leaders, teachers, writers giving the wrong answers to the burning questions of the time? We shall have more hope of the Church when men become more wrathful about the words that are spoken to them. The pulpit will respond to the impatience of the heart when it will not follow the lead of the arbitrary intellect. Who can sit still and hear men's deepest questions treated lightly? Here it is that wrath comes to fulfil its proper function. It will not ask little questions, it will not be content with superficial replies; it says in effect, You do not understand the disease; you are crying Peace, peace; when there is no peace, or you are daubing the wall with untempered mortar: silence! ye teachers of vanity and followers of the wind. Anything is better in the Church than mere assent, indifference, neglect, intellectual passivity, the sort of feeling that has no feeling, mere decency of exterior, and a cultivation of patience which is only anxious to reach the conclusion. Let us have debate, controversy, exchange of opinion, vital, sympathetic conference one with another; then we shall know the true meaning, and the real depth and urgency of human want, and be sent back to find solid and living answers to the great cries of the soul.

How courteously the young man dismisses the old form of teaching.

"I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (vv. 6, 7).

The old might be dismissed with some dignity. A time does come in human teaching when we pass from one set of teachers to another; but in passing to the higher range of teachers we need not be uncivil to the men who have told us all they knew, and who have brought their religious knowledge up to

date. We cannot live in to-morrow; we cannot now speak the language that will be spoken in the Church fifty years hence: all we can do is to make one another welcome to our present acquisitions, and our present information, and our present sympathy. We do not claim finality for these things; we say in effect, This is all we know to-day: if we knew more, we would speak more; but knowing only this, we have only this to tell. Why sneer at the old theologians? They worked much harder than many work who are endeavouring to bring them into contempt. Why smile with a species of patient complacency upon the long-laboured theological treatises of the men of the seventeenth century? If they lived now they would speak the language of the day, they would adapt themselves to the methods of the day; but they did all that in their power lay, and really if we are going to leave them, what if we show some sign of civility, courtesy, indebtedness, thanking the men who went so far and saying to them, You would have gone farther if you could: in God's name we bless you, for you have done all that lay in your power? This is not the way with men. The old preacher is often turned off uncivilly; he is said to be out of date, not to be abreast with the times, to have fallen astern; he has had his day, and he must be content to sit down. That is rough talk; that is uncourteous treatment. You would hardly treat a horse so, that had won many a race or served the family many a year: you would find some kind of suitable pasture for the dumb beast; you would remember how fiery and capable he once was, and would not deny him what is appropriate for his old age. Let us be thankful to our teachers who have spoken earnestly all they knew, and hail the young and new teachers with enthusiasm, only withholding our confidence until they have established their claim to it.

Elihu takes solid ground when he says:

"There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (v. 8).

Inspired instinct is greater and trustier than cultivated intellect. Let nature speak. Let all that is deepest in you have full expression. We so often talk up through the burden of our information, acquisition, attainment of any and every kind. We are kept back



by the very fact that we may possibly be offending something that is written in the books. We more frequently go by the book than by the soul. By "the book" we do not mean the Book of Revelation, but the man-made book; the traditional system, doctrine, or thought; the scientific form: we are afraid lest we should offend there; and so inspired instinct has not fair play in this great process of spiritual education. If our instinct, being inspired, had fair, free, ample utterance, it would put an end to many a wordy fray. What does inspired instinct declare? Hearing men arguing grammatically about salvation, settling doctrine upon mere grammatical accuracy, building churches upon declensions of substantives or conjugations of verbs, inspired instinct says, My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer, and ye have made it a den of pedants. Inspired instinct says, with a warmth that is itself argumentative, It cannot be that God has fixed the eternal destiny of men upon niceties of grammar. Are then such niceties to be despised? Certainly not. Is the letter of no consequence? The letter is of great consequence: it has its place, a large and most useful place; but it is not to that suggestion that inspired instinct makes reply, it is to the suggestion that unless you are a grammarian you cannot be a penitent, unless you can parse a sentence you cannot receive a gospel. Elihu was right in urging this view of the case, and in urging it he did not for a moment dispossess the grammarian of his proper position as a teacher and guide: rather he would say to him, We are obliged to you for what you have done, but the Bible is within the Bible, the truth is within the words of its expression, the thing signified is within the sign, or is beyond the sign, and under all circumstances is greater than the sign. The soul must answer in great vital controversies, in which eternity is involved. Inspired instinct says right boldly, as a mother might say it when her holiest anger is flaming,—God cannot have chosen to save a few men, and let the others go to perdition. In vain to quote to inspired instinct chapters and verses, which some grammarians have settled in one way and other grammarians have settled in another way: the soul puts them all aside, and thinks of God, the eternal, the loving, the all-creating; the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to save it; and when the soul is wrought up into

that fine mood of divinest sympathy, it is simply in vain that you tell it that God has chosen a few men here and a few men there out of whom to make his invisible and triumphant Church, and all the rest are doomed to eternal fire. Inspired men who allow their souls fair play say, Whatever difficulties there may be in the grammar of this matter, there is something deeper than etymology, syntax, and prosody, "there is a spirit in man," and although that spirit may not be eloquent in the use of theological phrases, yet it says to all such suggestions, That cannot be: God is love: he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner; his perpetual cry is, Turn ye! turn ye! why will ye die?—and inspired instinct continues, I know there are hard-looking texts, but you must have misunderstood them: you are trying to open the lock with the wrong key; you are using violence instead of ingenuity; you have forced your theology; you have not grown it like a plant in the garden of God. Inspired instinct cannot maintain all this in words; it has a kind of motherly way of saying, You may beat me in argument, but you are wrong in theory; your words are very ponderous and pompous, but somewhere and somehow I feel you are wrong if you damn a single human creature, and charge the damnation upon the sovereignty of God. So there is a place for the young voice, the impartial voice, the wrathful spirit, the inspired instinct: let us hear them all, and consider well what they have to say. The processes of an argument may themselves be sound, but the result may be a moral error. The syllogism may be absolutely without flaw or fault; men may stand before it and say, Yes, that is logic; the three members hang together, and cannot be dissociated. So they do; but the premises are wrong. Granting the premises, the syllogistic form is right, complete, unanswerable: but the thing assumed is a lie, therefore the conclusion is a blasphemy. Our assault, therefore, must be made not upon a form but upon a false assumption; not upon something that cannot be challenged, but upon that underlying fallacy which the soul alone can detect, in its highest movements, in its sublimest affections and ecstasies.

There is no reason why the listener, the so-called layman, should not have his word, when all the professional preachers, and advisers, and comforters have finished the empty nothing

they had to say. We must have the truth from some quarter. "Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say" (v. 11.)—and now I can bear it no longer. Let the pew speak when the pulpit cannot handle the occasion. This truth we must establish, that somebody must tell us really what God means in his communications with the human race. A man does not necessarily know what God means because he happens to stand on an eminent place in the church, as for example, a pulpit, or a platform, or within the shadow of the holy altar. We must know what right he has to be there by the speech he makes. What is it? Does it touch the reality of the case? Is he coming into the holiest places of the heart, and discussing the most solemn questions of life? Does he bring with him burning oil or healing balm? Does he speak in the tone of experience, or in the tone of mere adventure and conjecture? When it is ascertained that he has not given the right answer to a multitude of men gathered around him, somebody ought to stand up and say, The wrong answer has been given; the right answer is this——. Then let us hear it, consider it, and form an estimate of its value. Who told the laymen of the Church that they had no right to speak? Who imposed silence upon listeners beyond a given point? Where is the infallibility of official speech? Men who sit in pews and keep up churches, and are yet sure that the right word is not spoken, ought, by speech or by writing, by conversation or by open declaration, to tell us what the mistake is, and to express in unequivocal language what it is that is tearing their souls and beclouding all their prospects. An earnest listener will make an earnest preacher, or the preacher must sit down and let the earnest listener speak out of his soul, however incorrectly as to words, and tell us what human nature feels, and needs, and longs for, with supreme desire.

A time is coming when the old way of putting things must give way to some new method. But if the old are not always wise, the young are not always complete. We live in a time of doctrinal change. There is now an opportunity for an Elihu whose wrath is divinely kindled to make the great progress in attempting the higher education of the soul. Elihu must come;

when he does come he will be killed : but another Elihu must take his place, and go forward with the work until the enemy is tired of blood, and lets the last Elihu have a hearing. We may change forms without changing substances. Personally I do not know one grand fact in the evangelical faith that needs to be changed at all, unless it be in the mere method of stating it. I feel more and more that all the evangelical faith is right. Many criticisms are passed upon it ; many a rough handling it has to undergo ; many an outwork has been taken ; many a sentinel has been surprised and shot : but within it is pure as the love of God, large as the pity of heaven, responsive as the bosom of a mother to the cry of a helpless child. Let us allow that new methods of stating old truths are perfectly legitimate. Let us not condemn a man who resorts to novel expressions, if he does not injure the substance of the thing which he intends to reveal.

Take, for example, the doctrine of Prayer. The doctrine of prayer has been mocked, or misunderstood, or imperfectly stated. Every man must state this doctrine for himself. Only the individual man knows what he means by prayer. There is no generic and final definition which can be shut up within the scope of a lexicon. Who can define prayer once for all ? Only the Almighty. Every suppliant knows what he means when he prays to his Father in heaven. He must not be overloaded with other men's definitions ; they will only burden his prayer ; they will only stifle the music of his supplication. Each soul knows what it means by living, earnest, fervent prayer. What mockery has been poured upon the doctrine of praying to God for help ! Suppose we say, Prayer is good in cases of sickness, but it stops short at surgery. What a wonderful thing to say ! wonderful because of its emptiness and vanity. Yet how inclined we are to smile when we are told that prayer is exceedingly good in the removal of nervous or imaginary diseases, but prayer always stops short at surgery ; prayer never prayed a man's limb back again to him when he had once lost it. As well say, Nursing is very good, but it always stop short at death. So it does ; so it must. As well say, Reaping is very good, but reaping always stops short at winter. That is true, and that is right. "That which is lacking cannot be numbered." Law must have

some reasonableness, or it ceases to be law : when it loses its reasonableness it loses its dignity and the power of getting hold upon the general judgment and the personal trust of men. Even miracles themselves might be played with, turned into commonplaces, debased into familiarities utterly valueless. Prayer may and does stop short at surgery, but love itself has a point at which it stops short; the living air has a point at which it falls back, so to speak, helplessly; all the ministries of nature stop short at assignable points, saying that without assent and consent and co-operation on the other side no miracle can be done. In all these cases consider reasonableness and law, and the necessity of boundary and fixture in the education and culture of mankind. Then, again, others would deprive prayer of what many have considered to be an essential feature. In order to maintain what doctrine of prayer they may have, they are only too glad to eliminate it of the element of petition. They are not unwilling to have aspiration, a species of poetical communion with the Invisible, but they would complete a great work of eradication in the direction of request, petition, solicitation; they would dismiss the beggar from the altar, and admit only the poetic contemplatist, or the spiritual enthusiast, or the mystic communicant. For this we see no reason. We hold to the old doctrine of " Ask, and ye shall receive : ye have not because ye ask not : if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." That there may be abuses in the direction of solicitation is obvious; but we must never give up the reality because it can be abused. What is there that cannot be abused? Not art, not eloquence, not beauty, not truth itself—for even truth may be pressed into unholy alliances, and may sometimes be used as a handle to force the way of a lie. There may, indeed, be a debased use of asking or supplication; it may be so used as to express nothing but spiritual selfishness—a kind of miserliness or covetousness of heart: but is it not overlooked that in relation to the Infinite and the Eternal, man's very position is one of dependence and need? If he never spoke a word the very limit of his life would be the beginning of his prayer. Men are not to ask for trifles; they are not to ask that the laws of the universe may be changed for their personal convenience: they are to remember that they are parts of a stupendous whole, atoms in an infinitely complex economy;

and after having asked all they can imagine, they are to conclude the long continued supplication with the sweet, holy words—  
“Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.”

It is asked, Do we continually supplicate those whom we love to give us something? I answer, Yes, we do: the very love is a prayer, and it cannot be other. That this prayer can be made selfish, narrow, little, unworthy, petty, is obvious enough; but because it can be debased it is not therefore non-existent. Two men who love one another cannot walk together without asking something from each other; and they are always getting it: a glow of love creates a reciprocal action as between man and man; there may be no begging for money, for jewellery, or trifles: but there is a deeper desire, a longing for communion, a longing for trust, a longing for assurance that there is no secret kept from the other, but that they stand in a common brotherhood and in a common love. This is only partially analogical; no illustration even can cover the whole scope of the doctrine, but the philosophy of it would seem to be this: that to be finite is to be in necessity; to sustain a conscious relation to the Infinite is by that very relation to be continually asking the Infinite—if not in terms of interrogation or demand, yet in spirit—to complete the incomplete, and to give what is needful to make life a utility and a joy. Be assured that asking can be debased. Let us not shrink from confessing such to be the fact. God will not be made use of in that way; the heavens will not be turned into mere conveniences for the gratification of our vanity or the satisfaction of our petty necessities, which we ought to bear with fortitude, and confidence in the good government of God. But—this is our contention—when all that is allowed; there remains the necessary fact that to live is to need, to breathe is to pray, to continue from day to day in activity is to continue to receive grace, energy, succour, from him who is the fountain of energy and the spring of all solace. Whilst, therefore, the doctrine of prayer is open to certain flippant objections and petty criticisms, and whilst those who pray are open to mockery because they ask for little things or self-gratifications, all these faults, many as they may be, and serious as in some cases they are, do not interfere with the fact that we must need because we are finite, and we

must ask because we need. If a man once get into his head that he must not ask, and ask minutely and daily and continuously, he blocks himself out from one of the holiest enjoyments possible to religious life. But when he has asked all, he has to repeat the prayer already quoted. I do not see why men should not often ask things that are apparently little and trivial, if they do so in the right spirit. But having urged all their requests they are to say, Father, hear my ignorance, listen to my poor weakness: I have told thee frankly all I want, thou must judge; thy No will be as gracious as thy Yes; thou art good, supremely good; good when thou givest, nor less when thou deniest: not my will, but thine, be done: yet I thought, being a creature of thine, a poor little wanderer in this great universe, I would whisper to thee all I want, I would be frank with thee, and say I want a fine day, I want a special favour, I want to be assisted through a particular difficulty, I want—I want—I want—— Now I have emptied my heart at thy throne, not my will, but thine, be done. Inspired instinct will confirm that when criticism and sneering have done their little worst, and are forgotten in the angry contempt and holy solicitude of mankind.

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#### NOTE.

Elihu ("God-Jehovah"), one of Job's friends, described as "the son of Barachel, a Buzite, of the kindred of Ram" (Job xxxii. 2). This is usually understood to imply that he was descended from Buz, the son of Abraham's brother Nahor, from whose family the city called Buz (Jer. xxv. 23) also took its name. The Chaldee paraphrase asserts Elihu to have been a relation of Abraham. Elihu's name does not appear among those friends who came in the first instance to condole with Job, nor is his presence indicated till the debate between the afflicted man and his three friends had been brought to a conclusion. Then, finding there was no answer to Job's last speech, he comes forward with considerable modesty, which he loses as he proceeds to remark on the debate, and to deliver his own opinion on the points at issue. It appears from the manner in which Elihu introduces himself, that he was by much the youngest of the party; and it is evident that he had been present from the commencement of the discussion, to which he had paid very close attention. This would suggest that the debate between Job and his friends was carried on in the presence of a deeply interested auditory, among which was this Elihu, who could not forbear from interfering when the controversy appeared to have reached an unsatisfactory conclusion.—KITTO'S *Cyclopædia of Biblical Literature*.

## Chapter xxxiii.

### THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.

#### II.

**T**HE introduction has quite excited our expectation. We have admired the young man's fresh voice ; he seems to have come down from the highlands, and brought all the fresh wind of heaven with him. He begins modestly and yet ambitiously. The modesty of Elihu was of a peculiar quality, thoroughly genuine and simple, yet round about it there is an atmosphere of conscious power. He boldly says that he will do what the other men have failed to do, though they were rich in days, and complete as to experience. After such an introduction as Elihu has made, we can hardly be content with less than a revelation. A man should not be large in his introduction ; he should there be quite small : the kingdom of heaven itself is like unto a grain of mustard seed. What can Elihu say after his exordium ? He has promised us thunder and lightning, summer glory and beauty, an opening of secrets, and a comforting of disconsolate hearts ; he has come out, as it were, from the very sanctuary of God, with an odour of heaven round about him : what can we do but sit down at this young teacher's feet, and hear what he has to say ?

Not only are the three men ordered off with a great deal of well-controlled egotism, but Job himself is called to be upon his good behaviour :—

**"Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart : and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead : I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee" (vv. 1-7).**



What less than a revelation can come after this introduction? Have not many young teachers ruined themselves by their promises? If they had said less, and done more, had it not been better with them? Had not their fortune been sunnier and their latter end more comfortable? How many have risen up to teach the Church to pull down her bulwarks and fortresses? How many have sprung up, saying to old preachers, Cease your prating: we have the right word; we have brought medicine with us for the healing of the world's sore: stand back, and let young genius have its opportunity! Elihu has introduced himself thus, and yet when he comes to deal with the great question which was before the minds of the four men, what has he to say? He has run so splendidly before coming to the wall he had to leap over, that he stands before it on this side. He has run himself out of breath. Rhetorically he was wrong; philosophically he has proved himself to be absurd. He repeats the old things as if he had discovered them. Some men have a wonderfully self-deceiving imagination: they hear things, and then suppose that they have invented them; they acquaint themselves with the greatest thinking of the Church, and then retail the teachings as if they were originalities. If Elihu has uttered one solitary original observation, we shall not fail to discover it. He must be original before we give him credit for novelty.

It is plain from all that has taken place in these eloquent colloquies that preaching abstract doctrines, however true, is useless. We must leave the abstract and come to the concrete, the personal, the living, the real; we must find the value of the sermon in its application. We have a right to say to teachers—What does your lesson amount to? When it is all told, what is it? A stroke delivered upon the life of the enemy, a medicament applied to the wound of the suffering, a light held above the path of the perplexed. What is it? It must be more than words, for you have hindered us by your speeches; if you have nothing for us but mere eloquence, we must resent the introduction as an affront and as a moral disgrace. Men speak of God's righteousness, and of man's depravity, and all that is said sounds most tuneful and harmonious; the lines may be scanned as if they were poetry, all the sentences come and go with sweet

rhythm : but what is there in them for our human need, for this bitter and tormenting distress ? Even truth may be so preached as to charge God foolishly. The very attributes of God may be so presented as to drive men away from him. The listening man must insist that, not only shall there be a great doctrine in words proclaimed, but it shall come down to his poverty and wound and distress and darkness, and do something for him ; otherwise it is wasted omnipotence, almightiness playing at thunderstorms in the startled air,—not a great strong arm brought down to this day's battle and to the help of this day's tremendous struggle. That abstract truth may be proclaimed, and yet leave nothing behind it that is of the nature of strength and solace, must be evident if we consider that these men, now joined by Elihu, have insisted that all men are wrong, and therefore Job ought to accept his lot with equanimity, if not with thankfulness. But observe how pointless is this remark as it relates to Job. It is perfectly true that all men have done wrong, but all men do not suffer as Job suffered. It was open to Job to retort upon these men, If we have all done wrong, why am I suffering and ye prating ? You are perfectly right in saying we have all done wrong, but where is the common penalty ? Compare our respective lots at this moment. The patriarch might have continued, If your doctrine is right, and the only doctrine, and is to be preached without modification, without speciality of meaning and adaptation, then how do you account for our present relation the one to the other—I the comforted, you the comforters ? Were we all in one condemnation, then we should be uttering one lamentation, and we should need some angel from heaven, some white-winged life from the upper spaces of creation, to bring to us gospels, and words of cheer and direction and sympathy : you embarrass me ; I cannot answer your doctrine, for that is right, but that it needs some interpretation you have not given it, is perfectly clear from the facts : were we all overwhelmed, were we all lepers, were we all sitting in dust and ashes, then the proclamation of a common depravity would meet the whole of the case, and we should reply to the charge with a common consent ; but where there are rich and poor, strong and weak, prosperous and adverse ; where there are people who are rioting in their strength, and others to whom

life itself is a vexation and a weariness, you must adapt your doctrine; otherwise you will misrepresent it. Job felt that something was needed; he said: I have not realised the whole quantity; that I have held to certain great central truths is evident enough, but what I now possess must be brought into relation with other truths, and upon the whole there must shine a light above the brightness of the sun; otherwise we are lost in intellectual bewilderment and moral tumult. So we cannot meet the world by the proclamation of an abstract doctrine only. What is true needs to be adapted. Even the sunlight needs to be atmosphered in order to accommodate itself to human vision and the general condition of the world that is illuminated. So an abstract doctrine thundered down from some theological height will only mock the world it was intended to bless, unless it, too, be atmosphered, set in right relations, and brought with happy, yea, with inspired skill to bear upon human ignorance, weakness, misery, and fall into all the undulations of human experience with a grace that is never a burden. Proclaim the great abstract doctrine of human responsibility. That only awakens controversy. Where can there be responsibility where there is not mutual consent? When men were not asked whether they would come into the world or not, why start a great solemn doctrine of responsibility? When men are of unequal capacity, moral fibre, intellectual power; when men are conditioned without their own consent; when their very conditions of life chafe them, and hinder them from prayer, is it not hard to thunder down upon them the abstract doctrine—You are responsible, and you must answer the responsibility or forfeit your immortal blessedness? Now the doctrine of human responsibility is right. Society could not exist without it. The doctrine of human responsibility finds its corroboration in the human consciousness, and in all the line of social experience it is reaffirmed. But there must be accommodation of this doctrine also to peculiar circumstances and disadvantages; otherwise it will be resented, because it will be felt to be a weight which human weakness cannot bear. "Of some have compassion, making a difference." Jesus Christ laid down the doctrine of responsibility and judgment, but he said: From him to whom much was given much will be expected; from him to whom little was given little will be expected: certain

men shall be beaten with many stripes; certain other men with few stripes. The doctrine of responsibility is not an abstract philosophy to be hurled over the entire population indiscriminately; it is to be opened up, in all its blessed meaning, in all its solemnity, and is to be so applied that every man will answer in his own heart, That is right: according to God's gift is God's expectation; he will not reap where he has not sown; he is not only a just God, but a merciful, not only merciful but just; he will judge, therefore, by a righteous standard. This is what is meant by adapting doctrines, individualising them, so to say, and setting them in right relations, so that they shall not trouble the conscience and bewilder the judgment, but carry with them rather the solemn assent and consent of the hearers themselves.

Here is the great failure in the case of the three friends and of Elihu: they spoke broad generalities; they are sure the doctrine is right. With these as mere utterances we have no fault to find; but where was the wisdom which could apply the doctrine to the individual case? where the holy skill that could touch the wound without aggravating it? where that learned and eloquent tongue that could speak a word in season to him that was weary, and speak as if he were singing?—who could utter himself without making any noise, who could declare a judgment without perpetrating a violence? Such condolence is the very balm of heaven, but such comfort was never associated with bald generalities, rough vague statements of truths however profound; such condolence, such solace, can only be applied out of the heart that has itself become rich in experience, and learned through many a long school-day how to suffer and be strong. Commonplaces, however profound and beautiful, cannot touch the agony of life. By "commonplaces" is here meant statements which may for their truthfulness pass without challenge: they have become amongst the established truths of the world; they are accepted; the Church listens to them as to falling rain; they excite no surprise; they come and operate as by a gracious necessity. But what we want is particular application, study of every individual case: each heart has its own history; each spirit knows its own want. The spirit of a man alone understands what the man wants. So in listening to great broad

declarations from the pulpit, we must each receive these declarations according to our individual need; they cease to be merely general when they become definitely and personally applied. In this way many of us may be so taught of God as to know just what to take, because taught to know just what we need. We do not need the same every day, or under every combination of circumstances: there is a portion of meat for each in due season. In speaking thus we do not dispute the doctrines themselves in all their abstract completeness and grandeur; we simply seek to accommodate them, which the men in Job's case did not, to a particular and exceptional set of circumstances.

Elihu speaks many beautiful things:—

“For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away” (xxxii. 22).

How many a man has come forward to say that he was not going to flatter us, and by so saying has flattered himself! How many a man has set himself on too high a pedestal for talking to the commonalty of the world! “My maker would soon take me away” were I to give flattering titles unto men. Where is the common ground? Men should take care how they separate themselves from those to whom they would minister. The doctor does not speak from behind a curtain; he lays his inquiring hand upon the poor pulse, and whilst it is there, listening, so to say, to the throb of weary life, he makes all his notes and comments, and prepares himself for the prescription that is to follow. Any dignity that separates the healing man from the man needing healing is a vicious dignity, and should be destroyed when man comes into living contact with man.

Elihu says, in verse 12, “I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.” Why these commonplaces? Job had never denied that, and yet Job's case was never touched. The man was seized as if he had hurled accusations against all the theology of the ages. He says in effect, I have never doubted these things: what are you talking about? To whom are you speaking? You have mistaken my identity; I am a man of prayer and faith and devotion; you are talking to me as if I were a pagan, an atheist, an infidel. Are we not all often spoken to in this way? There is a secret the men have not yet got at. We

have lived in vain if we deny the operation of a similar secret in all our preaching and teaching and ecclesiastical relations. "Things are not what they seem." We should have learned enough by this time to say to an exiled suffering man, You only can at present view the surface: what thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter: God is not dealing roughly with thee; he is conducting an experiment; he is making a new revelation to the observers who are looking abroad for manifestations of his method of government and training: God is making an example of thee, and he is teaching through thee: say to him, O thou blessed One, cruel is this wound if only a wound, but a most blessed dower from thine hand if meant to teach somewhat of thy kingdom and purpose to those who are looking on: thy grace is sufficient for me. Only by some such line as this can we reconcile providences which are obvious with the goodness which is often denied. Look for the latter end. See what God will do at the last.

"Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (v. 24).

Many have found Christ in this verse. We are not aware that he is literally here. Very possibly, were the words limited to mere grammar, nothing of Christ, as we understand that term, could be found in the verse. It is right that we should first get at the grammar, and settle the literal sense of a text: but what vase could hold the fragrance so well as the rose? Who can tell how much there may be in a sentence of this kind that is not expressed in the letter? Why try to find as little as possible in the letter? Why endeavour to prove that a star is no larger than the telescope through which it is seen? Why not rather take another course of exegesis, and say, These were seed-corns, beginnings, germs, hints of things; if afterwards there should appear in the pages of revelation histories that can further explain these enigmatical expressions, then bring together the history and the prophecy, and let the one illuminate or explain the other. Certainly, the Christian belief is that God has found a ransom; that God means that we should be saved from the pit. Elihu may not have known what he was talking about: he is none the less a good teacher for that. It is not necessary

that there should be self-consciousness in order that there should be divine revelation : sometimes we are not to know whether we are in the body or out of the body ; many a time we have to be but mere instruments through which God will blow across the ages the music of his gospel ; sometimes we are to be but signs or symbols by which a little vanishing personality shall prefigure a great and eternal truth. So would I teach, that men are not to deplete Scripture of all good and gracious meaning, but rather find in it more than appears to be in the letter, if so be that the criticism is guided by conscience and reason, and is consonant with the great truths which Christian history has established. Observe how I protect the Word from mere exaggeration, from foolish romance, or vicious or sophistical spiritualisings, and how I hold that prophetic meanings are only to come as history grows, as history takes them up and shows them in their vivid and actual applications.

What wonderful forecasts of evangelical doctrine there are in the Old Testament : take for example verses 27, 28—

“He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not ; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.”

Elihu was not a conscious evangelical preacher. If any one should arise and say, The grammar of that text does not admit of a gospel interpretation, as you understand it, he shall have the grammar, but when he has received his tribute we still feel that history has so evolved itself as to give blessed and gracious confirmation to the evangelical interpretation of these words. They might have been spoken by John—“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Thus the two Testaments are one. Men spoke in the dawn, when they hardly saw the exact figure of things, but the sun has not contradicted them as he has risen to the zenith ; he has simply cleared away the cloud, made definite that which was vague ; and there is no contradiction in the New Testament of any moral doctrine of the Old Testament ; the covenants blend in conforming unity.

Elihu was only wrong in his application of the truth ; he would

have Job fall down and say that he had been liar, thief, murderer, hypocrite; then the men would have been pleased; they would have said to Job, Now expect redemption, and forgiveness, and cleansing, and a new start in life. But Job could not do this; he said: I am not the bad man you suppose I am,—and Job in so asserting himself only claimed the character which God himself had given him. Observe that, for it is a vital fact. With what character does Job begin the book? Pronounced by God, the tribute is this—“That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” Such was God’s direct testimony to this suffering patriarch. And Job shows a wonderful constancy in not giving up his character; in effect he says, Everything has been taken from me, but you shall not take away my consciousness of at least aiming to be good and right with God. Then they came upon him and said, To thy knees, thou base hypocrite; pour out thy confession like a river; spare nothing of self-abasement; yea, speak aloud thy sins, and we will hear thee as priests might listen. Job said, No, I have no such speech to make; all this came upon me without any desert on my side: I never spared a prayer, I never abbreviated an act of worship, I never turned away a poor man from my table, no one ever perished within my gates or outside of them to my knowledge; I am not going to say I am bad when I feel perfectly sure I am to-day just what I have been for the many years of my prosperity and honour. We must not be immoral in our confessions; we must not be immoral in our moanings and lamentations. Character is not so easily procured that we can afford to part with it lightly even in religious confessions. He who would give away his character in order to obtain a sentimental peace will defeat his own purpose. God does not expect us so to deal with the character, which is his own work. A great character is a divine miracle. A holy character is no work of man’s, in any mechanical or limited sense; it expresses a grand co-operation between the divine and the human. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Having therefore lived twenty, thirty, fifty years in prayer, in submission to the divine will, in anxious solicitude to know what God has said and to do it, and having fallen into suffering, you have lost



your property, your children have wounded you, your house has been completely darkened in every room, every fire has been put out, the voices of music have ceased in the dwelling,—bethink you the reason is not necessarily that you ceased to pray, or that all the world is depraved, or that God has a right to do arbitrarily with you what he may: you must go higher, you must go deeper: human life is an education, a drill, a continuous and ever-varying discipline. We may pray for patience, we may complain that the wound is very sore; God knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust; he does not expect us to laugh the fool's laugh when he himself has darkened the house, and increased the burden, and put our poor strength to severest strain; he does not expect us to sing all the jubilant psalms when the valley is very deep and dark, and filled with a cold wind—cold as the breath of death itself. He knows our weakness. He is working out some great miracle through us. He has almost asked our permission to prove through us that his grace is sufficient for every human extremity, and that his kingdom in the heart of man can bear every thunder of hell, every blast of the pit, and yet stand. If he has chosen some of us through whom to prove this, our suffering will be very great; but what will the end be? What song of gladness, what psalm of triumph, what shout of victory! Only after death can we explain what happened in our lifetime.

Chapters xxxiii., xxxiv.

THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.

III.

ELIHU may show us what conception of God had been formed by a young mind. If we cannot follow the thread of his argument, we can join him here and there, and consider diligently what view of the divine nature and government a mind evidently audacious and energetic, yet reverent and docile, had formed. Elihu does not come before us as necessarily young in years, but as comparatively young; he had kept silence while older men were speaking; he claims distinctly to be heard because of his inferior age; it is legitimate, therefore, to regard the whole of his exposition as one which is uttered by a youthful, modest, yet active mind.

Who was the God of Elihu? Was he a deity that could command homage? Does he sit upon an appointed place like a helpless idol? or is he intelligent, watchful, judicial, righteous? It will be interesting to discover what kind of deity was avowed and honoured so long ago.

“The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life” (xxxiii. 4).

The Bible has no difficulty in connecting human life instantly with God. There is a wonderful sense of nearness as between the Creator and the created. Elihu does not interpose millions of ages between the creating God and the created man; he rather speaks of the creation as the very last thing that was done. Elihu does not say,—I am the result of intermediate operations and causes, and secondary influences; I represent the civilisation of my line or day. He speaks as Adam might have spoken when he was turned from the hand of God a living man, a divine image. This young poet—if he were only a poet—stands next

to God, and says—I am the man whom God made; the very breath I am now breathing I received from him. All this of course may be poetry, but all this may also be fact, reality, and only poetry in the sense in which poetry is the highest truth. What do we gain by considering that we were created by the Almighty countless millions of ages ago, as compared with the thought that every one of us is his handiwork, as it were just made, the very last proof of his omnipotence and wisdom and love? We gain much by the latter view: we are thus placed very close to God; he might be looking at us now; he might be speaking of us as his latest wonder, the last miracle of his creative energy. There are the two views; let men adopt which seems right to their reason when it is illuminated by revelation. Either way we are God's creatures; from neither theory is God excluded, only in the latter he seems to some of us to be nearer;—he cannot be nearer in reality, for the ages are nothing to him, but he is nearer to our imagination, our sympathy, our need, our whole desire; it seems to suit our weakness best at least, to think that God has just made us and that in our nostrils is the breath we have but just caught from him. This was the standpoint of Elihu. It enabled him to speak with great solemnity in the argument. Elihu did not pretend to come into it as a discoverer, an inventor, a moral genius, a man gifted in the reading of riddles; he came into the argument as a distinct creation of God, a man different from any who had spoken, with an individuality that involved responsibility;—he speaks as if he had overheard God, and had been empowered to tell others what God had revealed to him.

Observe how he proceeds—

“For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not” (xxxiii. 14).

Let the meaning be this: God does not speak in one way only; there is nothing monotonous in the divine government: God speaks “once,” “twice,”—that is, in one way, in two ways, in many ways, in apparently self-contradictory ways,—now in the high heavens, now in the deep earth; sometimes in visions of the night, often by moral intuitions, sudden startlings of the mind into new energies, and sudden investitures

of the whole nature with new powers and capabilities. Elihu will not have God bound down to one way of revelation; Elihu rather says: God reveals himself in nature, in providence, in history, in human consciousness, in social combinations,—in the mystery of life's great circumference: whoever has a new thought has it from God; whoever has a right vision is indebted to God for his vision: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,"—that is to say, God can sustain life in a thousand different ways: if there were no wheat, it would make no difference to the sustenance of man upon the earth; if the earth refused to grow one root or fruit, God could still keep man upon the earth as vigorously and as usefully as ever: God is not confined to one method of operation; Let us then, Elihu would say, acknowledge God in whatever form he may come; do not exclude God from any part of the ministry of the universe: if you think you see him in the star, you do see him; it is the star that is lifted up in glory and suggestiveness, not the deity that is brought down into finite bounds: if any flower of the field can help you to see into heaven look through it: if you can hear music in the trill and carol of birds, hear it, and magnify it until you get some hint of the infinite music of heaven. This is not idolatry; it is the proper magnifying of nature, the proper extension of all history and providence: thus you are lifted up, and from higher levels can behold wider spaces. How much we lose in thinking that God is confined to one house, place, hour, day, week! Thus we become idolaters, and thus we exclude many from the altar who are really worshipping at it. All men are not religious in the same way: there is a diversity of operation even in the religious regions and outlooks of life. What if some men shall be found to be religious who never supposed themselves to be such? God speaketh once, yea twice, yea thrice: his voice covers the whole gamut of utterance, and men who speak truth in any department of life, of art, of science, speak God's truth, for all truth is God's.

So far Elihu might have been a modern teacher, so advanced, so progressive is he. From no point will he have God excluded. If a man has a dream he will say, Tell it, for even in visions

of the night God shows himself. If a man can only speak through his harp, Elihu says, Play it, and we will tell you whether God or devil stretched the strings, and taught your fingers to discourse upon them. There is a spirit in man, a verifying faculty, a child-heart, that knows what the father said, and knows the very tone in which he said it.

Of one thing Elihu seems to be supremely certain—

“Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity” (xxxiv. 10).

Elihu now occupies moral ground. His deity is not a majestic outline; it is a heart, a conscience, the very source and centre of life. This gives comfort wherever it is realised. A thought like this enables man to give time to God, that he may out of a multitude of details shape a final meaning. Elihu says in effect, Things look very troubled now: it seems as if we were dealing with shapelessness, rather than with order and definite meaning: now the great space of the firmament is full of thunders and lightnings and tempests, and the very foundations of things seem to be ploughed up; but write this down as the first item in your creed, and the middle, and the last—“far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should do iniquity . . . . Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.” Then wait: he will bring forth judgment as the morning, and righteousness as the noonday. Such doctrines establish the heart in gracious confidence. They do not blind men to the tumult and confusion which are so manifest on all the surface of life; such doctrines enable men to cultivate and exemplify the grace or virtue of patience: they acknowledge that appearances are against their doctrine, but they claim time for the Almighty: they reason analogically; they say, Look at nature; look at human life; look at any great enterprise entered into by men: what digging, what blasting of rocks, what marvellous confusion, what a want of evident form and shape and design! Yet when months have come and gone, and architects and builders have carried out their whole purpose, they retire, and say, Behold what we have been aiming at all the time,—then in great temple, or wide noble bridge spanning boiling rivers, we see that when we thought all

things were in confusion, they were being carried on to order and shape and perfectness and utility. So Elihu says, One thing is certain: 'to be God he must be good; if he were wicked he would not be God: brethren, he would say in modern language, Let us pray where we cannot reason, let us wait where we cannot move: our waiting may be service, our prayer may be the beginning of new opportunities.

Following this doctrine, and part and parcel of it, Elihu advances to say—

“For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways” (xxxiv. 11).

Being righteous, he will cause the law of cause and effect to proceed whatever happens in relation to human conduct and spiritual results. This is what Paul said—“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” That is a New Testament translation of Old Testament words—“For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.” How much have we advanced beyond that doctrine? Where is the difference between the Old Testament and the New in this particular? God is of one mind; who can turn him as to the law of moral cause and moral effect? A man cannot sow one kind of seed and reap another: the sowing determines the harvest. Elihu might make a false application of this principle to Job, but the principle itself is right. It is of value as showing the conception which Elihu had formed of God's nature. He was worshipping a God worthy of his homage. Again let us say, he was not worshipping an idol, a vain imagination of his own; and again let us apply to ourselves the holy proof of God's rule, that whatever he does he does it from a spirit of right and with a purpose of right, and that in all his doing there is no compromise with evil, no concession to wicked principles or powers. God is righteous; true and righteous altogether. Let a man have that conception of God, and how quiet he is! Though the floods lift up their voice and roar, yet still he says, There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God: though the wicked triumph for a time, yea, in great noise and great pomp; yet, he says, his triumphing is but for a moment, his joy is but

a flash, to be lost in the enclosing and eternal darkness. Without such convictions we are driven about by every wind of doctrine; the doctrines themselves, which are unformed and unsettled, trouble us. What are we to do in relation to such doctrines? To come back every night to our rocky home, to the great fortresses established in the holy revelation, to the sanctuary of God's righteousness, to the impossibility of his thinking, being, or doing anything that is wrong. Here we find rest, and from this high sanctuary we can look abroad upon all the excitement and tumult of the times, and wait in loving and expectant patience for the growing light, for the descending revelation, for the new promise that shall give us new consolation.

Then Elihu might have lived to-day. Verily he seems to be worshipping the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He might not be able to say so in words, to realise it in all the fulness and sweetness of its meaning; but he, in the far-away time, had a clear vision of God's personality, God's government, and God's holiness.

What a comprehensive view of God he gives us—

"Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands. In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand. For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (xxxiv. vv. 17-22).

Observe here the action of what may be called the moral imagination. We are at liberty to expand what we do know of God in the letter. This is the meaning of preaching. The preaching however must be the expansion of what is found in revelation. If there be in one discourse a word of man's own making, it must be taken out. Not an evidence of man's invention must be found in any discourse. Whatever is said must be provable by what is written. Expansion is our sphere; tender, gracious, beautiful amplification is the work to which we are called: the kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, but when the mustard-tree is grown it is not an oak, nor a

cedar ; it is still what it was in the seed. So Elihu resorts to images, illustrations, rhetorical enlargements, and the like ; but he is always tethered to the centre, always fixed in the settled and eternal truths ; what he does otherwise he may do as the result of inspired genius, but it is all consonant with what is positively and definitely revealed. What then do we know of God ? Nothing of ourselves. We have imaginings, conjectures, suggestions, quite a thousand in number, but as they are only imaginings, suggestions, and conjectures they are open to all kinds of disappointment ; but when we come to revelation, and fix our eyes there, we feel that we are building our house upon a rock, and being built upon a rock, we can wait ; we can say, Let the storm rise and fall ; we have nothing to do with it whilst it rages ; when it is passed we shall see what is left behind. Always distinguish between the foam and the sea, between that which is superficial and that which is central and everlasting ; and be not tossed about by the wind that blows over the surface of the earth, but rest confidently and lovingly in the living God.

Elihu now comes closely to us with a gentle gospel message, and because of the gentleness of his message we are the more assured of the validity of his reasoning—"For he will not lay upon man more than right"—(xxxiv. 23). This is the way by which we are to judge the Bible. If we were governed wholly by the majestic images of the Bible, we should be overwhelmed, unable to follow the high delineation ; we should be blinded by excess of light ; but the Bible comes down from its high revelations, and speaks comfortingly to troubled lives, to broken hearts, to weary travellers ; and because it is so sympathetic and gracious in our weakness and sorrow, we begin to feel that when it rises, expands, and flames in unutterable splendour, it may be equally right there : the foot of the ladder is upon the earth ; the head of the ladder is lifted up into glory, and we cannot see it. It is even so with this divine revelation of God. When he is set forth as Infinite, Eternal, Everlasting, Jehovah, Sovereign, we are lost, we cannot follow up this dizzy way of utterance ; but when he is called by such terms as enable us to see that he is loving, gentle, piteous, compassionate, lifting up those that be bowed down, and comforting with tender solaces those whose hearts



are sore, then we begin to feel that what was so majestic at the one end, and so tender at the other, may be harmonious, may be one, may be the very God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. A wonderful thing this for Elihu to have discovered by himself. Who ever discovered God in equal terms and equal proportions? Is this man talking out of his own emptiness and vanity of mind? Is it possible that a man younger than those who were listening to him conceived all this regarding God? Then in very deed here is the supreme miracle in the intellectual history of mankind. Here is a man who without communication with the other world has discovered a God infinite in majesty, in wisdom, in power; tender, gracious, loving in spirit; righteous, pure, holy in his nature; revealing all things to the benefit of all. One of two things must have been: either this man Elihu invented all this, and thus became practically as good as the thing which he invented; or it was revealed to him and he as an instrument revealed it to others. This latter view Christian readers of the Bible adopt. They do not believe in an invented God, but in a God revealed; in a God who will not lay upon man more than is right; in a God who knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust; in a God that never reaps where he has not sown; a righteous God, revealed to the world through the intuition or the experience of mankind, or by direct and startling revelation in vision and dream of the night. Be the method what it may, here he is in light, in love, in faithfulness,—a God whom we adore, not with reverence only because he is great, but with sympathy and love because he is good.

The very necessity by which God loves the right makes him oppose the wicked. He will not have wicked men living as if in his complacency—"He striketh them as wicked men in the open sight of others:" he overpowers them; he fills them with disdain and contempt; if he allows them to travel half-way up the hill it is that their fall may be the greater. Never did he endorse the wicked man. No spirit of evil can produce a certificate from heaven, saying, Behold how I am written of by your God, and commended by him whom ye worship as holy. This, too, was a wonderful thing for the unaided Elihu to have discovered. Appearances were against him: wicked men have not

seldom had more than good men, so far as the possession of the hand is concerned; wicked men have been in high places; and yet here are men—Elihu and others—saying, looking on these facts, What you believe to be facts are only appearances, mere phases of things; within all is a righteous spirit, and the end of all is the confusion of every form and purpose of evil. Elihu never discovered that: this also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. We must await the issue, but here is our supreme difficulty—to wait when we are impatient; to know that the right will come, and yet not to be able to show it instantaneously, when men are waiting for it,—oh, that is trying! It gives the mocker opportunity to jeer. We are sure there is a proof, and we are positive that by-and-by it will be revealed, yet now, face to face with the sneerer, he seems to have it all his own way. Then what a struggle there is between faith and impatience, between confidence and weakness! how then we long that God would open a window in heaven, and would speak from some opening glory in the skies and declare himself! Yet he is far away, so far as silence can remove him; yea, he is dumb when the great controversy seems to beat against the very door of heaven. The Christian says we must wait; we can hasten nothing; we can toil as if we believed; we can confirm our faith by our life, and having done that we can do no more.

Elihu asks a question, which brings us to our right level—“Should it be according to thy mind?”—(xxxiv. 33). Which is to be the supreme intelligence? That is the great question. Who is to be on the throne? Who is to be uppermost? Who is to speak the guiding word? It must either be the mind of man or the mind of God. Elihu says, Shall it be the mind of man? See what man has done; behold all the way through which he has passed, and see how he has been correcting himself, stultifying himself, coming back from his prodigalities, reversing his judgments, and rewriting his vows. The world cannot be administered according to a finite or limited mind. It comes to this, then; that such a world as ours, and such a universe as we know it, must be ruled by a mind equal to the occasion. We who cannot tell what will happen to-morrow ought to be silent

rather than audible ; we should wait, rather than advance : if we could prove our infallibility we might assert, but until we can establish it as a fact we must not broach it as a theory. The universe is too large for our management. We cannot manage our own affairs without blunder and mistake : how much less then could we manage the affairs of all men, and the courses of all worlds, and the destinies of all operations ! It is ours to believe that God ruleth over all and is blessed for evermore ; that all things, visible and invisible, are parts of a great empire, of which God is King and Lord. It is a noble faith. No man may come to the acceptance of this faith on the ground of weak-mindedness. No man can accept this faith without being mentally enlarged and ennobled. It may be assented to without reasoning and without reflection, and then it is not a religion but a superstition ; or it may be received upon our knees, lovingly, adoringly, consentingly ; our acceptance of it may be the last result of our inspired reasoning : then it becomes a faith, a religion, an inspiration, and we bow down before it, not ashamed because we cannot explain it, but glorying rather because its mystery will not come into human words, and all its meaning is too vast for the tiny vessel of human speech.

What God then shall we have ? We must have some deity. We may deify ourselves, and thus become fools ; or we may worship the God of the Bible, and thus receive an instruction which operates even more directly upon the moral than upon the intellectual nature. No man can serve God, and do evil : he may do the evil, never willingly or joyfully, but always with assurance that he ought not to have done it and that God rebukes him in a thousand ways. We cannot rightly receive the God of the Bible, and be little, mean, uncharitable, and unworthy. If we can find persons who profess to have received the God of the Bible and are yet all these things, then their profession is a lie. "By their fruits ye shall know them." We are not asking for assent ; we are asking for faith. It is one thing not to differ from a proposition, and another to live upon it and to have no other means of mental existence. *That* is faith. He is no Christian who simply "does not dispute" the facts of Christian history. Only he is a Christian who is crucified with Christ, as it were on

the same cross, as it were pierced with the same nails, wounded with the same spear. *That* is Christianity. We debase the whole conception if we suppose that a man is a Christian because he does not differ from the New Testament in any energetic or aggressive way, that a man is a Christian because he passes through certain forms of Christian worship. That is not Christianity at all. A man may do all that, and a thousand times more, yet know nothing whatever of the Spirit of Christ. He does not receive the God of the Bible who is not as good as that God, according to the measure of his capacity: "Be ye holy, as your Father in heaven is holy." No man can receive the Christ of the gospels who is not dead and as much raised again as was that mighty Son of God, according to the man's measure and capacity. To believe in God we must be one with God. To believe in Christ we must be one with Christ. When we are so identified we shall need no argument in words, for our life will be argument, our spirit will be persuasive and convincing eloquence.

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#### NOTE.

In his second speech Elihu returns to the main question of Job's attitude towards God. He begins by imputing to Job language which he had never used, and which, from its extreme irreverence, Job would certainly have disowned (xxxiv. 5, 9), and maintains that God never acts unjustly, but rewards every man according to his deeds. There is nothing in his treatment of this theme which requires comment. . . . The subject of the third speech is handled with more originality. Job had really complained that afflicted persons such as himself appealed to God in vain (xxiv. 12, xxx. 20). Elihu replies to this (xxxv. 9-13), that such persons merely cried from physical pain, and did not really pray. The fourth and last speech, in which he dismisses controversy and expresses his own sublime ideas of the Creator, has the most poetical interest. At the very outset the solemnity of his language prepares the reader to expect something great, and the expectation is not altogether disappointed. "God," he says, "is mighty, but despiseth not any" (xxxvi. 5); he has given proof of this by the trials with which he visits his servants when they have fallen into sin. Might and mercy are the principal attributes of God. The verses in which Elihu applies this doctrine to Job's case are ambiguous and perhaps corrupt, but it appears as if Elihu regarded Job as in danger of missing the disciplinary object of his sufferings. It is in the second part of his speech (xxxvi. 26-xxxvii. 24) that Elihu displays his greatest rhetorical power; and though by no means equal to the speeches of Jehovah, which it appears to imitate, the vividness of his description has obtained the admiration of no less competent a judge than Alexander von Humboldt. The moral is intended to be that, instead of criticising God, Job should humble himself in devout awe at the combined splendour and mystery of the creation.—REV. CANON CHEYNE.

## Chapters xxxv.-xxxvii.

### THE SPEECH OF ELIHU.

#### IV.

**E**LIHU says many beautiful things. There is some difficulty in tracing the uniting line of his numerous remarks, but the remarks themselves often glitter with a really beautiful light. Many of the independent sayings are like single jewels. We need not always look for the thread upon which the pearls are strung: sometimes it is enough to see the separate pearls themselves, to admire, to value, and spiritually to appropriate all their helpful suggestion. Elihu's speech is like many a sermon: we may not be able to follow it in its continuity, and indeed in some instances, continuity may not be a feature of the discourse; yet what riches are found in separate sentences, in asides, in allusions whose meaning is not at first patent, but which grows as we peruse the words and consider the argument. We may know nothing of the discourse as a whole, and yet we may remember short sentences, brief references, and take them away as lights that will bless us in many a dark hour, or as birds that may sing to us when all human voices are silent.

Elihu says beautiful things about God, as we have already seen. He loved God. Was he sometimes too eager to defend God? Is it not possible for us to excite ourselves much too hotly in defending the eternal Name and in protecting the everlasting sanctuary? Who has called us to all this controversy, to all this angry hostility even against the foe? What if it had been more profitable to all if we had prayed with him instead of arguing; yea, even prayed for him in his absence; yea, higher miracle still—prayed for him despite his sneering and his mocking. Elihu may have been too vehement, too anxious

to defend God, as if God needed him. And yet that can hardly have been his spirit, for one of the very first things to which we shall now call attention shows Elihu's conception of God to be one of absolute independence of his creature's. Let us see whether Elihu was right or wrong in this conception.

"If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?" (xxxv. 6, 7).

This is true of God's majesty, but it is not true of God's fatherhood. God can do without any one of us, and yet his heart yearns if the very youngest of us be not at home, sitting at the table, and living on the bounty of his love. It is perfectly right to say what Elihu said: "If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him?" O thou puny transgressor, thou dost but bruise thine own hand when thou smitest against the rocks of eternity! "Or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him?" Can thy sin tarnish his crown, or take away one jewel from his diadem, or abate the storm of heaven's music that hails him eternal King? Consider, poor suffering patriarch: if thou be righteous even, on the other hand, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? And yet that statement is imperfect: it creates a chasm between the Creator and the creature; it sets God away at a great distance upon an inaccessible mountain, and clothes him with glories which dazzle the vision that would look upon them. From one side of the thought, it is good, it is glorious, but from the other side of the thought it is incomplete. Elihu speaks of the dazzling sun, but does he not forget to speak of the tender light that kisses every pane even in a poor man's window, and comes with God's benediction upon every flower planted by a child's hand, and watched by a child's love? We must not make God too imperious. There is a conception of God which represents him as keeping men at the staff-end, allowing them to approach so far but not one step beyond. That conception could be vindicated up to a given point, but there is the larger conception which says: We have boldness of access now; we have not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; we have come unto mount Sion, where with reverent

familiarity we may look face to face upon God, and speak to him, as a man speaketh with his friend, mouth to mouth, and return to our daily employment with the fragrance of heaven in our very breath, and with the almightiness of God as the fountain of our strength. This is the larger view. In all cases the larger view is the right view. He who has but a geographical view of the earth knows but little concerning it; as we have often had occasion to point out, the astronomical view involves the whole, and rules by infinite energy all that is apparently unequal and discrepant into serenest peace, into completest order. It is possible for us to be afraid of God: hence many minds would banish the thought of the divine love, saying, It is too high for us: no man may think of that and live: enough for us to deal with minor things: inferior concerns may well task our finite powers: we dare not lift up our eyes unto heaven: God is great, and may not be looked for. There was a time when that view might be historically correct, but Jesus Christ has come to present another aspect of God, to reveal him as Father, to declare his nearness, to preach his solicitude for the children of men, to describe him as so loving the world as to die for it. Let us repeat: that is the larger view, and until we have received it, we know nothing of what riches may be gathered in the sanctuary, and what triumphs may be won by the spirit of the Cross.

Elihu presents the same thought in another aspect; he says that man may do many things against God, and yet not injure him. That is not true. Here is opened to us a wild field of practical reflection. We cannot injure God without injuring ourselves. If we transgress against him, what does it amount to? Some may say, Who can blacken God's whole universe by any sin he may commit? What can Iscariot himself do when he attempts to stain the infinite snow of the divine purity? There is also a sense in which that is true. God is not dependent upon us: our prayers do not make him what he is; our sacrifices do not constitute his heaven: he could do without every one of us; he could pay no heed to any action committed by any hand. But this is not the God of the Bible. Such a God is possible to the licentious imagination, but not possible to any one who has

been trained in the Christian school, or who accepts Christian standards for the regulation of his thought, for the determination of his theology. We cannot omit a duty without grieving God; we cannot think an evil thought without troubling his heavens. He is concerned for us. Whilst we say we live, and move, and have our being in God, there is an obvious sense in which he may reply—I live, and move, and have my being in man. He watches for us, longs for us, sends messages to us, seems to spend his eternity in thinking about us, and planning our whole life, and enriching us in all the regions and departments of our existence and nature. That is the Christian view. Never let the idea get into your mind that God cannot be interested in the individual man. Once let that conviction seize the mind, and despair quickly follows: you have not adopted a sentiment; you have given it the key of your heart; the enemy has seized it, and he says, Let that thought work a long while—namely, that God does not care for the individual, that his universe is too large for him to pay any attention to details,—and when that thought has well saturated the mind, I will go in and work all the mystery of damnation. We shall keep the enemy at bay, we shall affright him, in proportion as we are found standing hand in hand with God, saying loudly and sweetly, He is my God, and will not forsake me: he loves me as if I were an only child; he has been pleased to make me essential to the completeness of his joy. Words must fail when attempting to depict such a thought, but they help us, as a hint may help a man who is in difficulty. Beyond this we must not force words. If they bring us to feel that God numbers the hairs of our head, watches the falling sparrow, takes note of everything, is interested in our pulse that throbs within us, it is helpful, restful; meanwhile it is sufficient: preparation has been made for larger gifts, for fuller disclosures of divine decree and purpose.

Elihu has not been altogether poetical in his speech to Job: but we incidentally come upon an expression which proves that Elihu even could be poet as well as critic and accuser; he says—

“But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?” (xxxv. 10.)



Whatever may be the exact critical definition of the phrase, who can fail to receive it as throwing an explanatory lustre upon many a human experience? Consider the words in their relation to one another. First look at them separately—"songs"; then look at the next word, "night"; now connect them, "songs in the night,"—apparently songs out of place, songs out of season, songs that have gone astray, angels that have lost their foothold in heaven and have fallen down into wildernesses and valleys of darkness. Such is not the case. "Song" and "night" are words which seem to have no reciprocal relation: but human experience is larger than human definitions, and it is true to the experience of mankind that whilst there has been a night the night has been made alive with music. Who will deny this? No man who has had experience of life; only he will deny it who has seen life in one aspect, and who has seen so little of life as really to have seen none of it. Life is not a flash, a transient phase, a cloud that comes and goes without leaving any impression behind it: life is a tragedy; life is a long, complicated, changeful experience,—now joyous to ecstasy, now sad to despair; now a great harvest-field rich with the gold of wheat, and now a great sandy desert in which no flower can be found. Taking life through and through, in all its relations and inter-relations, how many men can testify that in the night they have heard sweeter music than they ever heard in the day! Do not the surroundings sometimes help the music? Some music is out of place at midday; we must wait for the quiet wood, for the heart of the deep plantation, for the top of the silent hill, for the place where there is no city: some music must come to the heart in solitude—a weird, mystic, tender thing, frightful sometimes as a ghost, yet familiar oftentimes as a friend. Who has not seen more of God at the graveside than he ever saw elsewhere? Who has not had Scripture interpreted to him in the house of death which was never interpreted to him by eloquent Apollos or by reasoning Paul? and who has not had occasion to go back upon his life, and say, It was good for me that I was afflicted: now that I have had time to reflect, I see that all the while God was working for me, secretly, beneficently, and the result is morning, beauty, promise, early summer, almost heaven! But here we must interpose a word of wise caution. Do not let us expect

songs in the night if we had not duty and sacrifice in the daytime. God does not throw songs away. God does not expend upon us what we ourselves have not been prepared to receive by industry, by patient suffering, by all-hopeful endurance: never does God withhold the song in the night time when the day has been devoted to him. The darkness and the light are both alike to him. If we sow tares in one part of the day, we shall reap them in the other part. Sometimes the relation is reversed: one great, sweet, solemn voice has said, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning": there we seem to have the words set in right sequence—weeping and night; joy and morning. What a balance of expression! How exquisite in criticism and appropriateness! and yet Elihu will have it the other way:—difficulty in the daytime, songs in the night; a day of long labour and sore travail, but at night every star a gospel, and the whole arch of heaven a protection and a security. This may be poetry to some, it is solemn fact to others. Poetry is the fact. Poetry is truth blossoming,—fact budding into broader and more generous life.

Then Elihu presents another feature of the divine character, which is full of delightful suggestion—

"Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom" (xxxvi. 5).

Consider here the relation of terms: mighty, yet not contemptuous. This gives us the right interpretation of the very first passage which we quoted. God is mighty, yet condescending; God could crush us, yet he spares our life: because he is supremely mighty he is compassionate. Half-power is dangerous, almost mighty tempts the half-developed giant to tyrannous uses of his strength: but whole power, almightiness, omnipotence, by its very perfectness, can speak, can be compassionate, can fall into the words of pity and solicitude and love. Thus justice becomes mercy; thus righteousness and peace have kissed each other; thought to be strangers, they have hailed one another as friends and brethren. Then the very omnipotence of God may be regarded as a gospel feature and as a gospel support. If he were less powerful he would be less pitiful. It is because he knows all that strength can do that he knows how little it can do

Strength will never convert the world, omnipotence will never subdue creation, in the sense of exciting that creation to trust and worship, honour and love. What will overcome the universe of sin? Divine condescension, divine compassion,—the cross of Christ. When are men ruled? When they are persuaded. When are men made loyal subjects? When they are fascinated by the king's beauty, and delighted with the king's compassion, clemency, and grace. For what king will man die? For the king who rules by righteousness and who is the subject of his own people. Thus God will not drive us into his kingdom. God spreads the feast and gives us welcome; he declares gospels, he offers hospitality: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely;" and again, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in." So says he who by a breath could obliterate the universe. He will rule by love; he will take up his abode where he is welcomed by the broken heart and the contrite spirit.

A sweet word Elihu uses again; he speaks of "the bright light which is in the clouds" (xxxvii. 21). This is a sentence we have to stand side by side with "songs in the night." Astronomical meanings there may be, literal criticism may take out of expressions of this kind all that is nourishing to the soul and all that is comforting to the troubled spirit; yet there the juice of the divine grace remains, the sap of the holy virtue is found, and may be received and appropriated by hearts that are in a fit condition. Astronomy shall not have all the grandeur and all the suggestion; the heart will have some of it. The heart says, The universe was made for man, not man for the universe, and man has a right to take his sickle into every field, and reap the bread which he finds growing there, for wherever there is bread it was meant for the satisfaction of hunger. "Men see not the bright light which is in the clouds,"—the silver lining, the edge of glory. We ought to reckon up our mercies as well as talk of our judgments: "My song shall be of mercy and judgment"—a complete song, a psalm wanting in no feature of sublimity and tenderness. Suppose we sometimes reverse the usual process,

and instead of writing down the name of the cloud and its size and density, we should take our pen and with a glad swift eagerness write down the lines we have seen, the sudden gleamings, the bright visions, the angel-forms, the messages of love, the compensations, the advantages of life. That would be but grateful ; that would be but just. Is there any life that has not some brightness in it? How true it is that though in some cases the light is all gone, yet, even amongst little outcast children, see what laughter there is, what sunniness, what glee ! Who has not seen this on the city streets? Looking at the little wayfarers we should say, There can be no happiness in such lives ; such little ones can never know what it is to laugh ; and lo, whilst we are musing and moralising, how they lilt and sing and show signs of inextinguishable gladness. This is the mystery of life. It always has with it some touch of heaven, some throb of immortality, some sign of all-conquering force. Here it is that the gospel will get its hold upon men. Begin with the joys they have, carry them forward with due amplification, and purify them until they turn into a reasonable and religious gladness. Seize the facts of life, and reason from them up into pious generalisations, rational religious conclusions, and force men by the very strenuousness of your argument to see that they have had seeds enough, but have never planted them ; otherwise even their lives would have been blooming, blossoming, fruitful as the garden of God.

### Job xxxvii. 23, 24.

“Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out : he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice : he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him : he respecteth not any that are wise of heart.”

### THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN.

**I**T is well that there should be an immeasurable and unknown quantity in life and in creation. Even the Unknown has its purposes to serve : rightly received, it will heighten veneration ; it will reprove unholy ambition ; it will teach man somewhat of what he is, of what he can do and can not do, and therefore may save him from the wasteful expenditure of a good deal of energy.

“Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.” All space leads up to the Infinite. There comes a time when men can measure no longer ; they throw down their instrument, and say, This is useless : we are but adding cipher to cipher, and we can proceed no further : Space has run up into Infinity, and infinity cannot be measured. Nearly all the words, the greater words, that we use in our thinking and converse, run up into religious greatness. Take the word Time. We reckon time in minutes and hours, in days and weeks and months and years and centuries, and we have gone so far as to speak of millenniums ; but we soon tire ; arithmetic can only help us to a certain point. Here again we draw up the measuring line or calculating standard, and we say, It is useless, for Time has passed into Eternity. These are facts in philosophy and in science, in nature and in experience,—Space rising into Infinity ; Time ascending into Eternity : the foot of the ladder is upon earth, but the head of the ladder is lost in infinite distance. Take the word Love. To what uses we put it ! We call it by tuneful names : it charms us, it dissipates our solitude, it creates for us companionship, interchange of thought, reciprocation of trust, so that one

life helps another, completing it in a thousand ways, great or small. But there comes a point even in love where contemplation can go no further; there it rests—yea, there it expires, for Love has passed into Sacrifice; it has gone up by way of the Cross. Always in some minor degree there has been a touch of sacrifice in every form of love, but all these minor ways have culminated in the last tragedy, the final crucifixion, and Love has died for its object. So Space has gone into Infinity, Time into Eternity, Love into Sacrifice. Now take the word Man. Does it terminate in itself—is the term Man all we know of being? We have spoken of spirit, angel, archangel; rationally or poetically or by inspiration, we have thought of seraphim and cherubim, mighty winged ones, who burn and sing before the eternal throne, and still we have felt that there was something remaining beyond, and man is ennobled, glorified, until he passes into the completing term—God. They, therefore, are superficial and foolish who speak of Space, Time, Love, Man, as if these were self-completing terms: they are but the beginnings of the real thought, little vanishing signs, disappearing when the real thing signified comes into view, falling before it into harmonious and acceptable preparation and homage. So then, Faith may be but the next thing after Reason. It may be difficult to distinguish sometimes as to where Reason stops and Faith begins: but Faith has risen before it, round about it; Faith is indebted to Reason; without reason there could have been no faith. Why not, therefore, put Reason down amongst the terms, and so complete for the present our category, and say, Space, Time, Love, Man, Reason—for there comes a point in the ascent of Reason where Reason itself tires, and says, May I have wings now? I can walk no longer, I can run no more; and yet how much there is to be conquered, compassed, seized, and enjoyed! and when Reason so prays, what if Reason be transfigured into Faith, and if we almost see the holy image rising to become more like the Creator, and to dwell more closely and lovingly in his presence? All the great religious terms, then, have what may be called roots upon the earth, the sublime words from which men often fall back in almost ignorant homage amounting to superstition. Begin upon the earth; begin amongst ourselves; take up our words and show their real meaning, and give a hint of their final

issue. He who lives so, will have no want of companionship ; the mind that finds in all these human, social words, alphabetical signs of great religious quantities and thoughts, will have riches unsearchable, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Why dwarf our words ? Why deplete them of their richer and more vital meanings ? Why not rather follow them in an ascending course, and rejoice in their expansion, and in their riches ? The religious teacher is called upon to operate in this direction, so far as he can influence the minds of his hearers ; it is not his to take out of words all their best significations, but rather to charge every human term with some greater thought, to find in every word a seed, in every seed a harvest, it may be of wheat, it may be of other food, but always meant for the satisfaction and strengthening of our noblest nature.

Our relation, then, to God is strikingly set forth by this speech of Elihu. "We cannot find him out." It is something to know when the word "cannot" is to be introduced into human speech. That also is a most useful word. It chafes us ; we feel that it engages our life : but why need it do so ? There is a way of accepting even a "cannot" that shall ennoble our best thinking, that shall chasten all our feeling and passion, and shall excite in us hopes not now to be realised, because the space is too small, and the time too short, and the hour of liberation has not yet come. It is something to know where we have to stop for the moment ; time is saved, moral disappointment is avoided, energy is turned upon real practical immediate duty, so that instead of spending life in vain aspiration we spend it in beneficent service, not the less beneficent and large because it is animated by a sure hope and confidence that by-and-by even the horizon shall recede, even heaven shall be heightened, and all we know now of time and space shall be completed in eternity and in infinity. What we do know of God in the first instance, we know as Elihu knew it, through nature, experience, history. We cannot consent that these terms shall be limited by themselves as narrowly interpreted : they shall stand for greater quantities ; even such words shall be as little gates opening upon infinite spaces. We may know a good deal by looking at what are called phenomena. Even phenomena are not intended to be self-

terminating; they are meant to be suggestive, indicative, significant; rightly accepted, they lure us to further distances, and promise us great results to our religious attention. Take a house, and let me describe it to you with a view of your telling me what the builder or tenant or owner must be. The house is commodious, built of polished stone, enriched here and there and in many places with marble of the finest quality, on which has been expended the most minute and skilful workmanship: the garden is large, filled with choicest plants and flowers, and things of beauty: now and again I hear from the open windows strains of music and gladness and sacred festivity; all the tones are solemn, majestic; now and then indeed I hear sounds of children's voices, but all blend so as to impress me with a sense of sacredness or solemnity: equipages are coming, going, and great men descend and return; and behold, oftentimes through the gilded gates I see poor people going away with bread, and with signs of beneficent attention. Who lives there? I do not know; I never saw the tenant. Tell me what he must be. Who can hesitate? Though you never saw the tenant of that mansion you know a good deal about him, from what you have seen of what are called phenomena, or appearances, or outside hints. Who, passing the house, would hesitate to say, A rich man lives there; a good man has his home in that house; there you have abundance of wealth, there you have a domestic economy that results in harmony and gladness; there you have a beneficent ruler, one who cares for the poor and the sick and the helpless? Did you ever see him? No. Do you know his name? No. Then how can you predicate such things about him? Because of what we see; all these things, of course, are external, and, therefore, we are not at liberty to attach to them greater significance than belongs to appearances, so-called facts, or events; yet we cannot look upon these facts, events, occurrences, be they what they may, without feeling that no small creature lives there, no man of limited ideas, but a man who would make others as happy as himself, a man of resources, who enriches himself by enriching others. The reasoning would not be unsound; it would rather seem to be supported by facts. The man who took that view of the house might be a rationalist, and yet have no occasion to be ashamed of the designation. Let us "stand still," as Elihu



said in another passage, "and consider the wondrous works of God," and say from the contemplation of those works, even so far as they are known to us, what God must be, or the works could not be what they are. Verily, the house is large: who can touch the roof, so blue, sun-lighted, star-panelled? Truly the garden is ample, beautiful, fragrant; all the world seems to want to be a garden; the flowers would grow if we would allow them to do so; the music—thunder, tempest, storm, strong wind, gentle breeze, purling brook, roaring, dashing cataract—a wondrous combination of sounds! And happiness? Verily, there is a great deal of sunshine even amongst men and women and children; yea, merriment and dancing and laughter and gleeful singing. Who made this? I do not know. Who owns it? I cannot tell. What do you think of the architect? I think he must be great, wise, good. Then, say you, if you were to be told that his name is "Father," would you believe it? At once: you have made a revelation to me; that is the word: I will go round the whole place again, and confirm your accuracy by the facts which are patent to my observation. Then, looking again at the high heaven, at the radiant horizon, at the green earth, at the abundant summer, at the hospitable autumn, I return and say, You have given the right name: whoever he is, "Father" is a word that suits the circumstances: let us keep to that. Then you continue, Were you to be told that you should pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," would you? Instantly; reason would say so: I could defend myself by facts; I should feel that I was standing upon a pedestal of rock, lifted up so high that I could all but touch the great holy mystery. Thus the Christian thinks he has solid standing-ground; he has not given up reason and handed it over to those who call themselves rationalists; if any man would take away reason from the Church he would stop him and say, That is one of the golden goblets of the sanctuary; it must not be stolen; it is God's property and must be left in his sanctuary. Who, then, would hesitate, judging by the mere phenomena or circumstances, to describe God as great, wise good?

"He is excellent . . . in judgment." Is there any judgment displayed in the distribution of things? Is the globe ill-made?

Are all things in chaos? Is there anywhere the sign of a plummet-line, a measuring-tape? Are things apportioned as if by a wise administrator? How do things fit one another? Who has hesitated to say that the economy of nature, so far as we know it, is a wondrous economy? Explain it as men may, we all come to a common conclusion, that there is a marvellous fitness of things, a subtle relation and inter-relation, a harmony quite musical, an adaptation which though it could never have been invented by our reason, instantly secures the sanction of our understanding as being good, fit, and wholly wise.

“And in plenty of justice.” Now Elihu touches the moral chord. It is most noticeable that throughout the whole of the Bible the highest revelations are sustained by the strongest moral appeals. If the Bible dealt only in ecstatic contemplations, in religious musings, in poetical romances, we might rank it with other sacred books, and pay it such tribute as might be due to fine literary inventiveness and expression; but whatever there may be in the Bible supernatural, transcendental, mysterious, there is also judgment, right, justice: everywhere evil is burned with unquenchable fire, and right is commended and honoured as being of the quality of God. The moral discipline of Christianity sustains its highest imaginings. Let there be no divorce between what is spiritual in Christianity and what is ethical,—between the revelation sublime and the justice concrete, social, as between man and man; let the student keep within his purview all the parts and elements of this intricate revelation, and then let him say how the one balances the other, and what co-operation and harmony result from the inter-relation of metaphysics, spiritual revelations, high imaginings, and simple duty, personal sacrifice, industry as of stewardship, of trusteeship. This is the view which Elihu takes. God to him was “excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice.”

“He will not afflict.” A curious expression this, and differently rendered. Some render it, He will not answer: or, He will not be called upon to answer for his ways: he will give an account of himself to none; there is a point beyond which he

will not permit approach. Yet the words as they stand in the Authorised Version are supported by many collateral passages, and therefore may be taken as literal in this instance. He will not willingly afflict: he is no tyrant; he is not a despot who drinks the wine of blood, and thrives on the miseries of his creation: when he chastens it is that he may purify and ennoble the character, and bring before the vision of man lights and promises which otherwise would escape his attention. Affliction as administered by God is good; sorrow has its refining and enriching uses. The children of God are indeed bowed down, sorely chastened, visited by disappointments; oftentimes they lay their weary heads upon pillows of thorns. Nowhere is that denied in the Bible; everywhere is it patent in our own open history; and yet Christianity has so wrought within us, as to its very spirit and purpose, that we can accept affliction as a veiled angel, and sorrow as one of God's night-angels, coming to us in cloud and gloom, and yet in the darkest sevenfold midnight of loneliness whispering to us gospel words, and singing to us in tender minor tones as no other voice ever sang to the orphaned heart. Christians can say this; Christians do say this. They say it not the less distinctly because there are men who mock them. They must take one of two courses: they must follow out their own impressions and realisations of spiritual ministry within the heart; or they must, forsooth, listen to men who do not know them, and allow their piety to be sneered away, and their deepest spiritual realisations to be mocked out of them or carried away by some wind of fool's laughter. They have made up their minds to be more rational; they have resolved to construe the events of their own experience and to accept the sacred conclusion, and that conclusion is that God does not willingly afflict the children of men, that the rod is in a Father's hand, that no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it worketh out the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Believe me, they are not to be laughed out of that position. They are reasonable men, men of great sagacity, men of affairs, men who can deal with questions of state and empire; and they, coming into the sanctuary—the inmost, sacred sanctuary—are not ashamed to pray. This is the strength of

Christian faith. When the Christian is ashamed of his Lord, the argument for Christianity is practically, and temporarily at least, dead. Why do we not speak more distinctly as to the results of our own observation and experience? Great abstract truths admit of being accented by personal testimony. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God," said one, "and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." If a witness will confine himself to what he himself has known, felt and handled of the word of life, then in order to destroy the argument you must first destroy his character.

So, then, we are agnostics—"touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." But we are agnostics only because of our limitation. We are agnostics about all things beyond a given point. Even philosophers say that they are agnostics as regards the inner elements and qualities of matter itself. So let it be. But being agnostics in that sense and under that definition, we are not prevented from following the instinct of life, and inquiring into Scriptural revelation through the medium of its moral discipline; and so inquiring, we have come to the conclusion that God is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; that God is Creator, King, Ruler, Father, Redeemer, and that at the last good will triumph over evil, and the Redeemer shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. Ask us to prove these things in words, and you ask us to do what cannot be done by such feeble instruments; but beyond words, and deeper than words, are holy instinct, spiritual convictions, absolute confidence in the processes and ministries of things which will abide when the mocker is tired of sneering, and when the interrogator is wearied with the monotony of his own questioning. Let us lovingly, steadfastly, through the eternal Son of God, worship and trust him, who has been pleased to make himself known to us by the gracious and tender name of Father.

Chapters xxxviii.-xli.

THE THEOPHANY.

WE have now come to the portion of the Book of Job which is known as the Theophany, or *Appearance*, that is to say, the appearance of the Divine Being. Let us set forth the sacred speech in its fulness and unity :—

1. Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind [a voice without a form], and said,

2. Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge ?

3. Gird up now thy loins like a man ; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

4. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth [or founded the earth] ? declare if thou hast understanding.

5. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest ? or who hath stretched the line upon it ? [Intimating absolute order and law.]

6. Whereupon are the foundations [not the same word as in verse four] thereof fastened [or sunk] ? or who laid the corner stone thereof ;

7. When the morning-stars sang together [the stars preceded the earth], and all the sons of God [angels] shouted for joy ?

8. Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb ? [The ocean is personified as a new-born giant.]

9. When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it,

10. And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors,

11. And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further : and here shall thy proud waves be stayed ?

12. Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days [any day in thy little life] ; and caused the day-spring to know his place ;

13. That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it ? [Note the material and moral effects of light].

14. It is turned as clay to the seal [it is changed as seal-clay] ; and they stand as a garment [all things stand out as a garment].

15. And from the wicked their light is withholden, and the high arm shall be broken.

16. Hast thou entered into the springs [weepings] of the sea ? or hast thou walked in the search [vain search] of the depth ?

17. Have the gates of death been opened unto thee ? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death ?

18. Hast thou perceived [comprehended] the breadth of the earth ? declare if thou knowest it all.

19. Where is the way [the land] where light dwelleth ? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof ?

20. That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof ?

21. Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born ? or because the number of thy days is great ?

22. Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow ? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail,

23. Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war ?

24. By what way is the light parted, which scattereth the east wind upon the earth ? [or, doth the east wind scatter itself over the earth ?]

25. Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters [who hath riven a channel for the torrent of waters], or a way for the lightning of thunder [of voices] ;

26. To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is ; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man ;

27. To satisfy the desolate and waste ground ; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth ?

28. Hath the rain a father ? or who hath begotten the drops of dew ?

29. Out of whose womb came the ice ? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it ?

30. The waters are hid as with a stone [the waters are hardened like stone, and the surface of the deep is held fast], and the face of the deep is frozen.

31. Canst thou bind the sweet influences [fastenings] of Pleiades [a heap or group], or loose the bands of Orion [the fool or giant] ?

32. Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth [some say the Zodiac ; others, Jupiter or Venus] in his season ? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons ?

33. Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven ? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth ?

34. Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee ?

35. Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are ?

36. Who hath put wisdom [the gift of discerning causes] in the inward parts [the kidneys are regarded in Hebrew physiology as the seat of instinctive yearnings] ? or who hath given understanding to the heart ?

37. Who can number the clouds in wisdom ? or who can stay [cause to lie down] the bottles of heaven.

38. When the dust groweth into hardness [when the dust is molten into a mass], and the clods cleave fast together ?

39. Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion [lioness] ? or fill the appetite of the young lions,

40. When they couch in their dens, and abide [sit] in the covert to lie in wait ?

41. Who provideth for the raven his food ? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

### Chapter xxxix.

1. Knowest [this knowledge includes perception into causes] thou the time when the wild goats [rock-climbers] of the rock bring forth ? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve ?

2. Canst thou number the months that they fulfil ? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth ?

3. They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones,

they cast out their sorrows. [Arab poets call infants and young children "pangs."]

4. Their young ones are in good liking [fatten], they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them.

5. Who hath sent out the wild ass free [whose speed exceeds that of the fastest horse]? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass?

6. Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings [salt waste which wild asses lick with avidity].

7. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver [task-master].

8. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.

9. Will the unicorn [*rather*, a well-known species of gazelle] be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?

10. Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee?

11. Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him?

12. Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?

13. Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks [a mis-translation]? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?

14. Which leaveth [not in the sense of forsaking, but in the sense of committing] her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust,

15. And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them.

16. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not her's: her labour is in vain without fear;

17. Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding.

18. What time she lifteth up herself on high [lashes the air], she scorneth the horse and his rider.

19. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? [Suggesting the idea of vehement and terrific movement.]

20. Canst thou make him afraid [spring] as a grasshopper? The glory of his nostrils is terrible.



21. He paweth in the valley [he diggeth the plain], and rejoiceth in his strength : he goeth on to meet the armed men.

22. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted : neither turneth he back from the sword.

23. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield.

24. He swalloweth the ground [the space which separates the armies] with fierceness and rage : neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet.

25. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha ; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

26. Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south ?

27. Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high ?

28. She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place.

29. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off.

30. Her young ones also suck up blood : and where the slain are, there is she.

### Chapter xl.

1. Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said,

2. Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him ? he that reproveth God, let him answer it.

3. ¶ Then Job answered the Lord, and said,

4. Behold, I am vile ; what shall I answer thee ? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

5. Once have I spoken ; but I will not answer : yea, twice ; but I will proceed no further.

6. ¶ Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

7. Gird up thy loins now like a man : I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

8. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment ? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous ?

9. Hast thou an arm like God ? or canst thou thunder with voice like him ?

10. Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency ; and array thyself with glory and beauty.

11. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath : and behold every one that is proud, and abase him.

12. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low ; and tread down the wicked in their place.

13. Hide them in the dust together ; and bind their faces in secret.

14. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.

15. ¶ Behold now behemoth [the hippopotamus], which I made with thee ; he eateth grass [herbage] as an ox.

16. Lo now, his strength [his special characteristic] is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. [Unlike the hippopotamus, the elephant is mostly easily wounded in the belly.]

17. He moveth his tail like a cedar [not in size but in rigidity] : the sinews of his stones are wrapped together :

18. His bones are as strong pieces of brass [his bones are as tubes of copper] ; his bones are like bars of iron.

19. He is the chief of the ways [the masterpiece] of God : he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him.

20. Surely the mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field play. [“He searches the rising ground near the river for his substance, in company with the animals of the land.”]

21. He lieth under the shady trees [the lotus trees], in the covert of the reed, and fens.

22. The shady trees cover him with their shadow ; the willows of the brook compass him about.

23. Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not : he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth [he is steadfast if the Jordan boast upon his mouth].

24. He taketh it with his eyes : his nose pierceth through snares.

### Chapter xli.

1. Canst thou draw out leviathan [crocodile] with a hook ? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down [sinkest his tongue in a noose] ?

2. Canst thou put an hook into his nose? or bore his jaw through with a thorn?

3. Will he make many supplications unto thee? will he speak soft words unto thee?

4. Will he make a covenant with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? [The crocodile can be partially tamed.]

5. Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?

6. Shall the companions [Egyptian fishermen were called Fellows or Companions] make a banquet [traffic] of him? shall they part him among the merchants [Canaanites]?

7. Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish spears?

8. Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more.

9. Behold the hope of him [the hope of man that the animal may be caught] is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?

10. None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?

11. Who hath prevented me [made me a debtor], that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.

12. I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his comely proportion.

13. Who can discover the face of his garment [who can lift up, as a veil, his outside covering]? or who can come to him with his double bridle [his double row of teeth]?

14. Who can open the doors of his face? his teeth are terrible round about [round about his teeth is terror].

15. His scales are his pride ["grand is the channeling of his shield-like scales"], shut up together as with a close seal.

16. One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.

17. They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered.

18. By his neesings a light doth shine, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning [and were made a symbol of morning by the Egyptians].

19. Out of his mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire leap out.

20. Out of his nostrils goeth smoke, as out of a seething pot or caldron.

21. His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth.

22. In his neck remaineth strength, and sorrow is turned into joy before him.

23. The flakes of his flesh [even the parts of most animals which are loose and flabby] are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved.

24. His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone.

25. When he raiseth up himself the mighty are afraid: by reason of breakings they purify themselves [lose their presence of mind].

26. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon.

27. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.

28. The arrow cannot make him flee: sling stones are turned with him into stubble.

29. Darts [or clubs] are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear.

30. Sharp stones are under him: he spreadeth sharp pointed things upon the mire.

31. He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment.

32. He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary.

33. Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear.

34. He [coldly] beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride [all beasts of prey].

Chapters xxxviii.-xli.

THE THEOPHANY.

I.

LET us admit that the Theophany is poetical ; that will not hinder our deriving from it lessons that are supported by reason and vividly illustrated by facts. As an incident, the Theophany is before us, come whence it may. It inquires concerning great realities, which realities are patent to our vision. It does not plunge into metaphysics only, or rise to things transcendental ; it keeps within lines which are more or less visible, lines which in many cases are actually tangible. Here, then, it stands as a fact, to be perused and wisely considered.

To such questions there ought to be some answer. They are a hundred thick on the page. If we cannot answer all we may answer some. God has not spared his interrogatories. There is no attempt at concealment. He points to the door, and asks who built it, and how to get into it, and how to bring from beyond it whatever treasure may be hidden there. It is a sublime challenge in the form of interrogation.

The thing to be noted first of all, is, that it purports to be the speech of God. That is a bold suggestion. The man who wrote the first verse fixed the bound of his own task.

“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said——”  
(xxxviii. 1).

It was a daring line even for an author to write. He proposed his own end, and by that end he shall be judged. He himself assigned the level of his thought, and we are at liberty to watch whether he keeps upon the level, or falls to some lower

line. A wonderful thing to have injected God into any book! This is what is done in the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Whether he did so or not, some man *said* he did. That thought must be traced to its genesis. It is easy for us now, amid the familiarity of religious education, to talk of God doing this and that, and accomplishing great purposes, and consummating stupendous miracles. We were born into an atmosphere in which such suggestions and inquiries are native and familiar. There was a time when they had to be invented—or revealed. Notice that God is supposed to have taken part in the colloquy. Now Job will be satisfied. He has been crying out for God; he has been telling his friends again and again that if he could but see God everything would be rectified almost instantaneously. Job has been mourning like one forsaken, saying, Oh that I knew where I might find him! Oh that God would come to me, and prefer his accusation against me in his own person and language! Now the aspiration is answered: God is at the front. Let us see what comes of the conflict.

Still we may dwell upon the sweet and sacred thought that God is taking part in human controversies, inquiries, and studies of every depth and range. He is a friend at least who suggested that God has something to say to me when all time is night, when all sensation is pain. If we could be sure that One takes part in human conversation if only by way of cross-examination, it would be something to know; at any moment he might change his tone. It is everything to feel that he is in the conversation. Whatever point he may occupy, whatever line of reply he may adopt, to have him, who is the beginning and the ending, in the intercourse, is to have at least a possible opportunity of seeing new light, and feeling a new touch of power, and being brought into more vivid and sympathetic relations with things profound and eternal. Why do we edge the Almighty out of life by describing his supposed intervention as the suggestion of poetry? What is this poetry, supposed to be so mischievous? Is it any more mischievous than a sky? What crimes has it committed? What is the indictment against poetry? By "poetry" we are not to understand words that

meet together in sound and rhyme, but the highest reason, the sublimest philosophy, the very blossom of reason. Men suppose that when they have designated a saying or a suggestion as poetical, they have put it out of court. It is not so. A fable may be the highest fact. In a romance you may find the soul of the truest history; there may not be a solitary literal incident in the whole, and yet the effect shall be atmospheric, a sense of having been in other centuries and in other lands, and learned many languages, and entered into masonry with things hither unfamiliar. Sometimes we must use wings. Poetry may be as the wings of reason. But how good the poetry is which suggests that God is a listener to human talk, and may become a party to human conversation, and may at least riddle the darkness of our confusion by the darts of his own inquiries. Here is a case in point. Does he ask little questions? Are they frivolous interrogations that he propounds? Is the inquiry worthy of his name, even though that name be poetical? Is every question here on a level with the highest thinking? Judge the Theophany as a whole, and then say how far we are at liberty to excuse ourselves from the applications of its argument on the trivial ground that it is but poetry.

Who can read all these questions without feeling that man came very late into the field of creation? No deference is paid to his venerableness. The Lord does not accost him as a thing of ancient time as compared with the creation of which he is a part. Everything was here before man came: the earth was founded, the stars shone, the seas rolled in their infinite channels; the Pleiades were sprinkled on the blue of heaven, and the band of Orion was a fact before poor Job was born. It would seem as if everything had been done that could have been done by way of preparation for him! He brought nothing with him into this creation, not even one little star, or one tiny flower, or one singing bird: the house was furnished in every chamber for the reception of this visitor. This is scientific according to the science of the passing time. Has any one invented a theory that man came first, and furnished his own house, allotted his own stars, and supplied the face of the earth with what ornamentation he required? Is there anything here inconsistent with the marvellous

doctrine of evolution? Contrariwise, is not everything here indicative of germ, and progress, and unfolding, and preparation, as if at any moment the consummation might be effected and God's purpose revealed in the entirety of its pomp and beneficence? Man is here spoken of as having just come into the sphere of things, and not having yet had time to know where he is, what is the meaning of the symbols that glitter from the sky or the suggestions that enrich the earth. A challenge like this would be quite inconsistent with a recent creation of the universe. How recent that creation would be at the time at which these inquiries were put! Now that astronomy has made us familiar with whole rows and regiments of figures, we speak of six or eight or ten thousand years as but a twinkling of the eye, but according to old reckoning how young would creation have been, if it had been created but six thousand years ago when this Theophany was written some three or four thousand years since as a matter of literary fact! Take off three or four thousand years from the supposed six, and then all the questions would be inappropriate and absurd as applied to a creation hardly finished. The speech seems to be spoken across an eternity. So that we have no fear of evolutionary figures or astronomical calculations; we have no apprehension arising from theories of growth, involvement, evolvement progress, consummation; on the contrary, the whole spirit and genius of the Bible would seem to point to age, mystery, immeasurableness, unknowableness. Everywhere there is written upon every creation of God Unfathomable. The Theophany, then, is worthy, in point of literary conception and grandeur of the opening line—"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind."

Not only does man come late into the field of creation, but, viewed individually, how soon he passes away! "Man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" We are of yesterday, and know nothing. The bells that announce our birth would seem to be interrupted by the toll of the knell that announces our decease. Thus God has great hold upon the whole race by the hold which he has upon the individual man. When the individual man enlarges himself into humanity, and speaks of the whole race, the speech is not



without nobleness ; but how soon the speaker is humbled when he is reminded that he will not have time to finish his own argument—that long before he can reach an appropriate peroration he will be numbered with the generations that are dead. Thus we have greatness and smallness, abjectness and majesty, marvellously associated in the person of man. God seems to have taken no counsel with man about any of his arrangements of a natural kind. Man was not there to be consulted. Poor man ! he was not asked where the Pleiades should hine ; he was not invited to give an opinion upon the length and breadth of the sea ; he was not asked how the rain should be brought forth, and at what periods it should descend in fertilising baptism upon the thirsty ground. He finds everything appointed, fixed, settled. Man is like the sea in so far as there seems to be a boundary which he may not pass—"Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further," and here shall thy pursuit become prayer, and thy strength assume the weakness of supplication. Be the author of the Theophany who he may, be he profound reasoner or winged and ardent poet, he keeps his level well. Let us be just to him, even if we approach him from an unbelieving or a sceptical point of view. The palm be his who wins it : honour to whom honour is due. The man who dreamed this Theophany never falls into a nightmare ; his dream keeps on the wing until it alights at the very gate of heaven.

Judged in relation to all the universe which has been described, how inferior is the position which man occupies in creation ! some of the questions are very mocking and most humbling : man is asked if he can fly ; if he can send out lightnings, and cause the electricity to come and stand at his side and say, Here am I. He is put down, snubbed, rebuked. He is pointed to the beasts of the field, and asked what he can do with them : can he hire the unicorn ? "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib ? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow ? or will he harrow the valleys after thee ? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great ? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him ? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn ?"—(xxxix. 9-12). What art thou ? Gird up thy loins now like

a man, and answer these questions. "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? . . . canst thou put an hook into his nose? . . . The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee: sling stones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear. Sharp stones are under him: he spreadeth sharp pointed things upon the mire. He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment." What art thou? what canst thou do? where is thy strength? Disclose it. And as for thy wisdom, what is the measure thereof? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? canst thou play with the stars? All these questions drive man back into his appropriate position. The argument would seem to be, Until you can understand these comparatively inferior matters, let other subjects alone: if you cannot explain the ground you tread upon, the probability is that you will not be able to explain the sky you gaze upon: if you know not yourself, how can you know God? And yet let us not be discouraged. If man has any superiority it must be in other directions. How great, then, must those directions be, how sublime in their scope and energy! Is man altogether overwhelmed by these inquiries? In a certain limited way he is; but does he not recover his breath, and return and say, After all, I am crowned above all these things? He does, but we must wait until he has had time to recover his breath or regain his composure. The questions come upon him like a cataract! they roar upon him from all points of the compass in great overwhelming voices, so that he is deafened and stunned and thrown down, and asks for time. Presently we shall see that man is greater than all the stars put together, and that although he cannot search the past to exhaustion he will live when the sun himself grows dim and nature fades away; he will abide in the secret of the Almighty, long as eternal ages roll. His greatness is not in the past but in the future. Hardly a star in the blue of heaven but mocks the recentness of his birthday: but he says that he will live when the stars shall all be extinguished. Greatness does not lie in one direction. Greatness may hardly lie at all in the past: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The Christian hope is that

when Christ appears we shall be like him, that we shall see him as he is. We are not to be great as antiquarians but great as sons of God.

Here, then, is our opportunity: shall we arise and avail ourselves of it? the mischief is lest we should be tempted to follow out these inquiries in the Theophany as if our whole interest lay in the past. Into the past we can go but a little way. Who can tell the number of God's works, or find out the Almighty unto perfection? The oldest man amongst us is less than an infant of days compared even with some gigantic trees that have been rooted in the earth for a thousand years; they stand whilst man perishes; yea, they throw a shadow over a man's grave, and still grow on as if time meant them to be immortal. Our greatness, let us repeat, does not relate to the past, or to the past only; our opportunity is to-morrow the great morrow of eternity. So our song is, This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality: death shall be swallowed up in victory; saints shall mock the tomb. How do we feel now? are we rebuked? are we humbled? The answer must be Yes, and No: we are very young compared with the creation of God, but all these things shall be dissolved, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the little eternity of the ages shall be swallowed up and forgotten, and all the eternity of God's love and fellowship shall open as in ever-increasing brightness. How is that glory to be attained? Here the gospel preacher has his distinctive word to deliver. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The word may be disputed, but there it is; the word may occasion great mental anxiety, but it abides there—a solemn and noble fact in the book. Why should it affright us? There is music in that gospel. Hear it again. "This is life eternal." A peculiar quality of life rather than a mere duration of life: "eternal" does not only point to unendingness but to quality of life—"This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." The mystery is a mystery of music; the mystery is a mystery of light: there is no confusion in the thought, but unsearchable riches, and the embarrassment is that of wealth not of poverty. So now we have two standards

of judgment: the one the great outside creation, stars and seas, beasts and birds, hidden secrets of nature, undiscovered laws of the intricate economy of the universe; there we can know but little: and the other standard of judgment is the Son of God, of whom it is said, he created all things, was before all things, that in him all things consist, that he is Lord of all the stars, even of hosts; he shaped every one of them, flashed its light into the eye of every planet that burns, and rules them all with majesty as sublime as it is gracious. The Christian gospel says that he, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," that he might give us eternal life. O creation! great, monotonous, hard, austere creation! we perish as to the mere matter of duration before the ages which measure the period of thine existence, but we mock thee, laugh at thee, despise thee, if thou dost challenge us with a view to the future: the past is thine, take it, and die in luxuriating upon it; the future is ours, and being in Christ we cannot die. This is our rational challenge, as well as our Christian appeal and comfort.

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#### NOTE.

The exact amount of censure due to Job for the excesses into which he had been betrayed, and to his three opponents for their harshness and want of candour, could only be awarded by an omniscient Judge. Hence the necessity for the Theophany—from the midst of the storm Jehovah speaks. In language of incomparable grandeur He reproves and silences the murmurs of Job. God does not condescend, strictly speaking, to argue with His creatures. The speculative questions discussed in the colloquy are unnoticed, but the declaration of God's absolute power is illustrated by a marvellously beautiful and comprehensive survey of the glory of creation, and His all-embracing Providence by reference to the phenomena of the animal kingdom. He who would argue with the Lord must understand at least the objects for which instincts so strange and manifold are given to the beings far below man in gifts and powers. This declaration suffices to bring Job to a right mind: his confesses his inability to comprehend, and therefore to answer his Maker (xl. 3, 4). A second address completes the work. It proves that a charge of injustice against God involves the consequence that the accuser is more competent than he to rule the universe. He should then be able to control, to punish, to reduce all creatures to order—but he cannot even subdue the monsters of the irrational creation. Baffled by leviathan and oehemoth, how can he hold the reins of government, how contend with him who made and rules them all?—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

## Chapters xxxviii.-xli.

### THE THEOPHANY.

#### II.

HOW far is it possible to read all the great questions contained in the Theophany in a sympathetic and gentle tone? May we not be wrong in supposing that all the questions were put as with the whole pomp and majesty of heaven? Has not the Lord a still small voice in which he can put heart-searching questions? Is there not a river of God, the streams whereof shall make glad his city? Is that river a great, boiling, foaming flood? Perhaps we may have been wrong in carrying the whirlwind into the questions. "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind,"—but it is not said that the Lord answered Job *like* a whirlwind; even out of that tabernacle of storm God might speak to the suffering patriarch in an accommodated voice, in a whisper suited to his weakness. Let it be an exercise in sacred rhetoric to read the questions of the Theophany sympathetically, to whisper them, to address them to the heart alone. Unless we get the right tone in reading God's Book, we shall mar all its music, and we shall miss all its gospel. The people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus Christ; and the tone was often an explanation of what was spoken; there was something in the Man's way of stating what he had to say, which led hearers, otherwise hostile, to admit—"Never man spake like this man." It seems, indeed, as if the questions should be spoken with trumpets and thunders and whirlwinds a thousand in number; and yet by so speaking them we should not reveal the majesty of God; we might reveal that majesty still more vividly and persuasively by finding a way of asking the questions which would not overpower the listener or destroy what little strength he had.

God does not hesitate to charge upon the patriarch and all whom he represented something like absolute ignorance:—"Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? . . . Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?" What hast thou done? What hast thou seen? We have only seen outsides—what are called phenomena or appearances, aspects and phases of things; but what is below? "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?" "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?" Thou hast sailed across the sea, but hast thou ever walked through its depths? Hast thou not rather been carried as by some mighty nurse from continent to continent, rather than been a spectator of the springs of the infinite flood? "Hast thou walked in the search of the depth?" The word "search" is full of meaning; it signifies a kind of quest which will not be satisfied with anything but the origin, the actual fountain and spring and beginning of things: it is not enough to see the water, we must know where the water comes from; we must search into the depth. It is not enough to see the hail that falls, we want to see the house out of which it comes, the infinite snow-house in which God has laid up his treasures of cold. May we not see the treasures of the hail? We are ever kept outside. God has always something more that we have not seen. "Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee?" Thus we are reminded of our ignorance. Yet we are wise, limitedly wise; we are quite great as grubbers after phenomena; we come home every night laden with more phenomena. By some mysterious process the word "phenomena" seems to satisfy our appetite because it fills our mouth. But what are these phenomena? Have we found out everything yet? Let the most learned men answer, and they will say, We have found out nothing as it really is; we have just learned enough to correct the mistakes of yesterday, and enough to humble us in view of tomorrow; we are waiting for another revelation or discovery or acquisition; we have spent one century in obliterating the misrecorded phenomena of another. This is admitted by the men themselves. They demand justice at the hands of the Christian teacher, and they are the first to admit that they

know nothing in its reality, in its interior condition, quality, and meaning. We are not now forcing an interpretation upon their words, but almost literally quoting them. What is it that you are now playing with? hand it to me: what is the name of it? A flute. Very good: I have heard it, now I want to examine it! Open it for me! Why don't you open it? What are you playing upon? It seems to be a grand, many-voiced instrument,—what is the name of it? You answer me, It is an organ. Good: I like it; it touches me at a thousand points, and makes me feel as if I had a thousand lives: now open it; show me the music: I have heard it, I want to see it. You decline; in declining you are wise. Who destroys the instrument through which the music comes? Who would cut a little bird's throat to find out the secret of its trill? Hast thou seen the treasures—searched the depths—gone into the interior of things? Or art thou laden like a diligent gleaner with sheaves of phenomena, which thou art going to store in thy memory to-day for the purpose of casting them out to-morrow? What can we then know about God, if we can know so little about his sea, and the treasure-house of his hail, and the sanctuary of his thunder? It is the same with religious emotion and religious conviction. Take your emotion to pieces. You decline to take your flute to pieces; you smile at the suggestion that you should open every part of the organ and show me the singing angels that are closeted in the good prison: how then can I take this religious emotion to pieces? These deep religious convictions resist analysis; when we approach them analytically, they treat us as murderers. Men who exclaim against vivisection, and often justly, surely ought to be proportionately indignant with the men who would take souls, so to say, fibre from fibre, and perform upon them all the tricks and cruelties of analysis. Yet the universe is beautiful and profitable exceedingly. Even what we can see of it often fills our eyes with tears. Who has not been melted to tears by the beauty of nature, by the appealing sunshine, by the flower-gemmed fields and hills, by the purling streams and singing birds, and all the tender economy of summer? Men have sometimes been graciously forced to pray because things were so comely, beautiful, tender, suggestive; they could not be wild-voiced in the presence of such charms; even the rudest felt a new tone come

into his voice as he spake about the mystic loveliness. Behind all things there is a secret,—call it by what name you please: some have called it secret; others have called it persistent force; others have described it by various qualifications of energy; others again have said, It is a spirit that is behind things; others have whispered, It is a father. But that there is something behind appearances is a general belief amongst intelligent men. When one of the greatest of our teachers compares what is known to a piano of so many octaves, he only numbers the octaves which he can touch: who can tell what octaves infinite lie beyond his fingers? Who will say that any one man's fingers can touch the extremes of things? Were he to say so, we should mock him as he extended his arms to show us what a little span he has. Throughout the Theophany, then, God is not afraid to charge men with absolute ignorance of interior realities which may be spiritual energies

Not only is man ignorant, he is powerless “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?” (xxxviii. 31). Hark how he speaks of Pleiades as if the white sapphires were but a handful, and a child could use them! “Or loose the bands of Orion?” Answer me! “Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the the earth? Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?” (xxxviii. 32-35). These questions admit of some answer. Surely we should be able to give some reply to interrogatories of this kind. Then how man's power is mocked—“Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?” Try him; reason with him; show thyself friendly to him: come, thou art learned in the tricks of persuasion and all the conjuring of rhetorical argument, try thy skill upon the unicorn—“canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee?” Make some use of him; make a domestic of him; make a slave of the unicorn: or trust him; put confidence in him; be magnanimous to the unicorn: “Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave



thy labour to him?" Surely there is a mocking laugh running through all these particular inquiries,—not a laugh of bitter mockery, but of that taunt which has a gracious meaning, and by which alone God can sometimes call us to a realization of our strength which is in very deed our weakness. Then when all the questions are answered so far, God says, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook? or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down?" Thou art very able and yet very feeble: come, let us see what thou canst do. Thou canst beat a dog,—conciliate a unicorn; thou canst slay an ox, and stand over him like a butcher-conqueror,—call the eagle back from heaven's gate; demand that he come; thou art a man, thunder at him: what is the result? Thou hast numerous trophies and proofs of thine ability,—now put a thorn through the nostrils of leviathan, thrust a spear through the scales of the crocodile. Thou canst do something: thou canst not do everything. Do not understand, therefore, that weakness is power, or that power is all power; draw boundaries, lines, limits, and within these assert thy manhood and begin thy religion. Truly we are very powerless. Yet in some respects we are influential in a degree which warms our vanity. In the summer of 1886 there were shocks of earthquake in Charleston and in various other American cities. Why did the people not speak to the earthquake, and bid it be quiet? Surely they might have done that. Many of them were rich planters; many of them were gifted in the power of cursing and swearing and defying God. Look at them! Another shock, and the greatest buildings in the city are rent and dashed to the dust. Hear these men—drunkards, swearers, blasphemers, worldly men—begging black niggers on the open highway to pray! What a humiliation was theirs! Why did they not bind the earthquake, throw a bridle upon the neck of the infinite beast, put a bit in his mouth, and make him lie down and be still? See, they reel to and fro like drunken men! How powerless we are! And in these hours of powerlessness we know what a man's faith is worth. It is in such crises that we know what your intellectual speculations and fine metaphysical flourishings come to; it is then that we put our finger upon the pack of her mysteries, and say, Why don't you open this pack, and be quiet and comfortable whilst the heart is being shaken at its very

centre? Not a metaphysician but would part with all the mysteries he ever knew if he could only be saved from the wolf that is two feet behind him. We are not sure that any metaphysician ever lived who would not be quite willing to go back to school again as an ignorant boy—if the earthquake would only give over! Oh it rocks the town, it tears the mountains, it troubles the sea—oh would it but be quiet! We would give money, fame, learning, and begin the world afresh: but we cannot live in this misery. When you see men boasting, and blaspheming and scorning the Church, and pouring contempt upon all the ordinances of religion, all you need desire by way of testing the reality of such ebullition and madness would be to see them under the influence of an earthquake: they would beg a dog to pray for them if they thought that the dog had any influence with Heaven. Are we to be led by these men and to take the cue of our life from them, and to say, How strong they are, how lofty in stature, how broad in chest, and how they breathe with all the vigour of superabounding life: they shall be our leaders, and not your praying men in the Church? Can the blind lead the blind? they shall both fall into the ditch. You cannot tell what a man is by any one particular hour of his experience; you must see him in every degree of the circle before you can fully estimate the quality which marks him as a man.

It is something to know that we are ignorant and that we are powerless. Much is gained by knowing the limits of our ability, and the limits of our knowledge. Let a man keep within the boundary of his strength, and he will be powerful for good: let him stretch himself one little inch beyond God's appointment, and he will be not only impotent but contemptible. Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves and strong ambition be stayed. "The Lord reigneth." We are but men; our breath is in our nostrils. We cannot see through one little sheet of paper; the tiniest leaf that grows in the field if put upon our eye would shut out the sun. Better let us be quiet, simple, watchful, humble, patient, receiving the divine revelation as the divine Giver may see fit to disclose it.

The great argument, then, is this: as there is so much *in* nature which thou hast not understood, there may be also much

in human life and discipline thou hast not fully comprehended. It is the argument of analogy. It is the great argument of the philosophical bishop. There is no escape from it; certainly none within the limits of the Theophany. If we do not know the interior of a piece of wood, how can we know the interior of a thought? If we cannot pluck a flower, and keep it, how could we pluck the secret of God, and retain it as our own? Again and again we have seen that to pluck a flower is to kill it. However tenderly you may treat it, however you may feed it with water, protect it from all adverse influences, you have plucked the flower, and you have killed it. Thou shalt not trespass in the divine province. We may walk through the garden of God, but may not pluck the flowers that grow in that holy paradise. Things are not made valuable to us simply by holding them in the hand. The sun would be no sun if we could inclose him within our own habitation: he stands away at an inaccessible distance; he can come down to us, but we cannot go up to him. O thou great hospitable sun, terrible yet genial, distant yet quite near, thou art a bright symbol of the God who made thee. As there are mysteries in nature, so there are mysteries in life. What is your thought? Where did it come from? How did your ideas originate? What is that thing you call your soul? Show it; describe it; trace its length; name its relations; what is it? Psychology has its holy of holies as well as theology. Do not imagine that all the mysteries cluster around the name of God. We must, then, accept the mysteries of life: they are many in number; they are very pressing and urgent, and often embarrassing and difficult; but they belong to the great system of God's government. Why should the good man have trouble? Why should the atheist have a golden harvest? Why should the blasphemer prosper and the suppliant be driven away as if by a pursuing and judicial wind from heaven? "My feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment." Ah me! my

soul, wait thou patiently upon God. The mysteries of nature have their counterpart in the mysteries of life. But remember, in the second place, that as all in nature is under divine control, so is all in human life. There is a wise God over all, blessed for ever more. He comes down to us as a father, compassionate, tender, watchful, regarding every one of us as an only child, numbering the hairs of our head; he besets us behind and before; he is on the right hand and on the left, and he lays his hand upon us. We know it, for we have proved it in a thousand instances: our whole life is an argument in proof of the existence, government, and goodness of God. "Oh rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." The day is very cloudy and the night is full of weary hours; the chariot-wheels of time and the soul's trouble roll heavily; morning after morning comes like one disappointment upon another. It requires a God-wrought faith, a very miracle of trust, to wait and not complain.

Is man, then, but a part of an economy; not an individual but part of a process; one amongst ten thousand other things? Is a man at liberty to say—I have renounced my individuality; I fall into the great stream and current of what is called history; I have declined individual responsibility, and identified myself with the sum-total of things? How foolish would be this talk! Let us test that for one moment. Does Society recognise the impersonal creed? We must bring these creeds to practical tests. Suppose Society should say to all its members: Individual responsibility is gone; we are part and parcel of a stupendous economy, and we must just take our lot with the general movement: it is in vain that man after man should stand up and claim individual franchise or honour or influence or responsibility. Society never said so, and yet retained its security for any length of time. Does man himself recognise it in reference to his daily wants? Does he say: I am part of a general system of things, and therefore I do not trouble about what I should eat and what I should drink and wherewithal I should be clothed: all these are petty questions, minor and frivolous inquiries and concerns? Does man ever say so? But when he mounts his philosophic steed, then he becomes

“part of a general economy,” a shadowy gentleman, an impalpable nothing, a most proud humility. The doctrine will not bear practical tests. Man is always asserting his rights. Take part of his property from him, and you will destroy his creed. Occupy the seat for which he has paid, and tell him when he comes to claim it that he is part of a great system of things, belongs to a mysterious and impalpable economy, and say, “Why so hot, my little sir? Why not amalgamate yourself with the universe?” If these creeds will not bear testing in the marketplace and at the railway station, and in all the wear and tear, in all the attrition and controversy, of life, they are vanity, an empty wind. The Christian doctrine is—Every one of us shall give account of himself to God: we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. We cannot abandon our individuality socially, why should we abandon it religiously? We could not live by giving ourselves away into airy nothingness, then how can we live the better and nobler life by obliterating our personality and sinking like a snowflake on a river?

Here let us rest. God has spoken. His questions have been a multitude; they may have been thundered, they may have been whispered; now and then they may have risen into pomp and majesty and augustness, and yet now and then they may have come down into whisper and breathing and gentle speech. God's ministry is manifold. There is no monotony in the speech of God. He reveals himself to us as we are able to bear it. We cannot go to himself directly; we can go to his Son Jesus Christ, whom he hath made Lord of all things. We hail thee, Son of man, Son of God, and we do our own convictions injustice unless we hail thee as God the Son, and crown thee Lord of all.

## Chapters xxxviii-xli.

### THE THEOPHANY, AS A WHOLE.

WE have been waiting for the answer of God to the trouble of Job and to the tumult occasioned by his friends. We became weary of the fray of words, for they seemed to have no legitimate stopping-place, and to bring with them no sufficient and satisfactory answer. At length God has appeared, and we have already said that the appearance of God upon the scene is itself the great answer. To have come into the action at all is to have revealed a condescension and a complacency amounting to an expression of profound and tender solicitude in regard to all that distressed and overwhelmed the life of the patriarch. If God had not spoken, his presence would have been an answer. To be assured that God draws nigh at any moment to troubled human life, is to be also sure that he will see the right vindicated : he will not break the bruised reed ; he will not quench the smoking flax ; nor will he allow others to break and to quench what he has lovingly taken within his fatherly care. But, as a matter of fact, God has used words, and therefore we are entitled to read them, and to estimate their value, and to consider their whole influence upon the marvellous situation which occasioned them. This is not the answer that we expected. If we had been challenged to provide an answer, our imagination would have taken a very different line from that which God adopted in his reply to Job and his comforters. But who are we that we should have imagined any answer at all ? Better that we should have sat down in silence, saying, *This is a trouble which puts away from its sacred dignity all words ever devised or used by man.* Let man keep his words for mean occasions ; let him not attempt to use them when *God's hand is*

laid heavily upon one of his creatures : then silence is the true eloquence, mute grief is the wisest sympathy.

The answer overwhelms our expectations. It is greater than we had supposed it would be. We were not aware that such a sweep of thought would have been taken by the great Speaker and the divine Healer. Our way would have been more direct, in some respects more dramatic : we would have seen the black enemy lifted in mid-air, and blasted by the lightning he had defied ; we might have imagined him slain upon the altar of the universe, and cast down into outer and eternal darkness, and Job clothed with fine linen in sight of earth and heaven, and crowned conqueror, and having in his hand a palm worthy of his patience. Thus our little expectations are always turned upside down ; thus our little wisdom is proved by its littleness to be but a variety of ignorance : so does God make all occasions great, and show how wise a thing it would be on our part to refer all matters to his judgment, and not to take them within the limits of our own twilight and confused counsels. At the last it will be even so ; the winding-up will be so contrary to our expectations : the first shall be last, and the last shall be first ; and men shall come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and many who had attempted to force their way into the kingdom will be ordered back into the darkness which is native to their corruption. Let us learn from this continual rebuking of expectation that things all lie within God's power and wisdom, and that he will dispose them graciously and permanently, and vindicate his disposal by appeals to our own judgment and experience, in a larger world, where there is light enough to touch the problems of the past at every point.

In the next place, this is a terrible use to make of nature. Who could have thought that nature would be so used—forced, so to say, into religious uses of the largest kind ? The very stones cry out in hymns of praise to God ; the whole heaven comes to vindicate the excellence of his wisdom and the completeness of his power. What can man do when Nature takes up the exposition of divine purpose and decree ? Who can answer the whirlwind ? Who can hold his breath in face of a tempest that leaps down from the clouds and makes the mountains

shake by its tremendous energy? Who could look up when the stars put on all their light and blind the mortal vision of man? We are made afraid when we come into a realisation of this particular use of nature. We did not know that God had so many ministers who could speak for him. We had been dreaming about the heavens, and wondering about the infinite arch, and talking about the beauty of the things that lay round about us; we had called the earth a garden of God, and thought of nature as a comforting mother and nurse: yet now when the occasion needs it all nature stands up like an army ten thousand times ten thousand strong, and takes up the cause of God and pleads it with infinite eloquence. If we have to be rebuked by nature in this way, who can stand for one moment? If a man may not utter a complaint lest the lightning blind him, who then dare confess that he has a sorrow that gnaws his heart? If our disobedience is to be reproved by the rhythmic movement of the obedient stars, then who would care or dare to live? All things obey the Creator but man: "the heavens declare the glory of God"; night unto night uttereth speech; there is no disobedience in all the uproar of the seas; when nature is shaken she is not rebellious: but man—strange, poor, weird, ghostly man—can scarcely open his mouth without blasphemy, or look without insulting the heavens he gazes at, or think without planning some treason against the eternal throne. So God uses this great machine; so God hurls at us the stars that shine so placidly, and make the night so fair. Yet we must take care how we use nature: she is a dainty instrument; she resents some of the approaches we make when we intend to use her for illicit or base or unworthy purposes. We must beware how we press nature into our service. We must not appropriate nature to **exclusive** uses or to hint at the divisions and separations of **men**. Nature should be used otherwise. Better allow the great Creator to say how nature may be employed in illustrating religious thought, religious relations, and religious action.

But this is not the only use which is made of nature even by the Creator. At first we are affrighted, as we nearly always are in the Old Testament, but when the Creator speaks of



nature in the New Testament he adopts quite a different tone. There is One of whom it is said, He made all things : he is before all things : by him all things consist : without him was not anything made that was made. It will be instructive to hear him speak of the uses of nature. Does he answer his hearers "out of the whirlwind?" Does he thunder upon them from the sanctuary of eternity? Hear him, and wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth—Consider the lilies of the field how they grow : if God so care for or clothe the grass of the field, will he not much more care for and clothe you, O ye of little faith? Yet it would be unfair to the Old Testament if we did not point out that even there the gentler uses of nature are shown by the very Creator himself. When Jacob was cast down, when his way was supposed to be passed over, when all hope had died out of him, and every glint of light had vanished from his sky, God said to him, "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things,"—the same God, the same nature ; a weakened and discouraged man, yet nature in this case used to restore and comfort the soul that was overwhelmed. Thus God must use his armoury as he pleases. He can plead against us with great strength, he can overwhelm us, he can take away our breath by a whirlwind, he can blind us by excess of light ; or he can so show the galaxy of heaven, and the whole panorama of the visible universe, as to heal us and comfort us, and lead us to say, He who keeps these lights in their places will not quench the smoking flax. Where is there a healer so gentle and compassionate, loving and sympathetic, as nature? Sometimes she seems to say to broken-hearted man, I was made for you ; you never knew it until this hour : now I will heal you, and lead you to the altar, where you thought the fire had died out—the altar which you thought God had abandoned. This appeal to nature is the higher and truer way of teaching. It brings a man out of himself. That is the first great conquest to be achieved. All brooding must be broken up ; everything of the nature of melancholy or fixing the mind upon one point, or dwelling upon one series of events, must be invaded and dissipated. God would take a man for a mountain walk, and speak with him as they climbed the hill together, and watch him as the fresh wind blew upon his weary

life, and revived him as with physical gospels ; the Lord would take a man far out into the mid-sea, and there would watch the effect of healing influences which he himself has originated, and which he never fails to control : the man would be interested in new sights ; he would feel himself in point of contact with great sweet nature ; without knowing it, old age would be shed from his face, and he would ask youthful questions, and propose plans involving expenditure of hope and energy and confidence and faith of every degree and quality ; and he who went out an old, bent-down, helpless man, would come back clothed with youth, having undergone a process almost of resurrection, being brought up from the dead, and set in new and radiant relation to all duty, responsibility, and labour. Here is the benefit of the Church. So long as men hide themselves in solitude they do not receive the advantage and helpfulness of social and Christian sympathy. The very effort of coming to the church helps a man sometimes to throw off his imprisonment and narrowness of view. There is something in the human touch, in the human face divine, in the commingling of voices, in the public reading of the divine word, which nerves and cheers all who take part in the sacred exercise. Solitude soon becomes irreligious ; monasticism tends to the decay of all faculties that were meant to be social, sympathetic, reciprocal : "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together" : come into the larger humanity, behold the larger creation, and thus receive healing and comfort and benediction from enlargement of relation and sympathy. Never allow yourself to prey upon yourself. That act of self-consumption means everything that is involved in the words despair and ruin. Force yourselves into public relations ; so to say, compel yourselves to own your kith and kindred, to take part in family life and in that larger family life called the intercourse of the Church—in public worship, in public service—and also know that God has made all nature to minister unto your soul's health, establish a large intercourse with mountain and river and sea, with forest and flower-bed, and singing birds, and all things great and lovely : some day you will need them, and they will be God's ministers to you.

**This answer is a sublime rebuke to the pride which Job had**

once asserted during the colloquies. In chapter xiii. 22, Job said, in quite a round strong voice, indicative of energy and independence and self-complacency, "Then call thou, and I will answer : or let me speak, and answer thou me." That tone needed to be taken out of his voice. Oftentimes the musical teacher says to the pupil, Your voice must be altogether broken up, and you must start again in the formation of a voice ; you think now your voice is good and strong and useful, but you are mistaken ; the first thing I have to do with you is to take your voice away, then begin at the beginning and cultivate it into an appropriate expression. Job's voice was out of order when he said, "Call thou, and I will answer,"—or, if it please thee, I will adopt another policy—"let me speak, and answer thou me." Behold how complacent is Job ! how willing to adopt any form of arbitration ! how anxious to throw the responsibility upon another ! He feels himself to be right, and therefore the other side may make its own arrangements and its own terms, and whatever they are he will boldly accept them ! Every man must be answered in his own tone : "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If your challenge is so bold and proud, God must meet you on the ground which you yourself have chosen. "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said—" then comes the cataract of interrogation, the tempest of inquiry, in which Job seems to say, O spare me ! for behold I am vile : what shall I answer thee ? I will lay my hand upon my mouth : once have I spoken, but I will not answer ; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further : O thou God of the whirlwind, give me rest ; let me have time to draw my breath ! But, poor Job, thou didst say to God, "Call thou, and I will answer : or let me speak, and answer thou me : " where is now thy boast, thy pride, thy vain talking ? Thus does God humble us in a thousand ways. We pull down our barns and build greater, and behold in the morning they are without roof and without foundation, and none can say where the solid structure stood. We say, "Let us build a tower which shall reach even unto heaven " ; and we build it very high, and in the morning when we come to finish it, lo, there is not one stone left upon another. There is a humbling ministry in creation. Nature is full of rebuke, and criticism, and judgment ; or she is full of comfort and suggestion, and religiously rapsable and most tender benediction.

How apt we are to suppose that we could answer God if we only had the opportunity! Could we but see him; could we but have an interview with him; could we but speak to him face to face, how we should vindicate ourselves! There was a man who once sought to see God, and he turned and saw him, and fell down as one dead. Sudden revelation would blind us. Let us not tempt God too much to show himself. We know not what we ask. What is the great answer to our trial? The universe. What is the great commentary upon God? Providence. What is the least profitable occupation? Controversy. Thus much have we been taught by our reading in the Book of Job. Where Job had a spiritual revelation—a voice answering out of the whirlwind—we have had personal example. We do not hear God or see God in any direct way, but we see Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of man, who also knows all the secrets of nature, for he was before all things, and by him all things consist: the universe is his garment; behold, he is within the palpitating, the living soul. O mighty One! when thou dost come to us in our controversies and reasonings, plead not against us with thy great power, but begin at Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, and in all the Scriptures expound unto us the things concerning thyself; and we shall know who the speaker is by the warmth that glows in our thankful hearts.

### Job xlii. 1-6.

"Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

### AFTER THE STORM.

**W**HAT does it all come to? We have been much excited by the process, what is its consummation? Is the end worthy of the beginning? Is the literary structure well put together, and does it end in domes and pinnacles worthy of its magnitude and original purpose? Or is this a lame and impotent conclusion? Let us deal frankly with the facts as they are before us.

It is difficult to avoid the feeling of some disappointment as we come to the conclusion of the Book of Job. On first reading, the last chapter seems to be the poorest in all the work. If the writer was a dramatist, he seems to have lost his cunning towards the close. This chapter appears, when first looked at, to have been written by a wearied hand. The writer seems to be saying, I would I had never begun this drama of Job: parts of it were interesting enough to me, but now I have come to sum it all up I find a want of glory; I have not light enough to set above the whole tragedy; I thought to have ended amid the glory of noon-tide, and I find myself writing indistinctly and feebly in the cool and uncertain twilight. Should any man so express himself he must vindicate his position by the chapter as it stands at the close of the Book of Job. Is Job alive? Did we not expect him to go down under the cataract of questions which we had been considering? Does he not lie a dead drowned man under the tremendous torrent? To what shall we liken the course of Job? Shall we say, A ship at sea? Then verily it was a ship

that never knew anything but storms : every wind of heaven had a quarrel with it ; the whole sky clouded into a frown when looking upon that vessel ; the sea was troubled with it as with a burden it could not carry, and the lightnings made that poor ship their sport. Did the ship ever come into port ? or was it lost in the great flood ? Shall we compare Job to a traveller ? Then he seems to have travelled always in great jungles. Quiet, broad, sunny, flowery roads there were none in all the way that Job pursued : he is entangled, he is in darkness, the air is rent by roars and cries of wild beasts and birds of prey. It was a sad, sad journey. Is there anything left of Job ? The very weakness of the man's voice in this last chapter is the crowning perfection of art. If Job had stood straight up and spoken in an unruffled and unhindered voice, his doing so would have been out of harmony with all that has gone before. It was an inspiration to make him whisper at the last ; it was inspired genius that said, The hero of this tale must be barely heard when he speaks at last ; there must be no mistake about the articulation, every word must be distinct, but the whole must be uttered as it would be by a man who had been deafened by all the tempests of the air and affrighted by all the visions of the lower world. So even the weakness is not imbecility ; it is the natural weakness that ought to come after such a pressure. Old age has its peculiar and sweet characteristic. It would be out of place in youth. There is a dignity of feebleness ; there is a weakness that indicates the progress and establishment of a moral education. Job, then, is not weak in any senile or contemptible sense ; he is weak in a natural and proper degree.

Let us hear every word of his speech. What a deep conviction he has of God's infinite majesty—"I know that thou canst do every thing." These words might be read as if they were the expression of intellectual feebleness. They are the words of a shattered mind, or of undeveloped intellect ; they are more like a repetition than an original or well-reasoned conviction. "I know that thou canst do every thing,"—words which a child might say. Yet they are the very words that ought to be said under the peculiar circumstances of the case. There must be no attempt to match God's eloquence ; that thunder must roll in its

own heavens, and no man must attempt to set his voice against that shock of eloquence. Better that Job should speak in a stifled voice, with head fallen on his breast, saying, "I know that thou canst do every thing." He said much saying little. He paid God, so to say, the highest tribute by not answering him in the same rhetoric, but by contrasting his muffled tone with the imperious demands that seemed to shatter the air in which they were spoken. Who can be religious who does not feel that he has to deal with omnipotence? Who can be frivolous in the presence of almightiness—in the presence of him whose breath may be turned towards the destruction of the universe, the lifting up of whose hand makes all things tremble. Without veneration there is no religion. That veneration may be turned into superstition is no argument against this contention. Not what may be done by perverting genius, but what is natural and congruous is the question now before the mind. There should be a place, therefore, for silence in the church: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." We may not stare with audacity. If we catch any hint of the light of his garment, it must be by furtive glances. See, then, Job overpowered, convinced at least of omnipotence, assured that he has to deal with almightiness. That assurance will determine all that he says afterwards. But omnipotence is, so to say, objective; it is outside of us, beyond us, something to be looked at, perhaps admired, perhaps appealed to in servile tones.

Is there no attribute of God which corresponds with this but looks in the other direction? Job has discovered that attribute, for he adds "and that no thought can be withholden from thee." The God of Job's conception, then, was first clothed with omnipotence, and secondly invested with omniscience. Job is now upon solid ground. He is no dreaming theologian. He has laid hold of the ideal God in a way which will certainly and most substantially assist him. If omnipotence were the only attribute of God, we should feel a sense of security, because we could exclude him from the sanctuary of our being; we could keep him at bay; we could do with him as we could do with our nearest and dearest friend,—we could look loyalty and think blasphemy. Who can not smile, and yet in his heart feel all

the cruelty of murder? But here is a God who can search thought, and try the reins of the children of men; from whose eye nothing is hidden, but who sees the thought before it is a thought, when it is rising as a mist from the mind to shape itself into an imagining, a dream or a purpose. There is not a word upon my tongue, there is not a thought in my heart, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. God is a searcher of hearts. God uses this word "search" again and again in talking to Job: Hast thou searched the depths of the sea, the treasures of the hail, the hiding-place of wisdom? hast thou penetrated it, taken away fold after fold, and probed the infinite secret to its core? A wonderful revelation of God is this, which invests him with the attribute of searching, piercing to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow. There is nothing hidden from the eye of God. "All things," we read in this book, "are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." God is all secret: to God secret is impossible. The thing we have hidden in our hearts lies under the blaze of noon-day burning light. Is it nothing to have come to this conclusion on practical grounds as Job has done? We may come into religious conceptions in one of two ways: we may be instructed in them, they may be communicated to us by the friendly voice of father or teacher or pastor, and we may hold them with some realisation of their sacredness; or we may be scourged into them, driven into our religious persuasions and conclusions; we may be caused to flee into them by some pursuing tempest: when that is the case, our religion cannot be uprooted, for it is not something we hold lightly or secure by the hand; it is part of our very souls, it is involved in our identity. So there is a difference between intellectual religion and experimental religion; there is a difference between the Christianity of the young heart and the Christianity of the old heart: in the first instance there must be more or less of high imagination, ardent desire, perhaps a touch of speculation, perfectly innocent and often most useful; but in the case of the experienced Christian all history stamps the heart with its impress; the man has tested the world, and has written "lie and vanity" on its fairest words; he knows that there is something beyond appearances, he has been afflicted into his religion, and he is now as wrought iron that cannot be bent or broken;



the whole process has been completed within himself, so that suggestion and fact, conjecture and experience, joy and sorrow, high strength and all-humbling affliction, have co-operated in the working out of a result which is full of sacred trust, and which is not without a certain stimulus to pure joy.

So what was supposed to be weakness was in reality strength. The subduing of Job as to his mere attitude and voice, is the elevation of Job as to his highest conceptions and experiences. What a thorough conviction he had of his finite condition!—"Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." It is something to know that there are some spaces we cannot reach. The eye can do more than the hand. The hand would sometimes follow the eye, but it follows it at an immeasurable distance. The eye sees the fair blue arch of summer, but the spoiling hand cannot stain that fair disclosure of God's almightiness. The mind is the better for knowing that it is pursued by a law of trespass. Imagination is none the worse, but all the better, for seeing written here and there all round the horizon: No thoroughfare—No road—Private. What if we could see everything, handle everything, explain everything? Who would not soon tire of the intolerable monotony? It is the surprise, the flash of unexpected light, the hearing of a going in the tops of the trees, the shaking of the arras, that makes one feel that things are larger than we had once imagined, and by their largeness they allure us into broader study, into more importunate prayer. "Things too wonderful for me"—in providence, in the whole management of human history, in the handling of the universe—that easy, masterly handling by which all things are kept in attitude and at duty,—that secret handling, for who can see the hand that arranges and sustains all nature? Yet there nature stands, in all security and harmony and beneficence, to attest that behind it there is a government living, loving, personal, paternal. Is it not something to know, then, that we are not infinite? It is easy to admit that in words. Nothing is gained, however, by these easy admissions of great propositions in metaphysics and theology. We must here again, as in the former instance, be driven into them, so that when we utter them we may speak with the consent and force of a united life. We

accept the position of creaturehood, and must not attempt to seize the crown of creatorship.

What dissatisfaction Job expresses with mere hearsay in religious inquiry! "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear." That is superficial. There is nothing in it that can profoundly and savingly affect the life. Who has not heard thousands of sermons, and forgotten them by the easy process of turning aside from their appeals and practically disobeying them? Yet, who has heard aright—heard with his soul, heard with his unblunted and undivided attention, heard with the eagerness of men who must hear or die? Alas, there is but little such hearing. Even when the Scripture is read in the public assembly, who can hear all its music, who can reply to its sweet argument? Is there not much mere hearsay in religion? We may hear certain truths repeated so frequently that to hear anything to the contrary would amount to a species of infidelity. In reality, there may be no infidelity in the matter at all, for what we have been hearing may be all wrong as we shall presently have occasion to note. There is a mysterious, half-superstitious influence about repetition. Things may be said with a conciseness and a frequency which claim for the things said a species of revelation. Hence many false orthodoxies, and narrow constructions of human thought and human history, because other things do not balance with what we have always heard. But from whom have we heard these things? It may be that the fault lies in the speaker and in the hearer, and that the new voice is not a new voice in any sense amounting to mere novelty, but new because of our ignorance, new because we were not alive to our larger privileges.

"But now," Job continues, "mine eye seeth thee." "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear" is equal to, I have heard of thine omnipotence: "but now mine eye seeth thee" amounts to a balancing of the omniscient power of God. Man is allowed to see something of God, as God sees everything of man. The vision is reciprocal: whilst God looks we look,—"mine eye seeth."

"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." No man can imagine light. Looking upon the grey landscape

before the sun has fully risen, a man says—I can imagine what it will be when the sun shines upon it. He is wrong. No man can imagine sunlight. He can do so in a little degree; he can imaginatively increase the light that is already shining, but when the sun, so to say, chooses to come out in all the wizardry of his power, touching and blessing what he will and as he will, he startles the most diligent devotee at his altar with new displays of unsuspected splendour. So it is, only in infinitely higher degree, with the living God. Could we but see him even in his goodness, it should be unto us like glory; were his glory to pass before us, we should never see it more, for we should be blinded by the excess of light.

Here, then, we find the patriarch once so eloquent abhorring himself in dust and ashes. That is a condition to which we must come before we can be right with God. Whilst we are mere controversialists, we can never be penitents; whilst we are “clever,” we can never pray; whilst we think that there is one poor little rag upon our nakedness, God will not command the blessed ones to bring forth the white robe of adoption and restoration. We must be unmade before we can be re-made. We must be dead before we can live. Thou fool, that which thou sowest must die before it can bring forth fruit. That is the explanation of our want of real religion. We have never experienced real contrition for sin. We have never seen that we are sinners. If we could see that, all the other prayers of Scripture would gather themselves up in the one prayer—God be merciful to me a sinner! So long as we can ask questions we are outside the whole idea of redemption; by these questions we mean merely intellectual inquiries,—not the solemn moral inquiry, “What shall I do to be saved?” but the vain intellectual inquiry which assumes that the mind retains its integrity and is willing to converse with God upon equal terms. From the Pharisee God turns away with infinite contempt. We may know something of the full meaning of this by looking at it in its social relations. Take the case as it really stands in actual experience. A man has misunderstood you, robbed you; has acted proudly and self-sufficiently toward you; has been assured of one thing above all others, and that is that he himself is right whoever else

may be wrong: he has pursued his course; that course has ended in failure, disappointment, mortification, poverty: he returns to you that he may ask favours, but he asks them with all the old pride, without a single hint that he has done anything wrong, or committed a single mistake. You cannot help that man; you may feed him, but he can never rise above the position of a mendicant, a pauper for whom there is no help of a permanent kind. He speaks to you as if he were conferring a favour upon you in asking for the bread he wants to eat. What must that man do before he can ever be a man again in any worthy sense? He must get rid of his pride, his self-sufficiency, his self-idolatry; he must come and say, if not in words yet in all the signification of spirit—I am a fool, I have done wrong every day of my life; I have mistaken the bulk, proportion, colour, value of everything; I have been vain, self-sufficient, self-confident; I have duped myself: O pity me! Now you can begin, and now you can make solid work: the old man has been taken out of him; the sinning, the offending Adam has been whipped out of him, and he comes and says in effect, Help me now, for I am without self-excuse, self-defence; my vanity, my pride are not dead only, but buried, rotten, for ever gone. Now you may open your mind, open your heart, open your hand; now you may buy a ring for his fingers and shoes for his feet; now you may bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; now he begins to be a son. But without this there is no possible progress. If we go to God and say that we are men of great intellect, men even of genius, we can understand thee, show thyself to us; we are equal to the occasion; if we have made any mistakes, they are mere slips, they have not affected the integrity of our character or the pureness of our souls; we will climb the range of creation; we will demand to exercise the franchise of our uninjured manhood. Nothing will come of such high demand. The heavens will become as lead when such appeals are addressed to them. We must come in another tone, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner! Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? “A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall.” Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make as one of thy hired servants. Now the house will be full of light, full of music; a house almost heaven.

## PRAYER.

WE bless thy name, thou loving One, for thinking of our need of rest. Thou knowest our frame, thou rememberest that we are dust; thou hast set among the days one whose name is Rest. This is the Sabbath of the Lord. We hear thy voice saying unto us, Rest awhile. Thou dost cause us to rest that we may gather strength; thou dost not lull us into stupor; thou dost in sleep make us again, yea, thou dost create us in thine own image and likeness, so that when we come back from the land of forgetfulness we are ready for duty, for service, for suffering, and we expend the Lord's rest in doing the Lord's work. We bless thee for the Sabbath day. It is a day of triumph, the grave was robbed of its victory by the rising Christ. He is not in the grave, he is risen: we behold the place where the Lord lay, but he himself has gone forth free for ever. Teach us the meaning of death; show us that we must all die, but that being in Christ we die into greater life; we do not die into darkness and extinction, we die into light and immortality. Jesus Christ brought this great truth to light in the gospel: now we say, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? We triumph in the Lord's victory, we rise again in the Lord's resurrection. Help us to understand more of our relation to Jesus Christ; enable us to feel it more vitally; may we be in him, rooted, established, built up, yea may we be made one with the Son of God. Then shall Christ's triumph be ours, and the peace of Christ shall be our peace, and because he is in heaven we shall be very near him there. Fill us with all the fulness of Christ. In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily: may we partake of that fulness—fulness of God, fulness of Christ, fulness of life, and light, and love; yea, may Christ overflow in us, so that we may the more abundantly and earnestly desire him, knowing how rich is his grace, and how tender the touch of his love. We bless thee for all sense of new life; thou art writing the story of the resurrection upon the face of the whole earth; every opening flower preaches the good news of rising again, every green little bud upon hedge and tree tells us that God liveth, and he will bring up, from the winter of our sorrow and sin and overthrow, the spring immortal, the spring of celestial beauty. Every morning preaches the gospel of resurrection, every night the old enemy is overthrown and buried, and new-born light shines upon all the awakening and rejoicing earth. May we not be beguiled from our faith by aught that men can say of nature misread and misunderstood; may we rather read the parable of divine action in nature, and see in every dawn, in every spring, in every new opportunity, a hint of re-creation, and a guarantee of immortality. Help us to bring the power of an endless life to bear upon the action of the present day; then shall little things be made great, and things of no account shall stand up invested with importance. Every word shall fall into the music of Thine own utterance, and every aspiration shall lift us nearer thy throne. Pity those who have no Sabbath day, who toil, and wear themselves, and fall as victims

under crushing anxieties; pity those who have no Eastertide, no vernal springtide, no occasion of realized life, in which death flees away, and the grave, ashamed of its emptiness, seeks to fill itself with flowers. Look upon those who are dying, and tell them that death is overthrown; may there be joy in the chamber of affliction, may there be triumph in the house of bereavement, may they who sit in darkness see a great light, and say, Christ the Lord is risen to-day, and his name is great in Zion. Amen.

### Chapter xlii. 7-17.

"And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job. And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

### THE EXALTATION AND DEATH OF JOB.

**H**OW God rebukes the wisdom of the wise! How God humiliates the very men who supposed that they were defending and glorifying him! How even Christian ministers may misrepresent God! We may be talking about religion without being religious. These are the thoughts which are excited by the circumstance that when all the comforters had exhausted their accusatory eloquence they had neither comforted Job nor pleased God. It is right The tone that is to comfort the world is not a tone of exasperation: when the world is

really comforted in its inner heart it will be by music, by the singing of angels, by the reception of gospels, by communion with the loving God. How sad a thing is this, that men may suppose they are serving God at the very time they are angering him! How infinitely sad it is that a man may suppose he is preaching the gospel when he neither understands what he is saying nor feels it in all its pathos! Are there any critics so intolerable, so discouraging to man, so unacceptable to God, as those who think they know all things, and can answer all questions, and rebuke all errors and infirmities, and sit in just judgment upon the whole race of mankind? They think they do God service; nay, they are sure of it; they affirm it with great emphasis; they suppose they are the men, and that wisdom will die with them: what if at the end they should argue themselves into a great divine wrath, and plunge themselves by their giddy logic into the very fire of divine judgment?

The three comforters surely spoke up for God nobly, with eloquence, and with great argumentative skill, and with signal critical ability; they did not hesitate to perform upon Job the whole process of vivisection; they were not kept back by any fear of wounding his feelings; they were exasperating preachers; they hurled at Job the largest missiles they could lift and throw; but where was their bowing down of heart, where their tender sympathy, where their desire to know the case in its reality and make the best of it? What if at the last the Christian preacher may have to apologise to the people whom he has been misleading for offering them false doctrine and false comfort! Did the comforters of Job ever say, Before we utter one word about this misery, let us pray? Was there any prayer in the whole process until Job began to pray at the end of the tumultuous colloquy? They began in high argument and in sonorous eloquence, and they hurled the commonplaces of their time at the wounded head of Job, but even Eliphaz the Temanite—eldest, and in some respects best, of the comforters—did not say, Let us put away all controversy, and come together in prayer without words—that mute wrestling agony of the soul which God will understand and not pass by with neglect. What is this gospel we have to preach, and about

which some people know everything, and know most about it when they are most ignorant of its spirit? The gospel is not a mechanical arrangement, it is not a new device in theological geometry; we cannot tell whence it cometh, whither it goeth, in many of its effects; we should always be right, however, when we proclaim this doctrine, namely—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That is a sentence which admits of no amendment. We ought to be careful how we enlarge it, for it seems already to cover the very firmament and to flush the whole horizon with infinite and tender colour. What if it be our business to proclaim a gospel rather than explain it? What if there be no explanation of the gospel at all but a great deliverance of it—a mighty, gracious, world-wide proclamation? It may come to pass that that may be the right thing after all. We get entangled amongst men's explanations. Men sometimes contradict one another in the very act of explaining what they believe to be the truth. What if it be so arranged that all we have to do is to take up the great music and repeat it, saying, God is love: the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost: the Spirit and the bride say, Come; let him that heareth say, Come; and whosoever will let him come? These words may be so repeated as to affect the heart as no other words can ever affect it. The fussy, intrusive, self-laudatory, and self-trustful intellect, so-called, may force its way to the front and say, What do you mean by "come"? and we may think it reasonable that the question should be asked and that explanation should be given: thus we may alter the terms which God has imposed upon us; thus we may contract into a human argument what was meant to be an infinite revelation. Salvation can never be by argument; otherwise only they who are mentally gifted could be saved. How few there are who could follow an argument! How many there are who could accept an assurance, a gospel! The argument is for the trained, the skilled, the so-called wise; an argument is the very heaven of the wise man—the man who is wise in letters and wise after the scale of this world's wisdom: he says he loves to argue. The gospel is not a mere argument of a mechanical or formal kind; it is a declaration that when man lost himself and could



not recover himself—when there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, God's eye pitied and God's arm brought salvation; and if we trouble that revelation with little questions and criticisms, we may be pleasing our own intellectual vanity at the expense of losing the meaning of God's love. Surely there was nothing wanting on the part of Eliphaz and his two friends in the way of argument, controversy: they stood up to the line well, they acted like skilled controversialists; no sooner did Job speak than they answered him with a multitude of hard words; and if words went for anything, truly they overpowered the poor sufferer with their rough and urgent eloquence. Yet all the time they were but exasperating the God they intended to serve. In all these great things let us pray, let us whisper, let us keep closely to the word as it is written for us, and nearer and nearer still to the gracious Son of God, and add no word to his, for our additions are subtractions, and our explanations do but mystify what might to our hearts in their sincerity and simplicity have been clear.

At the very last Job prayed for his friends. Even Job was wrong so long as he argued. Argument has done very little for the world. It has divided families; it has distracted individual minds; it has broken the devout attention which ought to have been fixed upon vital points; it has appeared to be doing great service when it was only hindering the highest and widest progress of the soul. We are receivers, not associates with God; we are to open our hearts to receive the rain of his truth and love and blessing, and let that rain percolate through the whole being, and then express itself when working in harmony with the life in all that is beautiful and fruitful. "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends,"—as if to say, You are right; you have abandoned controversy, the clang and exchange of windy words; and you have begun to fall down at the altar, to clasp your hands and lift up your heart's eyes to heaven, and to pray: now all is yours that is of the nature of blessing and comfort and restoration. Let us pray for one another. Many have heard of the patience of Job who seem not to have heard of his prayer. What is this prayer? Is it an attitude? Is it a series of words? No; it is a condition of soul: not a word may be spoken, yet the mind may be deeply involved

in the sacred engagement of prayer : it is the expectancy of the heart ; it is the look which cannot be turned aside—that fixed, ardent, soul-gaze that means to take heaven captive. We do not pray when we use words ; the fewer words we use the better : “ When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do ; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” There is little or no speaking in words ; there is but a hinting, a putting up of a sentence as a signal or an indication, a pointing to the blessing which the soul would like to possess. Thus all men can pray. A few only may be able to pray in audible sentences : but salvation is no more of rhetoric and grammar than it is of argument. We can pray always ; it is a tear, a look, an ejaculation, a sigh ; it is the very mystery of life. Let no man, therefore, say that he cannot pray simply because he has no gift of words. The less gift of words the better. Words have troubled the ages ; words have hindered the truth. The true religious condition is a condition of heart, a quality of temper, spirit, disposition, union with the Son of God.

Some have thought that the after-life of Job was not sufficiently blessed considering all the process through which he passed. Have they sufficiently attended to the expressions which are used in this connection ? Let us look at this one in particular :—verse 7, “ my servant Job ” ; verse 8, “ my servant Job ” ; verse 8, again, “ my servant Job.” Who can tell how these words were said ? They are attributed to the divine lips, and they are not to be read by us with all the fulness of their emphasis and signification. When the Lord said, again and again and again, “ my servant Job,” who can tell what music was in his tone, what unction, what recognition, what benediction ? The anthem closes upon its key-note : at the very first the Lord said “ my servant Job ” ; at the end he says “ my servant Job.” It is possible for us to say, “ Well done, good and faithful servant,” and merely to utter these as so many syllables more or less beautiful ; but when Jesus Christ pronounces the very same syllables they will mean heaven. Words are not the same in different mouths. Some men have no gift of emphasis, no gift of expression ; their words are dissociated, they are unrelated, they are cold, they are not fused by that mysterious

power of sympathy and affection which runs them into consolidated beauty and blessing. When the Lord says "my servant Job"—a word Job had not heard these many days—he forgets his sorrow, and springs as Mary sprang when the supposed gardener addressed her by her name. There was a gardener's way of speaking and a Christ's way: when the Son of God said "Mary," all the past came back instantly, and heaven came more than half-way down to inclose the resuscitated heart in its infinite security. There may, therefore, be a better ending than we had at first supposed. The chapter may not be wanting in the highest force of expression when we really look into its syllables, when we really listen to its palpitation.

"The Lord turned the captivity of Job"—took off his fetters, his manacles, and the devil-forged chain that was cast about him, and gave him liberty. Do not ask a free man what liberty means: ask an emancipated slave. "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." This expression "twice as much" is arithmetical, and is but symbolic; it is in no sense literal. "Twice as much" means a million times as much multiplied by itself again and again. When God gives, he gives good measure, heaped up, pressed down, running over: "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." So it may be with you, poor suffering friend: this is the month of trial, this is the year of testing, this is the period of affliction and baffling, of bewilderment and stupefaction: hold on; cease from mere argument in words; pray, look heavenward, hope steadfastly in the loving One, and at the end you shall have "twice as much"—as God interprets the word "twice."

"The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." There is a "latter end." By that all things must be judged. If you cut the life of Jesus in twain, you might accuse God of having exposed him to the utmost want, loneliness, and cruelty. We must not interfere with the divine punctuation of the literature of providence; we must allow God to put in all the secondary points, and not until he has put the full period may we venture to look upon what he has done and offer some judgment as to its scope and meaning. Let my latter end be

like the good man's! He dies well; he dies like a hero; he dies as if he meant to live again: this is not dying, it is but crossing a little stream, the narrow stream of death,—a step, and it is passed, and is forgotten. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." God may do much in one day; he may clear up all the mysteries of a lifetime by one flash of light. Judge nothing before the time. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame—looking upon it as a necessary process, and regarding the end as the explanation of all that had gone before.

"In all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job." In Old Testament times great truths had to be hinted by these outward manifestations or indications of the divine providence. God set beauty before the eyes of him who had suffered much, who had felt the burden of darkness. The name of the first was "Jemima," from the Arabic, *dove, gentle bird*; or, from another origin, *day, day-bright*,—the eye of the morning, the gleaming of a new dispensation. The name of the second, "Kezia"—*cassia*, a fragrant spice. He who had sat long amidst pestilence and rottenness and decay and death, had cassia sent to him from the gardens above. "The name of the third, Kerenhappuch,"—*the horn of beauty, or the horn of plenty*: a sign of abundance in the house. All the names were histories or commentaries or promises. Thus God blessed Job in a way Job could understand: he sent him back voices to sing in the house, and when the fair girls passed before him, tinted with the vermilion of nature, he said, This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, excellent in counsel, as well as wondrous in working. See God in your family, in that sleeping infant, in that opening mind, in those clinging hands, in those eyes that are quickened into the expression of prayer;—see God in the fields, in the sheep, and the oxen, and all the great abundance which is round about.

"So Job died, being old and full of days." We cannot tell what these words meant to an Old Testament mind. "Full

of days." They brought to him a sense of completeness. He was not satiated, but satisfied. He said, The circle is complete ; I do not want another hour ; now I have completed my career ; praise God in eternity. All this was significant of the future. We have seen again and again how earthly things have been invested with religious meanings. Abraham was called to go out into a far country, and promised a land that flowed with milk and honey ; and when he came near it he said—I do not want this ; I want a country out of sight, a heavenly Canaan, a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God : I am glad I was stirred up from my home, that I am come out, for travelling has done me good ; but as the ground has enlarged and I have seen things more clearly in their right proportions and meanings, I do not want the earth ; its rivers are too shallow, its oceans too small, its space is a prison : I want heaven. This comes of our training in things inferior and minor and preliminary, if we rightly accept that training. The man who starts with the promise that he shall have gold at the end, if that man should live well, and be industrious with a mind that is honest, when he comes to the gold he will say, There is something beyond this ; I am thankful enough for it in the meantime, but is there not a fine gold, a gold twice refined ? Is there not some spiritual reward ? O clouds ! open, and let me see what is above, for I feel that there, even in the great height, must be the gold that would satisfy me. I counsel thee to buy fine gold : seek wisdom ; get understanding ; for the merchandise of it is better than silver and better and richer than gold.

Then does Job simply die ? The Hebrew ends here, but the Septuagint adds a very wonderful verse—" And Job died, old and full of days ; and it is written that he will rise again with those whom the Lord raiseth." There needed some touch of immortality to complete the tragedy. Is there no immortality in the Old Testament ? I hold that there is immortality in the very creation of man ; to be a man is to be immortal. Where is it said, " The Lord made man rational " ? any more than it is said, " God made man immortal " ? Everything is said in this word—" In the image of God created he him." That is reason ; that is responsibility ; that is immortality ;

that is but minor divinity. Have we laid the right emphasis upon the word "man" when we read of his creation? It would be a most noticeable thing, amounting to a conviction of the righteousness and goodness of God, if the Gentiles knew the doctrine of immortality when the patriarchs and Jews had been denied the realisation of that opportunity. Long before Christ came, and in countries where the name of Christ had never been mentioned until within recent years, the doctrine of immortality was affirmed. Plato, the most spiritual of the philosophers, believed in life after death; Socrates with all his accumulated wisdom taught the doctrine of life after death; in the Indian philosophies we find the declaration of a belief in life after death: these Gentiles were groping in darkness, or in twilight at best: wondrous if Plato, Socrates, and some of the great heathen thinkers in other lands had discovered the doctrine of immortality which was hidden from the men who were specially chosen of God to be the custodians of the truth, the depositaries of the very principles of the Church. I take it therefore, rather, that the whole doctrine of immortality is assumed, as is the reason of man, as is the responsibility of man; that it is involved in the very constitution of man. It is not my belief that God made man mortal. He made man, as to his thought and purpose, immortal: for man was made in the image of his Maker. Whatever may have been the condition of Old Testament saints, there can be no doubt about the position of man now, for life and immortality have been brought to light in the gospel. Jesus Christ boldly proclaimed the great doctrine of life after death, and he brought life and immortality to light; he did not create a new epoch, introduce a new series of thoughts, but he threw light upon ancient obscurities, and showed what marvellous assumptions had underlain the whole scheme of history and providence. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." **This is our joy**

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—supreme, triumphant joy. “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, and that which shall be left shall be immortality, which being interpreted from the standpoint of Christ’s cross means, not only longer life, but larger life, purer life, life consecrated to all high service, still finding its heaven in obedience, still finding its beginning and its ending in the eternal God.

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## “HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,”

### FOR ALL GLEANERS.

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“*Thus did Job continually.*”—JOB i. 5.

Many persons do good occasionally. —It is easy to be good outwardly on ceremonial occasions : it is to be in the fashion ; it is to be running along the rut of custom ; not indeed to appear to be good under such circumstances would be to incur opprobrium.—Church-going may be an occasional exercise ; prayer may be an intermittent enjoyment.—The characteristic excellence of Job's worship was that it was permanent, continuous, unbroken, proceeding with the regularity of life, and completing itself from time to time like a piece of concerted music.—We are exhorted to pray without ceasing.—The apostle desires us in everything by prayer and supplication to make known our requests unto God.—Exercise in such holy worship is like exercise in everything else : it strengthens the faculties ; it encourages the soul ; it tends towards perfectness.—We should read the Bible continually, that is to say, it should be the man of our counsel, the companion of our day-march, and the enjoyment of our solitude ; it is not to be read here and there, intermittently, eclectically, but is to be studied throughout in all its proportion and harmony.—People do not get good by going to church once : a single shower upon the earth is of little consequence ; the great

rain consists in shower upon shower, the water coming down for the time being continuously, copiously, and as it were hospitably, feeding and nourishing the earth.—It is by patient continuance in well-doing that we are to achieve glory, honour, and immortality, and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, showing that our good-doing is not a spasmodic feeling or action, but is the very breath and energy of the soul, the sweet and gracious necessity of the new life that is within us.—To be irregular in sacrifice, in worship, in devotion, in service, is to be irregular in the heart-beat of love towards God.—Who does not regret the irregular action of the heart, even from a physical point of view ? What, then, shall be said of irregularity of heart-action in reference to spiritual loyalty and continuity in the exhibition and enjoyment of a holy life ?—But there is no continuance in ourselves ; “we all do fade as a leaf ;” our poor little life plays itself out : what, then, is to be done ? Underneath, our life must be connected with the Fountain of all being ; it must be identified with God in Christ and through Christ, as the branch is part of the vine.—Hear the Lord Jesus : “Abide in me . . . without me ye can do nothing ;”—hear the Apostle Paul : “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—All the



passages which exhort to godly life exhort also to its continuance: "Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life:" "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."—The Bible is full of such animating and encouraging speech.

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 "Whence comest thou?"—JOB i. 7.

This, indeed, is the great puzzle of metaphysical and spiritual life.—There is a certain degree of comfort in the fact that it was the Lord himself who put the question to our great enemy: "Satan, whence comest thou?"—We know that it was not because he was ignorant of the origin and purposes of the enemy, but we may accommodate the question to express our own feeling and wonder in relation thereto.—Who has not dwelt upon the origin of evil? How the question has taxed the resources of the philosopher and the theologian!—The enemy himself refers to locality and action upon the surface of the earth, and thus even in his reply to God he would seem to evade the profoundest relations of the inquiry.—We do not ask, Whence comest thou? as inquiring into the last place of visitation or the last instance of assault or seduction: we ask concerning the very origin of evil, the root and core, the very beginning, the genesis of all that is false, impure, corrupt.—Let us be on our guard lest we press this inquiry too far.—Undoubtedly it is an inquiry of profoundest interest, and may therefore profitably occupy reverential attention for a time.—There is, however, a still greater question—namely, how to get rid of evil.—As a matter of mournful fact, evil is in the world, Satan is a great, dark, overshadowing figure in all our personal and social life: the question, therefore, is not so much whence he came as how to get rid of his personality and influence and destructive

ministry.—It is possible to be more anxious about the origin of evil than about its extinction. Practical men must direct attention to the means which have been set up according to revelation for the extirpation of the enemy and all his works.—When he comes he does not necessarily come as a conqueror; we must not suppose that there is no answer to his seductions and no escape from his wiles: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you;" "Take unto you the whole armour of God."—The question may be treated metaphysically, and dealt with on the broad grounds of human history and general experience; but let every man attack the question as related to his own heart: there the devil often sits: there he revels in triumph; there he seems to have everything his own way.—Whatever may be said of demoniacal possession as revealed in the New Testament, there can be no doubt of it as to the fact of evil influences operating directly and disastrously in every human heart.—Here we need all the resources of revelation, all the helps of pastoral encouragement and friendly sympathy, all that can be done by mutual Christian love.—To dispossess one's soul of the devil is to bring that soul into light and liberty and prospect of eternal blessedness.

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 "And there came a messenger unto Job."

JOB i. 14.

As a matter of literal interpretation this was simple enough; but regarded suggestively the thought admits of large and useful expansion.—Messengers are always coming to men; if not living messengers, living messages—impulses, words of exhortation, encouragement, warning, the whole ministry of truth and light.—A voice came to Samuel in the darkness; we have seen already in earlier studies how many anonymous ministries

there are in life,—men coming in the darkness, figures appearing in visions, voices heard in dreams, events forcing themselves upon religious attention.—There are many practical messengers coming to the cry of the heart every day: messengers of poverty, pain, bereavement; men requiring intellectual help, spiritual comfort, commercial direction: children needing to be trained, nurtured, directed, stimulated in right paths, protected from diabolical assaults.—“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—Providence itself is a great messenger and a great message.—If we choose to play the fool we can deafen ourselves to every voice and blind ourselves to every token: we can go up and down the earth saying that we hear nothing, see nothing; that we are practical, and that we pay no attention to the emotions of the soul, the peculiar actions that stir the inner being.—That certainly is one way of living; it is the poorest, meanest way of all; it is the way of the flower that has but a small root, and because there is no deepness of earth it will soon wither away.—He who dwells in daily communion with God fears no messenger who can come to him, even with evil news.—The fear of God takes away all other fear.—The surprise of the saintly soul is but a superficial or transient wonder; it does not affect the fountain and reality of his faith.—“If thou forbear to deliver him that is drawn unto death, God will judge thee; if thou sayest, Behold, I knew it not, he that searcheth the heart will bring thee to the judgment seat.”—To the man who listens there is many an appeal; to the man who is wakeful there is many a passing vision from which he can learn abiding truths.—A messenger has come to every one of us to declare the everlasting gospel. He flies abroad in the midst of heaven; he proclaims his truth regardless of age, condition, or

estate; his message is to every creature under heaven: it is a message charged with good news, meant to redeem and save and bless the heart.—Happy is the man who sees this messenger, and hears him, and provides for him a guest-chamber in his heart.

“ . . . none spake a word unto him.”

—JOB ii. 13.

There are silent friends.—We must not suppose that all our friends are human.—Oftentimes the greatest friend a man can have in sorrow is silent yet ever-eloquent Nature.—The mountain can do more for some men than can be done by the most elaborate controversy. God himself called upon Jacob to look up and behold the host of heaven, and draw lessons from that great army of stars.—The Psalmist also was accustomed to turn his eyes in the same direction that he might learn great life-lessons and be soothed and comforted by the quietness of Nature.—But these were men who came to Job, and they showed their wisdom by their silence.—What can words do in the supreme agony of life?—Do not let a man suppose that he is useless because he cannot talk largely and fluently.—Men may imagine that if they could go forth well-armed with arguments and gifted with high eloquence they would soothe and bless the world. Nothing of the kind.—Never forget the potency of silence, the magic of wordless sympathy.—There is a touch of the hand that conveys impressions to the mind which no words could convey. There are also deeds so subtle and delicate and far-reaching in their meaning that they comfort the heart without disturbing the ear or calling for any audible reply. It is a blessed experience to be forced to silence.—Silent prayer is sometimes the most effectual of all.—So long as we can express our

selves fluently in words our fluency may but represent the shallowness of our feeling.—Only those should speak who know what to say.—The best-meant word, if uttered in a wrong tone, may exasperate the sorrow it was intended to soothe.—How good are right words ! How pleasant and useful is divinely-inspired speech !—Sometimes a man is encouraged by seeing his friends overwhelmed by the grief which he bears : it touches his own sense of heroism ; he feels that he has to exemplify certain virtues and graces which are supposed to characterise religious life.—Yet there is a time to speak.—If we cannot speak directly to the grief we would comfort, we may speak generally, and so include the one specific object with the necessities of the whole world.—Men may not like to be addressed directly and personally, yet they may not object to listen to a general appeal which includes their own particular case.—When grief silences men, oppression should never take away their speech, nor should wrong-doing of any kind.—We are never to sit down beside the sin of the world silently because we see that the sin is very great ; the greatness of the sin should stir us into protest, denunciation, and then to gospel-preaching.—The majesty of God should be treated with silent reverence, yet there must be breaks in that silence, for we cannot withhold the hymn of praise, the ascription of adoration, and the declaration of filial trust and faithfulness.—“The Lord is in his holy temple : let all the earth keep silence before him,”—there is a period when silence is the best worship, but there is also a period when speech is an imperative duty.—What self-humiliation a man must experience who has allowed an opportunity to pass away without denouncing wrong, protesting against evil, and making declaration of the right under trying circumstances.—In addressing grief, we can

never be wrong in adopting spiritual language.—Always have recourse to the holy Book for words of sympathy and condolence ; they are venerable, they are lofty, they are full of reverence and tenderness, and they have been well tested in many generations.—We should at least begin with the language which we find in the Bible ; if by-and-by we care to add a word of our own, or enlarge the meaning of the divine word, so be it ; but every human heart responds in the hour of its agony to the solemn eloquence of Holy Writ.—The Bible was written for men who are in grief ; it approaches the soul without intruding upon us ; it is eloquent without being noisy ; it is majestic without being overpowering.—In the darkest hours of our life the Bible is the best witness to its own inspiration.

“ . . . *it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.*”—JOB iv. 5.

This is the same in all human experience.—It is easy to carry the burdens of others.—It may be quite delightful to speak to men who are suffering as to the way in which they should bear themselves in the hour of trial.—He can best sympathise who has most suffered.—It is one thing to see sorrow at a distance, and another to admit it into the innermost room in our own house and live within it night and day.—These are the times, however, when we can show our true spiritual quality.—So long as the affliction was at a distance we merely talked about it, but when it came near us we felt it, and under the agony of our feeling we showed what our souls were really trusting to.—Well-borne trial is the finest argument that can be set up on behalf of the grace of God.—The promises of Scripture are not so many jewels to be worn as a necklace ; they

are to be appropriated, and to become part of our very selves, giving us strength, patience, dignity, so that even the smell of fire shall not pass upon us when we go through the furnace of trial.—He can preach best who has had largest experience, it may be even of ill-health, loss, disappointment, and bereavement.—He also can read the Bible best who has passed through similar experience.—Every trial that comes to us furnishes an opportunity through which the soul can show the fulness of the grace of heaven.—If Christian men fall down in trial, what are un-Christian men to think of them and of their faith? If the very sons and princes of God quail in the day of adversity as do other men, what, then, has their religion done for them? By their depression, their fear, their want of light and hope, they not only show their own nature, they actually bring discredit upon the very religion which they profess.—How did such men come to take up with such a religion? What possible motive could they have for identifying themselves with a faith which, beyond all other faiths, is marked by heroic characteristics?—Cowards must not be numbered with those who follow the banner of the brave.—Some men have been greater in affliction than they have ever been in prosperity.—Their friends did not know them as to their real quality until they were called upon to carry heavy burdens, and to be tried by perils in the city, and perils in the wilderness, and perils on the sea, and perils amongst false brethren,—it was amidst such testing perils that the true quality of the spirit was disclosed, and that many a man who was thought timid and frail discovered himself to be a very giant in the family of God.—There is another aspect of the case which enables us to address men who are sensitive themselves whilst encourag-

ing other men to be noble and brave under assault.—The men referred to exhort others not to take heed of neglect or insult or dishonour; they say those who suffer from such attacks ought to be above them, ought not to resent them, ought to treat them with moderation and perhaps with occasional contempt: but how is it when the very same attacks are made upon themselves? Then how energetic they are in repelling them, how sensitive to every unkind word, how strong in their self-love, how violent in their self-conceit! —Example is better than precept.—To exhort another man to be magnanimous is not half so good as to be magnanimous under trial of any kind.

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*"Now a thing was secretly brought to me."*—JOB iv. 12.

Things which are so brought are often the best things.—They are not meant for the bodily eye, which can see but imperfectly, but for the vision of the soul, which, where the character is good, is strong and clear.—We call the sum of our experiences, "impressions," "feelings," "impulses," "tendencies;" we are afraid to characterise or define them by some positively religious name.—Who, for example, dare say he was inspired? Who has sufficient religious boldness to say that the Holy Spirit fell upon him, and taught him this or that, or awakened his faculties to such and such an exercise?—Those who are believers in the Bible ought to have no hesitation in using religious terms for the definition of religious impressions.—Inspiration is always a secret communication.—The Spirit of God steals, so to speak, upon the spirit of man, suddenly, in darkness, in out-of-the-way places, and, communing with him, transforms him into a new being, increasing his faculties both in

number and strength, and clothing him with new and beneficent power.—When a good impulse stirs the heart, better trace it to a high origin than to a low one.—When we are moved in the direction of self-sacrifice for the good of others we should instantly seal the action of the Spirit with the name of God, and thus give it sanctity and nobleness, and turn it into an imperative and gracious obligation.—When a man supposes anything has been secretly brought to him from heaven, it was not meant that it should be locked up in his own heart; the very man who says that a secret message was delivered to him now begins to speak of it and to relate it all in graphic detail.—We should repeat this experience.—Who has not had conviction of sin?—Who has not known the mysterious action of conscience?—Who has not felt deeply and irresistibly that this world is not all, but that upon the horizon of time there gleams the beginning of eternity?—We should speak of these better impulses, these religious exhortations and ecstasies; we should never be ashamed of them, but hold them as in our personal trust for the benefit of the common family of man.—Great ideas were never meant to be merely personal possessions; “There is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty”—intellectually and spiritually as well as financially. “He that watereth shall be watered also himself.”—Make no secret of your best ideas, your noblest impulses, your highest enthusiasms; tell them to others; the very stating of them may be as the declaration of gospels, the revelations of the unseen kingdom of Christ.—Of course the wise man will not throw his pearls before swine; he will study circumstances, opportunities, and conditions; the very spirit that brought the secret thing to him will indicate the right time and place under which he is to make revelations of

what he has seen and known and handled of the word of life.—Some gospels are to be preached to solitary persons; other gospels are to be thundered as it were from mountaintops, and to be made known in all their majesty and grandeur and beneficence to the whole family of mankind.—The heart at once identifies messages which have been brought from heaven; there is no disguising or perverting such messages so as to obliterate their identity.—Even when but poorly delivered there is something about them which declares a heavenly origin.—This is emphatically so with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Even when men are tempted to ridicule it, they seem to be trifling with a temple, to be bringing into disdain the noblest tower ever built upon the earth and reaching to heaven.—There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.—Perhaps even the commonest soul knows true music from false: there is something in it which claims a species of kinship with the man and awakens him into a new and blessed consciousness.

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“*I have seen the foolish taking root.*”—  
JOB v. 3.

This calls us to the curious sights in human life.—There are sights that are surprising, delightful, unexpected, overwhelming.—The sight which most puzzles the good man is that the foolish take root, and that the vicious should prosper.—A good man can make something of almost every other sight in the world, but this overwhelms him with dismay. It seems to be against the fitness of things; it seems to discourage all attempts at virtue; it seems to offer a premium to vice.—This was the difficulty of Asaph; he says his feet had well-nigh gone when he beheld the

prosperity of the foolish and listened to the revels of the wicked, for there were no bands in their death, they had more than heart could wish, their eyes stood out with fatness.—This is not an enemy who is bearing witness against Providence, it is a good man who is setting down what he has seen as a simple matter of fact.—He would not have been so surprised if he had seen the foolish flaming for a moment like a rocket, making a dash of display which perished in its own action; nor would he have complained perhaps if the foolish had made an occasional success in life: the thing which troubled him was that he had seen the foolish taking root, as if they were going to abide on the earth and come to maturity of power.—We must not ignore the difficult facts of Providence, but we must not limit our view to facts as we see them, or as they lie upon the surface; though they may be all that we can see with our bodily eyes, yet we are to bring our religious reflection to bear upon the case. The world is old enough now to afford us a basis of reasoning and inference respecting all appearances, combinations, and phenomena generally.—The root-idea of the Christian religion is that God is against all wickedness, and that in the long run he will overwhelm it and bring it to its appropriate punishment.—Let us be well grounded in that fundamental principle.—If we could for a moment doubt the reality of that principle our whole faith would be gone.—We speak it reverently when we say that if God could cause any man to succeed simply because the man was wicked, his claim to human confidence would be destroyed.—Here, then, lies the great basis-principle, that the eternal God is against evil, and is pledged to the extinction of wickedness.—In view of this principle, what becomes of all apparent success and root-taking, and honour, and influence, and pomp? These things are

but indications that the judgment will be of equal magnitude, and will come even more suddenly than the success is supposed to have come.—Meanwhile the difficulty is a great one, and there are circumstances under which men need all their deepest religious convictions to sustain them in the presence of providences which seem to be dead against the assertion and progress of truth and justice.—Sad is the case of heathen nations; sadder still is the condition of nations which are partially Christian, and which turn Christian civilisation itself into a means of extending their wickedness.—Sometimes we wonder how God can sit in the heavens and behold it all; we are troubled that he does not awake, so to speak, and come down in judgment that cannot be mistaken, and rectify relations that are thrown out of course.—Many a grief of this kind we have to hide in our own heart. Yet why should we hide our griefs in view of providences which we cannot understand? Let us go back to history. Let us be faithful to the interpretation of great breadths of human experience, and in all cases it will be seen that, however mysterious the process, God has in the end vindicated goodness and repelled from the throne of righteousness those who would overturn its pillars.—Man of God, take heart; the trial is no doubt hard; things have happened in one day which in human wisdom would have happened exactly in the other way, and we are dismayed, confounded, and put to silence, when we see how great is the grief of honest souls.—All we can do is to recur to history, to pray for the consolidation of our faith, for the increase of our spirit of patience and long-suffering; perhaps the longer God is in coming as a great light, the brighter will be the glory, the more blessed the vision, when it does arise to reward our weary waiting.

*"He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."*—JOB v. 13.

No doubt there are men who call themselves wise who do not believe in God.—Let us not consider them all fools in any merely intellectual sense.—There is a craft which prides itself on its sagacity, depth, cleverness, agility, and boasts itself of the multitude of its resources.—God often gives such craft room enough for its own display: he allows it to come to maturity that he may abase it the more effectually.—God delights to throw down towers that were meant to reach unto heaven.—Call no man wise until his plans have been thoroughly matured and carried out; they may look well in outline, they may begin very energetically, they may seem to carry within themselves all the elements of success; but God allows the man to go so far, until he can make an example of him.—Where is the wickedness that has continued from age to age to prosper? Where is the counsel that has really thriven as against God? Where are the heathen opponents that have not been broken as with a rod of iron?—There is no cleverness that can stand against true wisdom.—The difference between cleverness and wisdom is a difference of depth and quality: they do not belong to the same lineage or line of things; the one is superficial, sparkling, dashing, claiming attention by its loud boastfulness, a sight to be gaped at and wondered about and forgotten; but wisdom is profound, far-reaching, calm, taking in a great range of view, moving by a long line, and justifying itself in the end by revelations which never came within the purview of mere intellectual cleverness.—The cleverness of the world has never discovered any cure for the world's deepest diseases.—We have had reforms enough, guesses, hypotheses, theories, speculations; but it never lay within the scope

of mere cleverness to find a redemption that would meet all the necessities of sin and soothe all the accusations and agonies of conscience.—The world by wisdom knew not God.—The world by cleverness never invented a world-wide gospel, an all-time evangelisation; it lay with God alone to reveal a plan by which all human calculations were upset, all human cleverness abashed, and eternity accommodated to the narrow limits of time, and all heaven brought to supply what the earth needed in its supremest distresses.—Let us beware of cleverness everywhere; there is nothing in it. Let us rather seek for wisdom, and cry for understanding; searching diligently for that which is more precious than silver and gold, and with which rubies are not to be compared.—The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, nor can it stand in the day of final judgment.—We are of yesterday, and know nothing; we see only parts and aspects of things: how, then, can we provide for a whole world, and for all the exigencies of time?

*"Thou shalt come to thy grave in full age."*—JOB v. 26.

Wonderful to notice how light and shade mingle in Bible story and in the story of general life.—"Thou shalt come to thy grave" is a solemn warning; but when it is added, "in full age," it would seem as if the solemnity were relieved by a beam of cheerfulness.—The two statements must be taken together, if we would do justice to the providence of God.—To look at the grave alone is unfair to the divine purpose; so it is unfair to look at crosses, trials, and all manner of disappointment and discipline: the right view will take in all the circumstances, so far as possible, from the beginning to the end.—Interpreted in this way,

providence is a grand disclosure of the righteousness, love, and wisdom of God.—We should accustom ourselves to look for the mitigations of human sorrow or disappointment.—The eye that is always on the outlook for such mitigations will find a plentiful harvest in the providence of daily life. Where is there a human lot that has not some mitigation of his burden and suffering?—Sometimes, indeed the sufferer is more apt to see the mitigation than are the observers.—What lies heavily on the body may be in large part counteracted by inborn cheerfulness of soul, so that the spirit may triumph over the flesh.—What is wanting in one region of life may be more than made up by a superabundance of good in another.—The great lesson is, we are always to look for whatever can mitigate, lessen, or in any way throw a gleam of happiness upon the distresses of life.—Think of a completed course, such as is sketched in the text.—There is always more or less of beauty in completeness. It is when the column is broken in two that it appeals to us pathetically.—When the column is completed we admire and wonder, and are filled with gladness because of the fitness of things: something in the human spirit responds to outward harmony: there can be no true harmony where there is incompleteness or failure of design.—We may not come to our grave "in full age," for that is an Old Testament term; but we may come to our grave in full character, in full preparedness, meet for the Master's use, content to leave the earth, yea, rather desiring to flee away from it and be at rest in heaven.—Where the sense of immortality is triumphant, every burden of life is not only lessened but destroyed; that is to say, it is no longer felt as a burden; we endure as seeing the invisible; we despise the shame of the cross because

of the glory that is soon to be revealed.—A sad thing when the only completion of a man is the number of years which he has lived.—Completeness of age should suggest completeness of character.—The old man should be full of the wisdom of experience, even though he be ignorant of the knowledge of letters: he should have seen enough of life to justify certain broad practical inferences; and without being sated with life he should feel that he has had enough of it on earth, should it be God's will to open the gate of heaven and allow him to enter into its service.—Seeing there is an appointed time to man upon the earth—that there is "full age"—it behoves man to reckon the number of his days, that he may see what fortune of time he has to spend, and so invest it as to make the largest results accrue.—No human power can prevent our coming to the grave, but it lies very much with ourselves to say whether we shall come as conquerors or as conquered men.

*"The things that my soul refused to touch are as my sorrowful meat."*

—JOB. vi. 7.

Here we are called upon to recognise the astounding reverses which may take place in life.—It would seem as if nothing were impossible in the way of human reverses.—The most shocking events become commonplaces, and the things that are most dreaded force upon us their unwelcome familiarity.—Sometimes such reverses are good for us.—The dainty soul despises all common life, all democracy, all popular association, and prefers to live in dignified solitude or in luxurious ease.—When such a soul is brought by poverty, or ill-health, or any other circumstance, to mingle with hitherto despised classes, not unfrequently those classes appear in a better light than when seen from



a distance.—Many a man has been forced to a better interpretation of society by the loss of position which gave him uniqueness and assured him a large measure of ease and comfort.—We can only be fully trained to the highest life by being changed from one position to another, and by being compelled to associate with those who are supposed to be beneath us, and take part in service which has always been avoided as drudgery.—The poor present many aspects which are far from inviting to the rich ; yet when they are approached sympathetically even they can contribute a good deal towards the solid comfort and real progress of their nominal superiors.—Even disease, which when viewed in the abstract is most repulsive and intolerable, may come to create a kind of companionship between itself and the sufferer, so that the sufferer may look to his disease for instruction, chastening, discipline, and many moral advantages.—The Psalmist said: It was good for me that I was afflicted : before I was afflicted I went astray.—He did not value the affliction for its own sake, but for the sake of the things which it wrought out in the cultivation and perfecting of his character.—Job did not accept the discipline with gratitude when he declared that the things which his soul once refused had become his meat ; he did not forget to add the word "sorrowful" ; so the text stands as we find it.—Nor may we complain that Job did not at once reach the highest ideal of character, assimilating things evil in themselves, and accounting them as good ; there must be a period of training : for who can be at once familiar with sorrow, or immediately excite his affections in the interests of distress and loss and pain?—Keep in view the point, that we may suffer the most violent reverses in fortune, and be compelled altogether to change our tastes and affinities.—We are not sepa-

rated from any form of disease or sorrow by permanent boundaries : now we are on this side, and now we are on that, and oftentimes it would appear as if we had no control over our position or lot in life.—One thing we can do ; we can discourage the spirit of contempt in regard to those whose lot is heavy and bitter, and see in them what we ourselves may one day be : the very thinnest partition divides the richest man from the poorest : the strongest man may be dead to-morrow ; one lightning flash, and the most herculean frame may be thrown into decrepitude and helplessness.—So we must learn from one another, and understand that the highest and the lowest are related, and that exchange of position is always within the range of possibility, and may sometimes be necessary to the perfecting of our spiritual culture.

“ . . . cause me to understand wherein I have erred.”—JOB vi. 24.

Job does not admit his error, but inasmuch as he is suffering as if he had erred he wishes to have the mistake definitely pointed out.—All unexplained suffering is made the larger by its very mystery.—We do not always see the errors we have committed ; sometimes they require to be distinctly pointed out by him against whom we have transgressed.—Error is not broad, vulgar, and obvious, in all its manifestations.—Sometimes it is spiritual, subtle, beyond the reach of words, and wholly invisible, except when high moral light falls upon it from above.—The patriarch is in a reasonable mood, inasmuch as he desires to have his understanding enlightened as to his faults ; at the same time, even our reasonableness may be barbed with a cruel sting : the soft tone does not always convey the soft meaning : even in this exclamation of the sufferer there may be a tone of self-

complacency or even of defiance, as who should say, It is impossible to charge me with error: if I am chargeable with it, let me know what it is, for I have no consciousness of it, and if any proof can be furnished it will excite my surprise.—Men are not quick to see their own errors.—Even the best man requires all the light of heaven in which to see himself as he really is.—Comparing ourselves with ourselves, we become wise in our own conceit, but comparing ourselves with the spiritual law of God, we see that even our virtue cannot boast to be without stain or flaw.—The prayer may be turned to high practical uses: Search me, O God, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me.—We must get rid of the deception that we fully and absolutely see ourselves as we really are: every day we need God's help to show us our true character, our real motive, our complete design.—We can hide many things under a false exterior which we would not for the world expose to the light of day.—We must insist upon viewing ourselves in the divine light, rather than judging ourselves by social canons and conventional standards.—Let us go to God for full explanations of natural mysteries, personal perplexities, and all social hindrances and vexations.—There is always more in a case of this kind than is obvious on the surface.—All inward trouble does not indicate itself by outward symptoms: hence we need the intervention and guidance of the divine.

*"I will speak in the anguish of my spirit."*—JOB vii. 11.

This is natural, but unwise.—A spirit that is in anguish cannot take a fair and full view of any question.—Anguish and justice can hardly dwell together.—To speak in an agony of sorrow is to attach undue meanings to words, to

burden them with unjust weight, and to shut out elements and considerations which are essential to impartial and philosophical conclusions.—No man ought to speak in the anguish of his spirit concerning divine providence; otherwise he may charge God foolishly, bringing together all the inequalities, severities, and miscarriages of life, and urging them against the goodness of divine providence.—We should be silent in sorrow, for to speak without self-control is to speak without wisdom.—Let him speak who has passed through sorrow and seen something of its true purpose: then will he be likely to speak with the sobriety of experience and with the deep feeling of sympathy.—We could not speak fairly about a friend in the moment in which he has caused us grief or severe anxiety; we should fall into an accusatory strain and charge him with having been inconsiderate if not cruel towards us.—Time is required for many an explanation, social and divine.—Sometimes we boast that in the course of a year or two the friend whom we have now annoyed or grieved will see the wisdom of our course and thank us for our decision or counsel: in the strength of this we support ourselves, sometimes indeed we plume ourselves with pardonable conceit; and when in the lapse of time our judgment is vindicated we hail our friend with the expectation that he will bless us for counsel that appeared to be unsympathetic or for a decision which was so stern as to be momentarily cruel.—There are indeed countless incidents in life calculated to bring anguish upon the spirit, to excite scepticism in the heart, and to depose faith from its calm and absolute sovereignty: virtue is thrown down in the streets, vice has everything its own way, men who never pray are satisfied with abundance, and thus Providence appears to be on the side of wickedness

and selfishness of every degree.—Under such circumstances the spirit is filled with anguish, and when it speaks it is in tones of disapprobation or fretfulness or unbelief.—We should pray for the calm spirit, for the spirit of patience and longsuffering, and only speak after we have been in profound and continuous communion with God.—Even a believing man, when he allows his anguish to dictate his speech, may offend against God, and bring discredit upon the altar at which he serves.—Let us understand that the moment of anguish is to be the moment of silence, so far as criticism is concerned.

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 “*Let me alone.*”—JOB vii. 16.

Here, again, is a natural exclamation, but one which we must train ourselves to stifle.—No man can be let alone and yet live; in other words, life is an expression of communion and not of isolation.—It is pleasant for the moment only to be left to oneself; even then the pleasure is a mere sensation, and is not the expression of a deep and permanent satisfaction.—Can the branch say to the tree, Let me alone?—Can the limb say to the body, Let me exist by myself?—Can the hand live without being attached to the heart?—Trace every human life in its finest expressions and issues, and it will be found that even the most lonely are not without association with the greatest, yea, even with God himself.—Sometimes, for a moment, we may wish that even God himself would withdraw from us, at least in all controversial and judicial aspects: he presses us with too many questions, he impoverishes us by too many demands, he exhausts us by appeals too numerous to be answered.—When we ask to be let alone, it is our weakness that speaks, not our strength: our exhaustion, not our reason.—The one prayer we should

constantly offer is, not to be let alone, but to be evermore an object of divine solicitude, and to be evermore called upon to answer divine claims.—When God lets a man alone the man's doom is sealed.—In the Book of Amos we find the words, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone”;—preservation from this state should be our continual and ardent desire.—When the sun lets the earth alone, the earth is chilled into ice. When the mother lets the infant alone, the infant dies.—Let us take heart, for all the controversy through which we pass is but so much discipline, and the end of all discipline sent by Heaven and properly accepted by man is culture, strength, satisfaction.

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 “*Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.*”—JOB viii. 7.

So life is not to be judged by its beginning, but by its end.—This is true, scientifically as well as morally.—We need not doubt that the beginning of all life was small: but who can deny that the development of life has been sure, profound, and beneficent?—Man may have had the lowliest possible origin, yet he brings with him a seal higher than human; the very token of God is in his spirit; his very figure is an argument and a suggestion.—The text encourages the spirit of hope.—The Bible does not incite us towards mere review; it continually calls us to anticipation: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.”—We might look back until our spirits sickened and all our hope perished in coldness and dismay; but we are to look forward and behold ourselves, sanctified and glorified, the purpose of our manhood in full fruition, and the service of God becoming the very music of our life.—There is a review of life which is simply unprofitable; when we have settled that our origin

was as low as possible, we have done nothing to encourage the soul, but rather to bring it into self-contempt : but when, in the Spirit of Christ, we forecast the future, seeing what God meant us to be when he created us, then we have an ideal towards which we can grow ; we are beckoned by a celestial perfection, and assured that every effort in that direction will be crowned with the fullest reward.—This message may be delivered to those who have just begun to believe in the Son of God.—The kingdom of God itself is like unto a grain of mustard-seed.—At first our faith may be small, hardly indeed distinguishable from unbelief ; our prayer may be "Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief" : but the very fact that we have begun to believe should cheer us, and bring with it the assurance that this faith will grow, until it dominates the whole life and rules the destiny, beyond the reach of temptation or overthrow on the part of the enemy.—What man ceases to nurture his body, because his beginning as an infant was small ? He does not dwell upon the days when he could neither speak, nor reason, nor help himself : when he looks back upon those days, it is with wonder that his advance has been so great and so sure ; what is true in the flesh is truer still in the spirit ; we began at a point almost invisible, but, by the grace of God, we have been trained to some measure of manhood, strength, and dominance.—What has been done is but a hint of what may yet be done.—  
 "My soul, hope thou in God."

*"If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me."*—JOB ix. 20.

There are two processes often going on together in human thought,—self-justification and self-condemnation.—The justification's often outward ; that is, it takes a social range, going up and

down amongst men, asking for charges, indictments, proofs of blame : but even whilst the soul is thus revelling in social applause, when it turns in upon itself, it is with bitterest reproaches.—The hand has been clean, but the heart has been impure ; the deed has had all the appearance of charming beneficence, but the motive out of which it came was one of the intensest selfishness.—A man may justify himself logically ; that is to say, he may prove a literal consistency in his behaviour ; yet when he turns to spiritual considerations, he may overwhelm himself with proofs that all his outward life has been but a series of studied attitudes, a marvel in trickery, invention, and cunning arrangement.—"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he : " "The Lord looketh on the heart : " "Judge not by the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."—It is at this point that the spirituality of the Christian religion is realised.—God searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men.—Innocence can be simulated ; respectability can be put on like a cloak ; even piety itself may be turned into a mere colour of the skin : but all these accessories are stripped by the spirit of divine judgment, and the eye of God looks upon the heart, its motive, its purpose, its supreme desire.—This is at once a terror and a blessing : a terror to the evil man, how clever soever he may have been in his exterior arrangements, a blessing to the pure and genuine heart that has had to struggle against a thousand social disadvantages and oppositions.—The great condemnation is self-condemnation.—In vain the world applauds us, when we know that the applause is undeserved.—The public assembly may welcome us with overwhelming acclamation, yet the soul within may say, All this noise is a tribute to my hypocrisy, not a recognition of my real state ; could these people

know me as I really am, these welcoming cheers would be turned into thundering denunciations: I do not accept the huzzas of the ignorant multitude, I tremble and cower under my own judgment.—Self-justification is no commendation: he who justifies himself before men, is all the more likely to be guilty before God; for he tries to make up by boisterousness and declamation what is wanting in solidity and spiritual piety.—“Brethren, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”—Blessed is the man who condemns himself justly and thoroughly, for only by so doing does he prepare himself for the true revelation of God in the soul.—God never sat down in the heart of self-conceit, but evermore hurled against that heart his judgments and retributions.—The Pharisee justified himself, and was left unjustified by God: the publican condemned himself, and went down to his house justified.

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 “*Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me.*”—JOB x. 8.

The fact is correct, but the reasoning is false.—It often happens so in reasoning under strong feeling.—The argument ought to have proceeded in exactly the opposite way; then Job would have said with the Psalmist, “Thou wilt not forsake the work of thine own hands.”—There is a strong temptation to recognise Providence in parts and sections, but not to continue the thought throughout the whole line of human life and experience.—Many persons will acknowledge a Creator, who do not acknowledge the providential government which touches every detail of existence.—Others, again, will acknowledge Providence, but deny the reality of Redemption.—

Others, again, are devoted to the collection of facts, and yet, when they have brought all their facts into a focus, they seem to be unable to draw the right inferences from them.—Man often perishes at the point of argument.—Man ought often to let argument alone and simply rest upon facts.—Where argument does arise in a case like this, it should take some such terms as the following:—Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; therefore thou hast a living and loving interest in me, and although I cannot understand the discipline through which thou art now making me to pass, I am confident, from the excellence and minuteness of thy creation, that thy providence cannot fall short of what is there so vividly and graciously displayed.—Jesus Christ always reasoned from the lower to the higher:—If God takes care of oxen, will he not take care of you; if he clothe the grass of the field, etc.; if he care for the fowls of the air, etc.; if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, etc.—This is the Saviour's argument, always rising upwards towards the unseen, the eternal.—By creating man, God does not set up any right to destroy him.—Creation would be too narrowly viewed if it were regarded as simply an arbitrary act.—Even in the region of manufactures, who is there that makes an article for the sake of destroying it, and, even though there may be the right of destroying such an article, yet who is not restrained by reason from perpetrating its destruction?—In the case of man, however, the circumstances are wholly different: man is rational; man is responsible; man can hold companionship with God; man is capable of enduring the most excruciating agonies; under all these conditions of life the very act of creation implies the further act of care, patience,

training, love, and redemption.—We should reason that if God has given us the light of the sun he will not withhold needful illumination from the mind: if God has filled the earth with bread and other food for man, he has made some provision for the nurture and sustenance of the soul: if he has made us, he means to keep us,—yea, though we sin against him, he will come out after us, that he who has been our Creator may also be our Redeemer.

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 "I am full of confusion."—JOB x. 15.

This is a fact, and ought to be regarded seriously.—Providence is often such as to bewilder our merely intellectual faculties.—Things do not happen in the sequence which we have determined.—We seem, for the moment, at least, to sow one thing and reap another.—All our calculations are upset as to the prosperity of virtue and the degradation of vice.—We make bold to prophesy what will happen to-morrow in the order of God's providence; we say, The wicked man will return from his attempts worsted and ashamed, and yet he comes in successful and glorying in his abundant prosperity.—Being full of confusion, we should (a) wait; (b) take an appointed course of inquiry; (c) not suppose that it lies within our power to comprehend the whole counsel of God.—These broad and frank confessions of confusion or of ignorance are not at all harmful even in the Christian teacher; when he avows his inability to deal with certain questions he acquires for himself an additional measure of confidence in regard to those subjects which he does undertake to elucidate.—The Bible itself does not propose to clear up every mystery, or drive away every cloud.—There is a sense indeed in which the Bible is the greatest

mystery of all.—Even in the wildest mental confusion, there are often some points of certainty, some solid facts, histories, or experiences, upon which we can rest the mind.—We should abide there until the storm abates a little, or the light so increases as to create a larger day.—No man need be altogether in confusion if he be frank-minded, really earnest, and religious in spirit.—Some little thing at least will be given to him, which he can seize and hold with a firm hand.—Stand by the one thing which is clear and plain, and from that work onward and outward towards those truths which seem to hang on the distant horizon.

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 "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?"—JOB xi. 8.

As a matter of fact, there is a heaven which our poor hands cannot touch.—Do we deny the existence of that lofty space, simply because we cannot touch it? Do we say, Our eyes may be deceiving us, and after all there is no such loftiness? It is all optical illusion or delusion?—As in nature so it ought to be in higher truth and graces; there are some things to be seen from afar, others to be handled and directly enjoyed, and others again which partake of the nature of dream and symbol and apocalypse.—We must make something like a reasonable distribution of the circumstances and phenomena which make up our life.—There are some things about which we may talk almost exhaustively; everything about them is so explicit and direct: but when we come upon those higher things which can only be seen at an infinite distance, we must make allowance for our inability, and not blame God or cast discredit upon his method of training the world.—If a man cannot reach what God has made, is it likely that he can comprehend all that God is? Is

not the worker always greater than his work? Whoever made the stars may be rationally supposed to be greater than the stars which he has made, and, being greater, is by so much more difficult of comprehension, so difficult, indeed, as to rise to the point of absolute impossibility in our present state.—We do not venture to attempt an interpretation of everything that is in ourselves; our own souls are often too profound for our vision; our motives are so complicated and intermixed that it is impossible for us to separate the one action from the other, and to say, This is good, and, That is bad, in exact terms.—All height should teach us to aspire; all width created by God, such as the great sea or the greater firmament, should lead us out in the direction of enlargement and comprehensiveness of mind; all the symbols of nature should have a corresponding effect upon our spiritual capacity and training.—We must not be afraid to look nature fully and lovingly in the face; she is a great parable which the heart alone can often read; she does not set little and arbitrary boundaries to our position and progress, but rather is full of encouragement to us to advance and conquer.—Still, as in nature we know just where to stop, so it should be in spiritual quest and study: we come to brinks, and must take care not to fall over: we behold lofty eminences, and must know that they were meant to be looked at and not to be trodden under foot: to make a wise use of nature in this way is to encourage and strengthen all that is best in our spiritual being.—Has any man seen all the creation of God? Has any man any conscious relation to any other world than the earth in which he was born? Is it possible for any man to see through the darkness of midnight, when all the light of heaven has been withdrawn?—If, then, there are such limits and obstructions, difficulties and im-

possibilities, in things which are termed natural, is it at all an irrational conception there should be things in even greater abundance in the purely spiritual realm, which mock us and sometimes defy us, and which all the while beckon and lure us with hopefulness that we may yet see further kingdoms and enjoy the larger liberties of life?—Blessed is he who knows where to stop.—Because there is a stopping-place in all thought, it does not follow that there is no line of thought to be entered upon.—When we know where to stop, we may also know that the point is but intermediate, not final; that we rest there but for a moment, and that by-and-by we shall take up the series, and continue it into the very day of heaven itself.

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“*I am not inferior to you.*”—JOB xii. 3.

This may be a mere boast, or it may contain truth which is of great spiritual significance.—The spirit of defiance ought to be taken out of it, and the substantial suggestion should be adopted by every man who wishes to make real progress in Christian instruction and experience.—The poorest man may say to the greatest—I am not inferior to you in my desire to appreciate my life and make the most of it; therefore I cannot be turned aside by vain quibbling or frivolous criticism, but I must go to the fountain of knowledge itself, and there make my own inquiries and decisions.—So the poor man may say—I am not inferior to you in the sight of God; social distinctions there are in abundance, often invidious, vexatious, troublesome, sometimes rational, useful and beneficent; but after all, the true judgment of man is with God, and God looks upon the rich and the poor alike, with an eye of love and interest.—This being the case, he may continue the argument and say, God will also take

care of me and my children; he has spoken kinder words to the poor than he ever spoke to the rich; he seems to have made his promises on purpose for those who were desolate, and helpless, and sad.—Then he may cheer himself with the thought that there are inferiorities which are only for the time being,—they are transient, and the true standard of superiority will by-and-by be worked out, and God will put every man in his legitimate place; the first shall be last, and the last shall be first; it is not for us to say who shall go forward, and who shall be thrust behind; our function is to discover our duty, to accept it, to do it with both hands earnestly, and to leave the whole result of classification and promotion to him who ruleth over all.—In speaking of inferiority and superiority, the spirit of vexatious criticism or envious defiance should always be suppressed and destroyed, and this only can be done by the reigning and superabundant grace of God.—He who boasts himself of himself is a fool; he who appeals to the divine standard and abides by the divine discrimination is a wise man, and he will accept the lowest place, not with humility only, but with thankfulness and joy, should such be the will of his Father in heaven.

“ . . . the soul of every living thing.”

JOB xii. 10.

Observe, not only “every living thing,” but actually the *soul* of it.—There is great meaning in this expression; it shows that we do not see the life in its innermost recesses and springs, but only some appearance or shape of it from the outside.—We have often said that no man has seen himself: the man is within the man; the life is within the life.—This rule holds good with regard to everything round about us;

notably, it holds good with regard to the Church, for the Church is within the Church, that is to say it is a spiritual reality, of which the visible Church is but the outward embodiment; and if we are not members of the spiritual kingdom it is of no importance what eminence we have attained with regard to formal position or membership.—The rule holds good also in regard to the Bible: in an emphatic sense, the Bible is within the Bible; a man may read the merely literary Bible from end to end, and know absolutely nothing about the revelation of God: that revelation is only granted to the wise and understanding heart, to those who are simple of mind, single and earnest in purpose, whose one desire is to know what God has said, and to do it: hence criticism can never get out of the Bible the soul of its living things: only sympathy with God, pureness of heart, and all the quiet graces of love, meekness, and docility, can reap great spoils in the harvest-field of the Bible.—The rule holds good also with regard to all ecclesiastical sacraments: they may be good or bad, useful or useless, just as we approach them or appropriate them.—We may turn them into mere idols and so may actually sin against the very purpose of their constitution; or we may regard them as instruments, mediums, or vehicles, through which God is pleased in some way to show himself to the waiting and expectant heart; used in this latter way, they become in very deed means of grace, valueless when viewed purely and absolutely in themselves but infinitely precious when regarded as the medium through which God descends upon the loving heart.—The same rule applies to the right interpretation of what is called material nature: who can tell what is behind it all? Agnostics themselves acknowledge that even in matter there is something which they cannot comprehend.



Agnosticism, or know-notism, is not, therefore, confined to what are usually known as spiritual subjects, but has a direct bearing upon things which are substantial and visible.—All these secrets of life being more or less beyond us, we are led up at once to the great principle that only God can be judge of all.—We know nothing as it really is.—He alone is the critic, whose penetration can pierce to the innermost thought, motive, and purpose of the heart; with him, therefore, must be left all judgment and all destiny.—It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of man.

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 “*He . . . maketh the judges fools.*”—  
 JOB xii. 17.

This is for their good.—If they were not rebuked, they would go on from one presumption to another, until they utterly forgot themselves and idolised their own ability.—It is good for the wise man to be made to know the measure of his wisdom, and for the judge to step down sometimes amongst the common people, and to own that there are questions too high for him.—The word “judges” should not be limited to the merely judicial function, as exercised in courts of law. The principle covers a large area. It includes, for example, all theologians; they should not stand up as men who know everything, and to whom is given the treasure of heavenly mystery, to be expended as they please: they are most influential when they are least presumptuous: they should claim to be fellow-readers, and fellow-students, and fellow-worshippers; and out of this sympathy with the common heart, they will acquire all true spiritual influence.—We are taught, by this divine visitation, not to put our confidence even in men who occupy

supreme positions: we may have come to them at a time, when their wits were bewildered, and their judgment had been turned upside down.—God does not take away their title, but he depletes it of all meaning and force, so that they represent the most seductive and disastrous irony, being judges only in name, and not in faculty.—It is clear that God will not give his glory unto another. The wise man is not to glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty man in his power. All flesh is to glory in the Lord.—God recognises judges, leaders, princes, captains, men of pre-eminent power and influence; and he has never withheld from them the tribute which was due to all their greatness and utility: nay, he himself has been the author of that greatness, and has been pleased to confer the blessedness of utility upon the service of the chief in his household; yet he has never given his glory to another, in the sense of being unable to withdraw it; the greatest servant may be deposed in an hour; there is but a step between the strongest man and death.—We are only judges in so far as we are docile students, reverential worshippers, patient waiters upon God.—In all matters of Biblical judgment, the spiritual faculty is generally with those who are least in their own esteem; who, passing by all that is merely initial and instrumental, come at once upon the pith and reality of things: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” In all cases God has chosen the teachable spirit as his peculiar dwelling-place.—What a lesson this is to all men in high position, in authority, children of fame, persons who suppose their castle to be founded upon rocks, and mighty men who scorn the idea of being brought down from their loftiness: “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

"He maketh them to stagger like a drunken man."—JOB xii. 25.

Here are men who are drunk, but not with wine; men who suppose themselves to be highly gifted, and yet who do not know their way home again when they have once gone astray.—God controls all physical substance and faculty: he toucheth the strength of a man, and it fades away: he waves his hand, so to say, across his brain, and all power of thinking is for ever suspended: he turneth a man's purposes upside down.—The deplorable and lamentable thing, viewed from a human standing-point, is that the men appear to be as strong and prosperous as ever, when their right hand has forgotten its cunning and their tongue can no longer speak familiar words: they represent death in life; they are as walking sepulchres: all the framework is there in its entirety, but the spirit within is humiliated, dispossessed, or quenched.—What, then, is our security? What is the guarantee that to the end we may possess sanity of mind, strength and dignity of judgment?—We are only safe in proportion as we keep company with God; as we invoke the abiding presence and ministry of the Holy Ghost; as we remember that we are nothing and have nothing, and that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights.—We sometimes ascribe great failures of mind and body to small causes.—We should remember that there is a great Sovereign above all, who appoints and disappoints, who leads forward and smites backward, who makes the first last, and the last first, not according to some arbitrary will, but according to a law of grace and love, the full scope of which we have not yet comprehended.—Better to be abased in this world, than to be destroyed in th

next.—Better to understand here and now that we are only servants than to be taught hereafter that there is no hope for us.—This is the time of school, of drill, of discipline, of all the educational processes which may end in mature wisdom and strength.—Here, again, we come upon the salutary exhortation, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom."—We are limited on every side.—Our wisdom is but partial.—Our greatest intellectual successes are but beginnings.—We shall begin to go down in all the best qualities of our soul, when we suppose we have approached the point of finality, because then we may turn round and make demands upon society, which are unsupported by reason and justice.—Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: put thine hand round about me, then I shall no longer stagger like a drunken man. What is my hope? What is my confidence? Yea, what is my expectation? Truly I will think nothing of myself, and attempt to be nothing in my own power and right: I will live as God's servant, I will pray as God's little child, I will have no way of my own from morning to night; in life, in death, my cry shall be:—Not my will, but thine, be done.

"Thou . . . makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth."—JOB xiii. 26.

Note the unity and continuity of life.—There is a philosophy which asserts that the human body changes its atoms or particles, say, every seven years, and in view of that philosophy it has been attempted to show that human identity practically changes.—The suggestion is not without fancy and beauty; at the same time it is simply driven out of court by certain moral instincts which insist that time has nothing whatever to do with the mitigation of deep moral offences.—Who,

for example, would say that a man is no longer to be charged with murder after seven years have elapsed since the perpetration of the crime? Who would admit a forger to his counting-house on the plea that more than seven years have passed by since the forgery was committed, and therefore the identity of the man had changed?—We have to elect between theories which are fanciful, and practices which are well-proved and established: as a mere matter of fact, it would be universally acknowledged that no man would be admitted to trust and fellowship who had committed murder or forgery even thirty years ago; he would be still held to be the same man, and his offence would be resented with undiminished indignation.—Here, then, is a law, the action of which we must faithfully recognise: Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; this plain word stands for ever, and nothing can change its application.—As a matter of fact, we know that after long years the transgressions against health which we have committed remind us by practical consequences of their reality.—We are constantly telling men that they treated themselves hardly in their youth, that in their youth they ruined their constitution, that in their youth they laid foundations for this or that disease.—This being the case bodily, it is also the case spiritually.—So mysterious is the connection between the body and the mind that what is done in the one affects the other for good or for evil.—A man cannot think a bad thought without taking so much quality out of his brain.—A man cannot even silently muse upon the possibility of doing forbidden things without returning from his contemplation shorn and weakened and dishonoured.—The brain gives off its quality very subtly, but most surely; so much so, that he who has been

indulging evil thoughts finds himself unprepared to discuss great questions or undertake perilous adventures.—Another law that is recognised in this text in the law of delay in the infliction of punishment or in the realisation of facts.—The penalty does not immediately succeed the transgression.—Herein men have hardened themselves to a high degree of impenitence against God.—“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”—We have illustrations of this even in physical life.—Men notice with wonder that people who have been infected with rabies do not instantly fall down dead: the poison mingles with the blood slowly, and probably months, in some cases even years will elapse, before the fatal result is developed.—This is looked upon as a scientific fact; it occasions no moral disturbance in the men who regard it as such: why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that a man of fifty should have to suffer for wrongs which he did at twenty?—Is it not matter rather for religious wonder and thankfulness that the law should be so continuous and inevitable in its operations and executions?—In science this would be thought admirable, and would be held up as an instance of the solidarity and majesty of nature; the moral teacher must be none the less ready to avail himself of it for his superior purposes.—A text of this kind justifies the preacher in exhorting his hearers to beware what they sow, to take care of themselves in their youth, and to proceed along the line of life with the caution of men who know that every word will be heard again, that every deed will repeat itself in some consequence, and that character is but the summing-up and consummation of works done day by day from the very beginning of life.

“. . . full of trouble.”—JOB xiv. 1.

This is one of the exaggerations quite pardonable to men in hours of agony.—There have been bright minds that have found more joy than sorrow in the world.—Unquestionably there is a diversity of temperament, and that ought to be taken into account in every consideration of the whole subject of human discipline.—It certainly seems as if some lives were left without the brightness of a single gleam of hope ; one trouble succeeds another like cloud coming after cloud, until the whole horizon is draped in blackness.—Consider the many sources and springs and occasions of trouble in human life.—Take the individual constitution : some men seem to be born utterly wanting in all the conditions of health ; from infancy upward they are doomed to depression, weakness, pain, and all the influences which contribute towards settled melancholy ; others, again, seem to be wounded every day through their children ; the hard-hearted, the ungrateful, the impenitent, the selfish, the thoughtless ; others again have no success in business ; whatever they do perishes in their hands ; they are always too late in the morning ; they always feel that some other man has passed by them in the race of life, and plucked the fruit which they intended to enjoy ; others, again, are beaten down in the conflict for the want of physical strength, or mental energy, or rational hopefulness : they think it is no use proceeding further ; they say the fates are against them, and so they sink into neglect, and pass away without leaving any traces of successful work in life.—We must distinguish between the trouble which is external, physical, and traceable more or less to our own action, and that mysterious heart-trouble which comes from solemn moral reflection, from the reckoning up of sins, and from

a thoughtful calculation of all the actions, thoughts, and purposes which have deserved divine condemnation.—There is no trouble to be compared with the trouble of the mind.—He is not poor who has left to him an estate of thought, reflection, contemplation, and the power of prayer.—In talking of trouble we should also talk about its mitigations. Is it possible that there can be a life anywhere on which some beam of sunshine does not alight ? We are not now talking about the insane, or those who suffer from increasing and continued melancholy, but about the general average of human life ; and, so speaking, surely we can always find in the hardest lot some mitigation of the burden, some compensation for extra darkness and difficulty.—We should look out for the mitigations.—Instead of arguing from the difficulty we should argue from the strength which is able to bear it in some degree. All this is never easy to do, and he would acquire no influence over men who sought to drive away their burdens, their difficulties, and their fears.—Better look at them seriously, add them up as to their real value, and so acquire standing-ground in the estimation of the hearer as to be enabled to proceed to enumerate mercies, blessings, alleviations, and the like, so as to mitigate the horrors of the actual situation.—Then, whatever trouble we may have, we must remember that it is not to be compared with the distress of him who said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”—We think of him, and justly so, at all times as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.—No man had sorrow like Christ’s.—He is therefore not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but from his own experience he is sensitive to all our sufferings, and responsive to all our appeals.—Then we should look at the

"afterwards" promised to those who bear discipline well and pass through chastisement patiently and uncomplainingly: "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

*"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one."*—JOB xiv. 4.

The answer is correct, and incorrect.—Everything depends upon the limits within which it is treated.—As regards man, it is impossible for him to change causes or to upset the laws of the universe.—With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.—This is the very thing that God is constantly doing: he is bringing strength out of weakness, purity out of impurity, life out of death; this is the eternal miracle of the divine administration.—It is of infinite importance, however, that man should realise his own helplessness in this matter, otherwise he will never look in the right direction for guidance and succour.—It is something to know that men have discovered beyond all question that to bring a clean thing out of an unclean is impossible.—The text is more than an inquiry; it is also a verdict.—Great importance attaches to these incidental intimations of the results of human inquiry and experience.—If any man had brought a clean thing out of an unclean it would be known, and the example would have been held up as pointing to a law, at least to an occasional possibility, and therefore perhaps to a reality which could be established upon the broadest bases.—But the very inquiry has in it a tone of helplessness.—When, therefore, man is done, God must take up the case, and, let us repeat again and again, it is his glory to do what man cannot do, and to show us that that

which is sown in corruption is raised in incorruption, and that which we sow cannot live until it has died.—The Bible is continually upsetting the so-called laws of nature and laws of sequence.—It would seem to be the delight of the spirit of the Bible to make the last first, and the first last, and to confuse all the thinking of the craftiest minds.—The Church of Christ is a clean thing brought out of an unclean.—Every renewed heart is a clean thing brought out of an unclean.—Every generous and noble deed is likewise a clean thing brought out of an unclean.—But the first motive was never in the unclean: as water cannot rise above its own level, neither can depravity: anything, therefore, that is now pure, wise, noble, true, and useful must be credited to the almighty grace of God.—That innumerable hard questions gather around this view of life is evident enough; still we have to deal with the practical end and issue of things, and there we find that even the man himself who does the good deeds is unwilling to ascribe them to the action of his own depraved motive and thought, but willingly accepts the solution that this is the Lord's doing and marvellous in his eyes.—Here the great gospel of salvation may be preached in all its unction and fulness and power.—God makes the tree good, and thus makes the fruit good.—He purifies the fountain, and thus he cleanses the stream.—God does not begin to work from the outside, cleansing the hands; but from the internal life, purifying the heart; then all the rest becomes morally sequential, and illustrative of the miracle that has been wrought within.

*"Art thou the first man that was born?"*—JOB xv. 7.

The humbling questions which may be put to men!—The very strongest

man is thrown down from his high position by the force of a blow like this.—How difficult it is to be an originator, the very first in the field, the man who had the earliest revelation and the first message to bring from heaven! We cannot get at that man; he is removed from us by a distance we cannot measure.—So when the poet sings he accompanies himself upon a harp which other men made; when a book is published it is only an advance upon a book published long before: when a man puts down upon paper all the knowledge he has acquired, he is bound to say that it was an acquisition and not an origination on his part; he says, in effect, Other men have told me this; whether they are right or wrong, I cannot tell; I merely repeat what I have been told.—We must distinguish between a voice and an echo.—The application of an inquiry of this kind lies in the direction of modifying our infallibility.—As I am not the first man that was born, I am obliged to consult some other man, so that we may come to a common opinion about beginnings, and operations. and issues: he may have seen more than I have seen: he may be better able to express himself than I am: he may have the very thing which I want.—Here is the great principle of traditional knowledge and relative knowledge; and this principle must be recognised in the interpretation of the universe, and even in the interpretation of the Bible.—God takes away from us all privileges which could be turned into boasting, or he limits those privileges by showing how many other people have shared them, and have borne their elevation in a modest spirit and with a thankful heart.—The question would admit of application in regard to all the worlds into which men are born: for example, a man is born into the world of literature, and there he finds him-

self crowded by ancestors;—a man is born into the spiritual world, in which he sings and prays, and holds communion with God, and suddenly he feels himself surrounded by an infinite host of fellow-worshippers;—he is born into a world of intellectual activity, and he is surprised at his own mental miracles, and scarcely has he plumed himself upon their originality or novelty when he finds that all he has looked upon as new are the commonplaces of ages forgotten.—Thus there is a subtle action of encouragement, and a concurrent action of humiliation, so that between the two the man's mind may be established in modesty and reason.—We should beware how we go about boasting of our originality, lest the man to whom we speak has given up our novelties as commonplaces he could no longer tolerate.—Thus infallibility goes down; thus all papacy is overthrown; thus all priesthood is dispossessed of authority: we can only live healthfully by mental concession, by discussion, by acknowledgment of indebtedness one to another, and by preserving the fellowship which eventuates in common truths, and sentiments which are sustained by a large common practice.—Never listen to any teacher who claims to be the first man that was born; be thankful for any wise man's word who is willing to regard it as but a contribution to the sum-total; and in proportion as the man refers to his authorities, and endeavours to found his claim upon his own gratitude, rather than upon his own inspiration, have confidence in the elevation of his intention.

“I have heard many such things.”—

JOB xvi. 2.

Many unreflecting speeches are made respecting the religious life; also many superficial speeches; especially are

many conjectural words uttered regarding human experience.—There has been no lack of answers to the religious need of man.—Christianity takes its place amongst those answers, and must vindicate itself by the fulness and adequacy of its doctrines.—The heart knows the right speech when it hears it.—The heart is sated with foolish appeals.—Take care of the answering voice which God has put within, and let its tones be well heard when appeals are made for the heart's confidence.—The answer of Christianity to the sorrow of the world is unique; it never can be classed amongst "many such things," for it stands alone in boldness, compass, tenderness.—All other religions have outworn themselves, in fruitless endeavours to give intelligent peace to the human mind; they have wrought apathy or stoicism, indifference, neglect, and even contempt, but profound and enlightened serenity is a miracle which they have never accomplished.—The sorrow of the world is not a commonplace, and therefore it is not to be subdued or mitigated by commonplaces.—When we speak of the sorrow of the world as a whole, we must remember that it is made up of individual distresses and agonies, and only that which applies to the individual can be applied effectually and happily to the whole world.—Who has not heard of fate, or chance, or misfortune, or the necessity of things? Who has not been told, more or less carelessly, to be quiet, patient and hopeful? Who has not been reminded that others are suffering more than themselves? The sufferer may well reply: I have heard many such things, but they have no application to my particular need.—When Jesus Christ comes to the heart it is impossible for the heart to say that many other speakers have said the same things in the same tone. Herein

it is true, as everywhere else, "Never man spake like this Man." We wonder at the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth: he needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man.—The distinctiveness of Christ's appeals constitutes a strong claim for their divinity.—David said of the sword of Goliath, "there is none like it": so we say of the words of Jesus Christ; they are unrivalled in sublimity, pathos, and simplicity.—He who has heard Christ with the attention of his heart can never forget the gracious eloquence and the infinite wisdom of the divine speaker.—Go to Christ for yourselves: this Man still receiveth sinners.—We read that the disciples went and told Jesus what had happened in an hour of calamity; we must go on the same errand, tell him everything, speak to him every day, and take no step which he does not sanction or accompany.

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*"God hath delivered me to the ungodly,  
and turned me over into the hands  
of the wicked."*—JOB xvi. 11.

This is not the speech of ignorance; nor is this a mere ebullition of fretfulness or peevishness: the man who speaks is a wise man, whose character God himself has recognised and commended as good, even supremely good.—Nor is this speech an exaggeration. This is precisely what God has done.—The patriarch now seems to realise the simple truth of the situation. As a matter of fact God had delivered Job to the ungodly, and turned him over into the hands of the wicked.—But God had done more, and it is that additional something which is so often forgotten in our surveys and estimates of Divine Providence.—God had pledged his word that Job would be constant in the

hour of trial, and that all the fire of hell would not burn him when he passed through the furnace.—Where God has made such a pledge he will supply the needful grace.—The battle was really not between Job and the devil, but between God himself and Satan : Job was, so to say, but the battle-field, on which the great combatants stood face to face.—If Job failed, God failed.—It is so now, that good men are handed over to be tried, tempted, and put to every test to which virtue can be subjected.—Godly men are not taken out of the world : they are still left in its atmosphere, and in immediate touch with all its customs and principles.—To be in the world is to be in temptation ; to live is to do battle with evil.—It is unprofitable to disguise from ourselves the reality of our spiritual position.—It is foolish to appear to be in the world, and yet to be independent of it ; we are not to hide ourselves from its appeals or temptations, or from any part of its manifold discipline : we are called upon to show that how severe soever may be our trial, he who is with us is more than all that can be against us.—The consolatory thought which every Christian should apply to himself is, that temptation is but for a moment ; it is not the evil that can endure for ever.—The Son of man had to work to-day and to-morrow, and on the third day he was perfected. We have to follow his example.—We are trained to strength by daily conflicts.—The spirit of wisdom is wrought in us by being exercised in discerning good and evil, and determining to follow that which is right, not only in preference to that which is wrong, but in absolute abhorrence of everything that is unlike the holiness of God.—Let the suffering Christian be cheered and animated by the reflection, that no temptation hath happened unto him but such as is common to man.

“*When a few years are come.*”—  
JOB xvi. 22.

Here is the idea of measured sorrow. A man complains of the road, but he is cheered by the fact that the end is not far away.—The Christian has not only to think of years, but “a few years”—quite a handful of days, a breath or two, a struggle or two, a disappointment or two, and then the end of all is reached.—We should always look out for the mitigations of our condition.—The sufferer here finds it in the brevity of the time which he has to endure ; we may always find it in the same direction. Others can find mitigations in different ways, as in the kindness of friends, the brightness of mind under bodily affliction, domestic comfort, and the evident accomplishment of divine purposes in the purification of the character.—We are not called upon in all cases to find consolation at the same point, but every man is called upon as a child of God to find consolation somewhere.—Let him say, “This is my Father’s hand : not my will, but thine, be done,” and all his afflictions will be turned into sources of joy.—We are to kiss the rod and him who hath appointed it ; we are to look upon chastening not as pleasant but as grievous, yet afterwards working the peaceable fruit of righteousness.—The text may be regarded as a refrain to a life-song. However the music may run—now smoothly, now roughly ; now harshly, like a strong wind, now softly, like a breeze among the flowers—yet the refrain is, “When a few years are come.” “Brief life is here our portion.”—The brevity of life which has its mournful aspects has also its aspects of comfort and encouragement.—The misanthropist would say, Life is so short, it is not worth while attempting to do anything great : the tower will not be half-finished, the work will but



mock me by an abrupt termination ; I will turn away from all activity, and wait for the end : the philanthropist would say, Life is brief, therefore I must be up and doing ; I must redeem the time or buy up the opportunity ; not a moment is to be lost ; I must hoard the hours as a miser hoards gold : the sufferer may say, Presently all will be over ; in a day or two I shall see heaven's gate opened, and join the happy throng on high,—at the best, "when a few years are come," this night of time will be forgotten in the brightness of heaven's eternal day ; I will encourage myself by this reflection : I will pray that I may be man enough to stand out the whole trial for the little time that yet remains : "he that endureth to the end shall be saved : " may God help me to be faithful unto death ; then he will not withhold from me the crown of life.—"Until death," and that is just within sight ; the dark shadow is already upon me ; the grave is already opening at my feet. Oh, poor, throbbing, suffering heart, hope on : even to-morrow may see thee bearing the banner of victory, and hear thee singing the song of the free.

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*"Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow."*—JOB xvii. 7.

The children of God need not hide the extremities to which they are put.—Whilst in one sense they are called upon to make the best of their circumstances, in another they are expected to realise all the discipline through which God is causing them to pass.—In any book invented for the purpose of deceiving the world, expressions of this kind would not have been found, for they are enough to turn away the reader from faith in the God who could permit such heavy distresses to fall upon his

chosen children.—In the Bible, however, the utmost frankness is used in describing the reality of life.—Christ said, If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross.—Christianity means crucifixion.—Looking upon the sufferer in the text, who would say, Let me also be as Job is : let me believe in God ; let me follow him in all the travail and sorrow of his life ; for surely the God who permits such chastisement is merciful and tender in spirit ? No man could make any such speech. Looked at, as he sits in sorrow and in dust and ashes, uncrowned, desolated, and abhorred, Job is rather calculated to turn men away from God, than to allure them to him.—Christians have suffered more than any other men have ever endured.—The higher the life the more susceptible is feeling : the nearer we are to God the more wicked does every sin appear to be.—It is not to be supposed that when a man lives and moves and has his being in God that he is exempt from loss, or pain, or want : but the case is not confined within the limits of such experience ; the error which we are always tempted to commit is the error of supposing that we see everything, and grasp the whole case of life in all the variety of its detail. We forget such comforting words as "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter ;" "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid ;" "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,"—that is, trials or tests of character.—When the eye is dim by reason of sorrow the eye of the soul is often made brighter and keener, that it may look further into all the mystery of love.—The real state of the life does not depend upon the tearless eye of the body ; when the eye of the body is brightest the eye of the soul may be dimmest. It is in the darkness that we see the stars.—The eye of the body is meant to be

extinguished, and all our members are intended to be but as a shadow; no uncommon thing has happened to us when we are in tears, or when we are beclouded by great apprehensions, or crushed under heavy burdens;—all that belongs to the present state of life and the present system of nature, as we now stand related to them in our character as transgressors.—When my heart and my flesh do fail, then the Lord will take me up.—It is in our extremity that God can best show the riches of his grace—

“Tis when our human hopes die out  
That Jesus best can prove  
The strength, and depth, and tenderness  
Of His unchanging love.”

Many men would never have known Christ in all his dignity and tenderness, but for the sufferings they have undergone; they have been made acquainted with him in the companionship of affliction. We see more of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane than in any other place in all his history.—One day we may have reason to exclaim, “It is good for me that I was afflicted.”—There are not wanting children of God who would not on any account surrender the trials they have undergone, because of the rich issues of wisdom and grace which they have realised in their hearts.

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“My familiar friends have forgotten me.”—JOB xix. 14.

What does this amount to? As a social fact it was simply ruinous.—A man without friends is without fellowship, confidence, hope.—What is a house without windows looking out upon the lighted landscape? What is it to have great thoughts, and yet to have no listener, into whose eager ear the high music can be poured?—Job is therefore not mourning something that

is of no consequence, but is lamenting one of the most serious incidents that can occur in social experience.—Still, spiritual advantages may accrue from loss of friends.—When friends are gone we begin to inquire what can be left; and if in our desolation we find that God remains behind in all faithfulness and love, we may say with Christ, “I am alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with me.”—What a lesson is this upon the whole subject of friendship, not friendship of a common kind, but friendship which involved former familiarity and almost oneness of thought and sympathy!—Let us take care upon what staff we lean.—We should remember that the best of men are but men at best.—We see, in this instance, how friendship was dependent in a large degree upon circumstances.—There are fair-weather friends, and there are friends whom no foul weather can drive from our side.—There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.—It is the peculiar glory of Jesus Christ that he has promised to be with us for ever, not a casual friend, not a day-long acquaintance, not a mere passer-by, but to abide with us and see us through all the cloud of time and the valley of death, and bring us into the sunlight of eternity.—To be forgotten, how sad a case is that! At first, it would appear to be a simple impossibility, yet we have known it as a lamentable fact; the memory has cast out names which it once prized.—Let us see to it that when we are forgotten, it is not for moral reasons; let the ingratitude be on the other side.—There comes a time when it is right to forget a man who has broken every commandment and turned a deaf ear to every exhortation; even Jesus Christ appoints a time when an offending brother is to become a heathen man and a publican.—As to forgetfulness, we ought to search into its quality, lest there be hidden within

it anything of the nature of unthankfulness.—Never forget a benefactor or a benefit.—To think of the sacred and fruitful past is to make the present glow with a holy influence.—God will not forget those who remember him.—God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love.—When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.—Our conscious loneliness will be among the chief of our blessings if it lead us to consider whether the blessing of God is not available.—Let our friendships be rooted in intelligent conviction, deep moral sympathy, congeniality of spiritual tastes, and even the roughest wind will leave them probably unbent, certainly unbroken.

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*“Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?”—*  
JOB xix. 28.

The time will come when every judgment will be regulated by the radical condition of men.—At present, judgment is superficial, relating largely to circumstances and changing conditions.—We should be concerned about the real character of a man, and in the light of that character view his eccentricities, peculiarities, and even the failings that seem to alienate our confidence.—Perfect men we need not expect to find, because we are not perfect ourselves; but without being perfect, a man may be rooted in the true life, and may be enriched with the true knowledge.—Men should be judged by the larger aspects of their character. There may be a thousand slips, mistakes, foibles, and yet underneath all there may be a living reality of faith and love.—We are not to break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, or turn aside that which is lame out of the way; we are to be pitiful, considerate, large-

minded towards all men.—Once be satisfied that the root of the matter is in a man—that is to say, that he means well, that his motives are simple, that his purposes are upright—then it will be easy to deal with the inequalities of his character.—There are some men who never show themselves to advantage. Unfortunately for them, they are always disclosing the weaker side of their nature, asserting their peculiarities, and, almost of set purpose, concealing their real quality.—“By their fruits ye shall know them” is a rule which cannot be amended,—not by the fruits of this particular day or that, but the fruits of the whole lifetime.—No man who has the root of the matter in him can wholly disguise its presence and effect in his life. The fruit will appear at unexpected times, and will be most abundant when there is the largest opportunity of feeding hunger without the observation of others.—Surely there is a sense in which the root of the matter is in every man,—some trace of divinity, some symbol of high origin, some thought not born of earth, some flash of light that must have been enkindled in eternity: it is this that inspires philanthropy with immortal hope, that nerves and succours it amid all the gathering discouragements which would suppress and destroy it.—Every man knows whether the root of the matter is in him or not. This has not to be revealed to him by others; it is a fact which his own conscience can positively determine.—Let there be no mistake as to the nature of the root,—it is not profession, it is not sentiment, it is not official alliance with this or that particular section of the Christian Church, it is not veneration for things past, or superstition for things sacerdotal and ecclesiastical; it is a life, it is a conscious enjoyment of God, it is a deep and unalterable vow to serve the living God, whatever others may do.

“How can he be clean that is born of a woman?”—JOB xxv. 4.

This is a question supported by reason.—It is a fact also confirmed by experience. There has been opportunity enough of knowing what the human race can do for itself; we need not now be making experiments as to the quality of human nature; within the scope of thousands of years it has had field enough in which to display itself, alike to advantage and disadvantage.—The question is philosophical and scientific: how can the effect be better than the cause? How can water rise above its level? How can a fountain send forth both sweet water and bitter? How can a vine bear fruit other than that of its own kind?—The inquiry is thus justified by all the processes of nature.—Yet revelation comes with a sublime and hopeful reply.—There is a cause above all the causes which we know—a great First Cause: we are stopped in our inquiry by ministries, mediums, intermediate arrangements, and what are termed secondary causes and impulses: within the circle of their operation the question must be answered, as involving an impossibility; but here it is that grace triumphs over law, here is the miracle of redemption and regeneration: with men this is impossible, with God all things are possible: the Holy Spirit takes up the work where man lays it down, and that which is resigned in feebleness is completed by omnipotence.—No man can heal himself, regenerate himself, re-create himself; a voice comes sounding down the ages, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.” This is the great gospel voice, declaring at once the saddest fact and the most blessed opportunity.

“Will he always call upon God?”—JOB xxvii. 10.

It would seem as if the emphasis should be laid upon the word “always.”—There is mutable worship enough.—Occasional prayers are known to those who are not Christians, even in name.—Probably, all men in Christian countries are conscious of occasional high impulses and noble aspirations; they enter with sympathy and enthusiasm into religious psalmody or other forms of religious worship: but they do so in a merely sentimental manner; they express an impulse, not a conviction; they enjoy a luxury, rather than reveal a hunger of the heart which God alone can satisfy.—Our worship is to be proved by its continuity.—We are not to serve God, so to say, in fits and starts, now very ardent, and now very cold; now engaging ourselves with all industry as if everything depended upon us, and now allowing the work to fall into desuetude and contempt.—Will he always call upon God,—in health, in sickness, in wealth, in poverty, in the bright summer day, in the cold winter night, on the land where all things seem to be solid, on the water where everything is restless and in peril?—Will he always serve God,—in the ardour of youth, in the sobriety of manhood, in the repose of old age? We must not boast ourselves of our religion until it has been tried in every possible combination of circumstances, for the one in which it has not been tried may prove that we never knew the inmost secret of God: “He that endureth to the end shall be saved.”—We are to watch and be sober, to persevere unto the end, to drive away slumber from the eyelids, lest whilst we sleep the Bridegroom should come.—There is little or no fear of our forgetting prayer in the day of trouble, of loneliness, or of bitter grief;

sorrow always makes us mindful of our religious obligations and opportunities, —the fear is that we may wax fat and kick, that in our prosperity we may forget God, that at high noon we may imagine we ourselves kindled the sun : “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”—To see a man praying when he seems to have no need of prayer is to see what approaches almost the dignity of a miracle.—It may be easy to cry unto God when we have lack of food, but to invoke his benediction upon a plentiful table, and to do it with a humble heart, may be a test of the reality of our religion.—Sweet is the word, Always pray—always,—every day of the week, every hour of the wakeful night ; not praying as a duty, or accepting it as a discipline, but enjoying it as a supreme delight, and valuing it as the widest and noblest liberty. “Pray without ceasing.”

“*I was eyes to the blind.*”—JOB xxix.  
15.

This may lead us to consider the subject of self-multiplication.—No man liveth unto himself.—We hold all our faculties and properties, not for ourselves alone but for others also ; in this respect we have all things in common.—No man is at liberty to say, when there is a blind man to be helped, that his eyes are wholly his own, and that he must devote them to his own occupations and interests.—In this way it lies within the power of every man to do good : without money, without genius, without influence, he can yet conduct a blind child across a thoroughfare, or speak a kind word to the dispirited traveller, or offer to do some deed of love to the friendless man.—Beneficence does not confine itself to one line. Unhappily, in many instances, it is so confined, and thus it is

in danger of falling into a mere trick or habit. Some men will give money largely who will not give any time to the promotion of good causes ; others do not grudge their time, but it is next to impossible to persuade them to contribute of their substance.—Each man will be judged according to his faculty and opportunity.—All that some men can do is to lead the blind, cheer the lonely, advise the perplexed ; these services to humanity are never set down in the subscription-lists of society ; it would seem as if it was only money that could be recorded, and not service of a still richer kind. Many are sitting in darkness and desolation who do not need money ; they need sympathy, counsel, encouragement.—Let every man consider what his particular power of serving society is. We must not judge ourselves by one another, but must inquire into the gift which gives us individuality ; that is the gift which is to be stirred up ; that is the gift which indicates the line of our service.—Some men have ten gifts, others two, others one, and each man must examine himself and work according to his particular endowment.—Blessed are they who live in others.—The blind who are helped ought not to forget the man who helped them. They should remember the touch of his kind hand, the cheerfulness of his generous voice, and by their thanks they should inspire him to continue his benevolent services to all who need them.—The man who has the word of wisdom has the key of many a prison.—Even services of the humblest kind should be rendered with tender grace, for thus their value may be doubled.—Many persons never see the blind because they never look for them.—There is other blindness than that of the eyes of the body—blindness of mind, of conscience, and even of affection.—What if a man should see well with his

bodily eyes, but should blind the vision of his soul? What if the eyes of imagination should wander through eternity, feasting themselves upon the riches of the universe, if the eyes of conscience and responsibility and social trust should be put out, so that those who are round about us needing our help should escape our observation.—Many persons are quick to see the faults of others, but blind to their own.—Let us remember that sympathy, counsel, encouragement, prayer, religious exhortation, may all come under the designation of that large and generous service which gives eyes to the blind.

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*“Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness.”—JOB xxx. 25, 26.*

Job did not always see the connection between cause and effect.—It is idle to deny that there are surprises in the working of this law in daily providence.—Events do not occur as we should have predicted.—It would even seem as if wheat brought forth tares, and thistles grew upon the vine.—The facts of life are very hard; they are moral mysteries, even such as trouble the conscience.—The assurance is that if we care for the poor the Lord will care for us; yet here is a man whose soul was grieved for the poor, and he himself was thrust down into the greatest distress.—The question arises whether we see the whole of the case, or whether at best we see but transient phases of things that are real and permanent.—It would seem as if every day we needed the comfort which arises from the exercise of patience in this matter of time.—The patriarch, having wept for him that

was in trouble, expected that good would come, and whilst he stood at his door looking for the radiant angel to advance, behold, evil came upon him! a great dense cloud gathered over his head and discharged its floods upon his house.—Job was conscious of having done right, of having been kind, of having spared nothing of all his wealth from the cry of the poor and the needy: then said he to himself, “Light will surely come,” and when he looked for the light the whole heaven blackened into a frown.—We must look at facts in all their reality and seriousness.—Within points that can be easily fixed, the argument of facts would often seem to be dead against the doctrine of a benign and watchful providence.—We have to wait for the latter end.—It is often a long time to wait, and many hearts break down in the weary process, Surely God will not be harsh with such hearts, for his trials are very many and very great.—We may learn a good deal from our inability as well as our ability in the matter of bearing trial.—It is right that our pride should be humbled and crushed, and that we should know ourselves to be but men. When the unbeliever taxes us with having done good, and yet with having received evil at the hand of the Lord, our reply should be a frank avowal of the fact, and our argument should be that as yet we know only in part.—There is a time in the process of germination when everything seems to be against the seed which has been sown; there is a point at which it is true, Thou fool! that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.—How absurd the suggestion that we too must die in order to live, we must become weak that we may be strong, we must empty ourselves that we may be filled of God.—No doubt, the atheist has occasions on which the argument seems to be wholly on his side.—Be-

yond all question, he can point to men of prayer who are doomed to poverty, men of faith who are slaves to circumstances, over-burdened and over-driven every day, their best toil coming back upon them like a mockery and a penalty.—So again and again we have to fall back upon the exhortation which bids us rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him ; he knows exactly how much purification we need, how much disappointment is best for us, how many days we have to be in the prison of fear, in order to prepare us for the joy of liberty.—Not my will, but thine, be done : I long to see another process in providence, one which will bear more directly upon the belief of unwilling minds, and the surrender of reluctant wills ; I long for thee, O God, to triumph, and to make manifest thy kingdom ; but thou art wise and I am foolish ; I came up from the emptiness and ignorance of yesterday, and will not dictate to the eternal God : O teach me from my heart to say, “Thy will, my God, be done !”

“ . . . an interpreter, one among a thousand.”—JOB xxxiii. 23.

Why should not all men be interpreters? As a matter of fact, they are not, and we are called upon to consider the moral import of that fact.—Men are variously gifted.—To be gifted at all is to receive honour from God.—The judgment is not as between one man and another, but as between each man, as a trustee, and God who has put him in trust.—The interpreter will always make his influence felt ; there will be something about his manner, mode of thinking, tone of expression, which will identify him as one on whom the tongue of flame is resting.—Society should honour its interpreters.—To be

one among a thousand is to be in a painful position.—We envy the eminence, but forget the responsibility ; we say how grand it must be to be so high up in society, forgetting that elevation means penalty, labour of many kinds, and vexations such as the great alone can feel.—The Bible is an interpreter, and one among a thousand.—This is the distinctive peculiarity of the Bible.—It is not only a revelation, it is an interpretation ; it interprets God, nature, truth, and it interprets man to himself.—It is one among a thousand because there are many books which profess to have great answers to great questions, but they all break down at a given point, and are least eloquent where the heart yearns most for spiritual communication.—Let us always dwell upon the distinctiveness of the Bible, and of the cross, and of the whole priesthood of Jesus Christ.—In many points it may be like other sacred messages, but there are points at which it breaks away from them all, and stands up in noble singularity.—We must not force interpretation too far.—Sometimes it is enough to have a hint without having a whole revelation.—If we walk according to the light we have, the light will soon increase.—He is deceiving himself who supposes that he would travel fast toward the kingdom of heaven if he could start his journey at mid-day.—Begin your journey as soon as there is the faintest streak of light in the east, and as you walk the sun will increase in splendour.—The Christian should be one in a thousand : he should be seen from afar : he should be known by the quality of his character, by the music of his voice : he should in no case be so living the vulgar life as to be confounded with the common herd—at the same time, he must distinguish between self-display, and the uniqueness which comes of long and happy communion with his Master.—

To be ostentatious is to be impious; to be a city set on a hill is to be a witness for God.

"Let us know among ourselves what is good."—JOB. xxxiv. 4.

The Church should be united in its testimony. Before going forth to the world the Church should agree upon what is eternal and what is temporal; in other words, between what is fundamental and what is changeable.—The Church suffers for want of self-consultation; each man seems to run at his own bidding, and to go a warfare at his own charges.—This is the exaggeration of individualism.—Man belongs to man, and should consult man, especially when the purpose is to represent a common message from heaven.—It is perfectly possible to be substantially one, and yet individually varied, so that there shall be a great element of permanence, and also a fascinating element of variety in the testimony and teaching of the Church.—They that love the Lord should speak often one to another, and their object should be to say, with a loud and unanimous voice, that in which they are agreed with regard to the kingdom of heaven.—How is it today? do we not hear more about controversies than about points of union? is not he the clever man who can create a new contention? and is not he considered as commonplace and wanting in originality who calls the Church to obedience, to duty, and to sacrifice?—Conference amongst Christians is a sure way to union.—When they cannot agree in speech to one another, they can agree in speech to God.—By praying much to God they may learn the art of speaking concedingly and fraternally to one another.—The action towards union which is to end aright must begin at the divine end; that is to say, it must begin by increasing our communion

with God and our love to God, and when we are right with the Father we shall soon be right with one another.—If thou hast aught against thy brother, go and speak to him.—Instead of representing in our own language what other men are supposed to think, we should go to those men and ask them what their real meaning is, and should endeavour to find their standpoint, and to enter sympathetically into their whole mental action.—There might be more outward union if there were really a deeper desire in the hearts of men to be one in Christ and in love of truth.

"Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly?"—JOB xxxiv. 18.

This makes a large assumption with regard to royal character.—This enables us to understand the exhortations of the Bible with regard to kings, princes, and rulers.—The assumption of the Bible is that they are good men, animated by a spirit of righteousness, and intent upon serving the interests of truth.—The Bible never assumes the king to be a bad man, or a prince to be ungodly.—This is the secret of all its exhortations to loyalty and obedience.—The king is to represent the whole state; the prince is to typify the righteousness of the universe.—We are not to look at kings and princes in their mere individuality, for then they may not be equal to many over whom they reign, in intellectual capacity or in moral nobleness; king and prince are typical or symbolical terms, and they have reference to character, and to office, and to divine designs.—If a king is not to be regarded as wicked, what about a Christian?—If the thought of princes being ungodly is abhorrent, what must be the thought of praying men being unfaithful to their own prayers, living a contradiction to their



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own most pious desires?—The more we expect from men the more we ought to realise from them, in the way of character and honour and utility.—Kings must be made to feel that their people expect great things from them—things worthy of kingship, actions worthy of royal designation; in this sense the people may make the king, the ruled may make the ruler.—Let the kings of the earth feel that their people are increasing in education, in moral elevation, and in enlargement of view, and it will be impossible for the officially great to linger behind the untitled nobility.—After all democracy has everything in its own hands; not

immediately, but remotely, and it may attain all its purposes by painstaking effort in matters of education, self-culture, and self-discipline.—The lowly will soon give the mighty to understand what is expected of them, by showing in themselves capacity for government and willingness to obey where laws are right and beneficent.—Nothing is gained by effrontery, impertinence, defiance.—It is easy to defy a king nothing comest of such rebellion; the true defiance is to be found in growing goodness, growing wisdom, growing simplicity of character.—That is not the defiance of audacity, but the holy defiance of virtue.

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## I N D E X .

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- ABSTRACT** doctrine, uselessness of preaching, 330.
- Adam, the temptation of, 8; never a boy, 19.
- Affliction, God's uses of, 364.
- After the storm, 398.
- Agnosticism, Christian, 269.
- Agnostics, perplexities of, 174.
- Angels, ministry of, 21.
- Annotated chapters: xxxi, 300; xxxviii, 366; xxxix, 368: xl, 370; xli, 371.
- Appearance, the divine, 366. *See* THEOPHANY.
- Aristotle, maxim of, 61.
- Arithmeticians, poverty of their figures, 95.
- Assaults of Satan, 15. *See* DEVIL; SATAN.
- BACKSLIDERS**, a call to, 254.
- Bereaved families, how to be approached, 58.
- Bible, an ever-enlarging book, 217.
- Bildad, first speech of, 56; wanting in sympathy, 57; his wisdom, 59; his philosophy, 61; Job's answer to, 65; his family and nation, 87; the second speech of, 172; Job's reply to, 180. *See* JOB.
- Book of Job, author of the, 188; its place in the Bible, 196; poetry of, 281; epitaphs in, 298.
- CANT**, the pride of, 81.
- Character, how watched and read, 18; value of, 337.
- Charleston, alarmed by earthquake, 386.
- Chastening, purpose of, 240.
- Cheyne, Rev. Canon, on the Book of Job, 290; on the speeches of Elihu, 349.
- Children, tombstones of little, 23.
- Christ, the teaching of, 113; in the Book of Job, 335. *See* JESUS CHRIST.
- Christian men, shortcomings of, 212.
- Christianity, what is, 349.
- Church, mission of the, 182; what she ought to be, 288; advantages in the, 395.
- Cleansing, man's need of, 70; means of, *ib.*
- Clouds with silver linings, 357.
- Comforters and flatterers, 163.
- Comforters, Job's, God's reply to, 391.
- Contrasts, man educated by, 141.
- Controversy, unprofitableness of, 397.
- Creaturedom, the position of, 403.
- Criticism, the fault of the world, 107.
- Cursed cities, Oriental horror of, 153.
- Cursing the day, meaning of, 29.
- DAUGHTERS** of Job, the, 413.
- Dead, love for the, 192.
- Death, certainty of, 47; how to be met, *ib.*
- Demosthenes, interrogations of, 51.
- Destiny, eternal, question of, 322.
- Devil, restlessness of the, 9; his estimate of good men, 11; his programme, 20; existence of the, 141

- wages of the, 154; restraint of the, 159; the mystery of his power, 164. *See* SATAN.
- Devilishness, evidence of the devil, 15, 25.
- Diseases of Job, 64.
- Doctrine, dangerous, to preach, 20; the world's contempt for, 98.
- Dream, a waking, 1.
- EARTHQUAKES, terror of, 386.
- Eden, the tragedy in, 8.
- Education, need of encouragement in, 32.
- Elihu, the speech of, 319; his wrathfulness, 320; his ancestry, 328; his modesty, 329; his beautiful sayings, 350. *See* JOB.
- Eliphaz, the argument of, 30; reproaches Job, 33; his sublime language, 35; some of his diamond words, 40; his tenderness, 45; Job's answer to, 48; his pedigree, 89; the second speech of, 147; his last speech, 216. *See* JOB.
- Ended words, 310.
- Evolution, the doctrine of, 377.
- Extortion, condemned by the law of Moses, 224.
- FAITH, the great work of, 209; a noble, 348.
- Family Bible, thumb marks in, 55.
- Father, meaning of, 257.
- God, how to be judged, 44; a refuge in times of grief, 60; the great mystery, 115; no unrighteousness in, 120; the Bible conception of, 145; man's desire after, 244; how to be sought, 249; the only critic, 295; his omnipotence, 297; entreaties of, 323; sovereignty of, *ib.*; his creative power, 341; righteousness of, 344, 346; his interest in man, 353; power of, 355; condescension of, *ib.*; his fatherhood, 362, 389; his uses of affliction, 364; his interrogations, 374; in the Bible, 375; in human controversies, *ib.*; revealed in Jesus Christ, 390; a wonderful revelation of, 401; rebukes the wise, 407.
- Gospel, the need of the, 171; message of the, 231.
- Grace, miracles of, 23.
- "HANDFULS of Purpose," 417.
- Hearts, broken, the Bible message to, 345.
- History, how to be interpreted, 74.
- Home, value of, 287.
- Human responsibility, doctrine of, 332.
- IMMORTALITY, doctrine of, in the Old Testament, 78; proclaimed by Jesus Christ, 415.
- JESUS CHRIST, temptation of, 13; the one mediator, 71; parables of, 173; the works of, 211; his mission, 352; sympathies of, 317; revealing the Father, 390. *See* CHRIST.
- Job, "a perfect man," 6; his affluence, 7; his destitution, 14; public trial of, 18; his eloquent tirade, 27; his answer to Eliphaz, 48; lamentations of, *ib.*; diseases of, 64; his answer to Bildad, 65; his noble view of God, 67; addressed by Zophar, 100; reply to his three friends, 106; a great natural theologian, 111; his hopefulness, 129; his conception of providence, 135; accused by Eliphaz, 150, 221; the soul-trouble of, 163; surrounded by flatterers, 168; his reply to Bildad, 180; his knowledge of immortality, 186; his review of the controversy, 235; the eloquence of, 265, 318; his religious loss, 283; his gift of rhetoric, 295; lessons from his experience, 299; his retrospect and protest, 302; at his intellectual best, 303; his mechanical life, *ib.*; his earnest speech, 304; calls God his "adversary," 308; the

- failures of his friends, 333; God's answer to, 391; his pride rebuked, 395; abhors himself, 404; exaltation and death of, 407; prays for his friends, 410; the daughters of, 413.
- KING LEAR**, the question of, 4.  
Known and the unknown, the, 358.
- LANGUAGE**, Max Müller on, 258.  
Lear, King, the question of, 4.  
Leathes, Rev. Professor Stanley, on the poetry of the Book of Job, 281.  
Life, mystery of, 118, 194; providence in, 133.  
Loans, law of Moses as to, 224.
- MAN**, weakness of, 42; immortality of, 138.  
Memory, ministry of, 236.  
Miserable comforters, 156.  
Miseries, unexplained in life, 313.  
Modern comforters, uselessness of, 314.  
Moral antiquity, 255.
- NAAMATHITE**, meaning of, 83, 96.  
Nature, principle of meditation in, 135; mysteries in, 388; how to be used, 393; rebukes in, 396.  
Night, songs in the, 354.
- OLD Testament**, the poetry of, 281.  
Olive-tree, fruit of, 154, 155.  
Ophir, the gold of, 232; situation of, 234.  
Opinions, Christ's judgment of, 199.
- PARENTS**, foolishness of, 49.  
Perseverance of the saints, doctrine of, 19; meaning of, 219.  
Personal preaching, what is, 222.  
Philological lesson, a, 258.  
Possibilities, some impossible, 157.  
Practical preaching, what is, 223.  
Prayer, doctrine of, 296, 325; the, always answered, 297.  
Prayers, 5, 39, 97, 406.  
Preacher, who is the great, 99.
- Preachers, responsibility of, 193.  
Profitableness of religion, the, 205.  
Prosperity, the impious boast of, 110.
- QUESTION** asking, reverent, 165.  
Questions, a cataract of, 398.  
Quiet resting-places, 263.
- RECONCILIATION** and results, 225.  
Redeemer, Job's confidence in the, 187.  
Religion, irreligious, 121; silence a part of true, *ib.*; profitableness of, 205.  
Religious man, definition of a, 274.  
Resurrection taught in nature, 130.  
Riches, when a blessing, 261.
- SATAN** at work, 6; the assaults of, 15.  
*See* **DEVIL**.  
Second speech of Eliphaz, the, 147.  
Self, monotony of, 166.  
Sick chamber, Job welcome in the, 3.  
Silence, eloquence of, 312.  
Sin, ancestry of, 94; madness of, 178.  
Snares, how laid, 179.  
Songs in the night, 354.  
Sorrow, how turned into joy, 55; the eloquence of, 270.  
Speeches, some wicked, 119.  
Sufferers, lessons from, 185.  
Suffering, a seal of divine sonship, 28.  
Sunny memories, 282.
- TEMPTATION**, the lot of all men, 12.  
Theology not a profession, 109.  
Theophany, the, 366, 374; its poetry, 374; how to be judged, 376; author of, 378; interrogations of the, 379, 383, 385; necessity of the, 381.  
Transgressors, the hard way of, 160.  
Traps, Scriptural allusions to, 179.  
Trial of Job, the, 22. *See* **JOA**.
- VITAL** talk, 100.  
Vows, broken, 249.
- WANT**, mystery of, 257.  
Weeping, joy following, 356.

- Wemyss, his characterisation of Zophar, 96.
- What is wisdom, 272.
- Wicked men, straits of, 202; fate of, 203.
- Wickedness, portrait of, 176; an ancient conception of, 188; drawbacks of, 190; doom of, 191; bad character of, 193; the last act of, 207; a wonderful portrayal of, 255; no originality in, 258.
- Wisdom, how acquired, 92; value of, 277; how found, 280.
- Words, some great, 358; should not be dwarfed, 360.
- Wrath, the proper function of, 320.
- YOUNG men, appeal to, 214.
- ZOPHAR, the first speech of, 81; his characteristics, *ib.*; the youngest of the comforters, 82; his conception of God, 95; his unfeelingness, 96; the noble appeal of, 99; a practical preacher, 101; his closing speech, 188; his frankness, 194. *See* JOB.

END OF VOLUME XI.