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## THE BOOK OF JOB.

### III.—THE FIRST COLLOQUY. (CHAPTERS IV.—XIV.)

#### (2.) JOB TO ELIPHAZ. (CHAPTERS VI. AND VII.)

THERE is, as I have already said, far more of logic in Job's replies to the arguments and reproaches of the Friends than is commonly discerned in them. We must not, however, expect from an ancient Oriental the dialectical forms and subtleties of the modern schools of the West. Still less must we expect that *Job* should confine himself to a logical refutation of the arguments of his Friends, since he was carrying on a far deeper controversy than that in which he engaged with them. Behind and above them he saw Him who is invisible, so that he was for ever breaking away from his discussion with them in order to appeal to his invisible Antagonist and to force from Him, if it were possible, some response to his appeal. Least of all must we expect from him logical and well-reasoned replies to the assaults of the Friends *at the outset* of this great argument; for, at the outset, his mind is preoccupied and perturbed by the strange bitter fact that even *they* had turned against him,—that even those who knew him best were suspecting and condemning him. At such a moment, and under the stress of this amazing

discovery, he had little heart for weighing the forms which their suspicions and censures assumed, or for considering how he might best rebut them. That the very friends to whom he confidently looked for sympathy should suspect him of some hidden but heinous sin, and cherish this suspicion right in the teeth of all they knew of him—this was enough, and more than enough, to occupy his thoughts; on what grounds they based their assumption he did not care too curiously to inquire. Hence, in his reply to Eliphaz, though at first (Chap. vi. 2-13) he does in some sort take up their censures and reply to them; though, throughout, he bears them so far in mind as that he permits them, directly or indirectly, to prescribe the general course and bent of his thoughts, he breaks off, first (verses 14-30), to make a passionate assault on the Friends, in which he affirms that their lack of sympathy with him implies a hardness of nature, a guilt beyond any which they have assumed in him; and then (Chap. vii. 1-21) to indulge in a new outburst of misery and despair, in which, forgetting all about the Friends, he challenges the equity of God, his real though unseen Antagonist, and demands death as the sole remedy of sufferings such as his.

“And yet, the pity of it, the pity of it!” Had his human friends but taken a more friendly and sympathetic tone he might never have questioned the equity and kindness of his Divine Friend. For, after all, it was mainly a question of tone; there is little to blame in the substance of Eliphaz’s address. As delicately as a man well could he had intimated

that even the best of men is but a man at the best ; that if Job *had* provoked and deserved his afflictions, it was only through a frailty common to the whole human race ; and that, possibly, his afflictions sprang not more from his sins than from the Divine mercy, and came on him mainly that he might know the blessedness of the man whom God correcteth. Had Eliphaz, instead of rebuking the impatience and despair which Job—in the Curse—expressed under his unparalleled miseries, sympathetically entered into those miseries ; had he even admitted that Job's veiled complaint against the God who had given him life was just so long as he conceived God to be hostile to him, and entreated him not to assume that God was hostile simply because He afflicted him, since correction was a sign of love as well as of anger, Job would have been comforted by his Friend's unabated faith in him ; by his kindness and compassion he might have been enabled to hold fast his confidence in the compassion and kindness of Jehovah. But to be suspected, condemned even, to have his guilt assumed by those to whom he looked for pity and solace, was more than he could brook. Not only did their assumption of his guilt and their covert insinuation of it provoke him to anger, to self-justification, to the demand,

“ Make me to see 't ; or at the least so prove it  
That the probation bear no hinge or loop  
To hang a doubt on ; ”

but, losing faith in the friendliness, in the very justice, of man, he also well-nigh lost all faith in the justice and friendliness of God.

## CHAPTERS VI. AND VII.

- CHAP. VI. 1.—*Then answered Job and said :*
2.       *Would that my passion were duly weighed,  
And that my misery were laid in the balance against it !*
3.       *For then would it be heavier than the sand of the sea :  
              Therefore have my words been wild.*
4.       *Lo, the arrows of the Almighty are in me,  
              And their venom drinketh up my spirit ;  
The terrors of God array themselves against me.*
5.       *Doth the wild ass bray over the grass,  
              Or loweth the ox over his fodder ?*
6.       *Can the insipid be eaten without salt,  
              Or is there savour in the white of an egg ?*
7.       *My soul refuseth to touch them ;  
              They are as food which I loathe.*
8.       *O that I might have my request,  
That God would grant me the thing that I long for,—*
9.       *Even that God would please to crush me,  
              That He would let loose his hand and tear me off !*
10.       *Yet this would still be my solace,  
And I would exult, even under the pain which spareth not,  
              That I have not denied the words of the Holy One.*
11.       *But what is my strength that I should hope,  
              And what my term that I should still be patient ?*
12.       *Is my strength the strength of stones ?  
              Is my flesh brass ?*
13.       *Is not my help gone,  
              And resource quite driven from me ?*
14.       *A friend should pity the afflicted,  
              Lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty ;*
15.       *But my brethren have become treacherous as a torrent,  
              Like the streams of the wady that pass away,  
              That become turbid with ice,  
              And in which the snow is dissolved :*
17.       *What time they wax warm they vanish ;  
When it is hot, they are dried up out of their place :*
18.       *The caravans divert their track,  
              They go up into the desert and perish ;*
19.       *The caravans of Tema looked,  
              The merchants of Sheba hoped for them :*

20. *They were ashamed that they had trusted,  
They came up to them and blushed.*
21. *Even so, now, ye are nought ;  
Ye see a terror and are terrified.*
22. *Is it that I said, ' Confer a boon upon me ;'  
Or, ' Of your substance offer a gift on my behalf ;'*
23. *Or, ' Rescue me from the hand of an adversary ;'  
Or, ' Ransom me from the hand of the violent ?'*
24. *Teach me, and I will be mute,  
And make clear to me wherein I have erred.*
25. *How forcible are honest rebukes !  
But what doth your reproof reprove ?*
26. *Think ye to reprove words !  
But the words of the desperate are for the wind.*
27. *Ye would even cast lots on the orphan,  
And traffic over a friend.*
28. *Now, therefore, be pleased to look upon me :  
I shall not surely lie to your face !*
29. *Come again, now : let there be no unfairness :  
Come again : still is my cause just.*
30. *Is there any unfairness in my tongue ?  
Cannot my palate discriminate that which is wrong ?*

- CHAP. VII. 1.—*Hath not man a term of hard service on earth,  
And are not his days like the days of a hireling ?*
2. *Like a slave who panteth for the shade,  
And like a hireling who waiteth for his wage:*
3. *So months of vanity have been made my heritage,  
And nights of weariness have been allotted to me.*
4. *If I lay me down, I say, ' When shall I arise ?'  
And the night lengtheneth itself out ;  
I am full of tossings until daybreak.*
5. *With vermin and an earthy crust is my flesh clad ;  
My skin stiffeneth, and then dischargeth.*
6. *My days glide swifter than a shuttle,  
And come to a close without hope.*
7. *O remember that my life is but a breath,  
That mine eye will never again see good !*
8. *The eye that seeth me shall see me no more :  
Thine own eyes shall look for me, but I shall not be.*
9. *As a cloud when it dissolveth is gone,  
So he that goeth down to Hades cometh up no more :*

10. *No more shall he revisit his home,  
Neither shall his place know him any more.*
11. *Therefore I will not curb my mouth,  
In the anguish of my spirit will I speak ;  
I will make my plaint in the bitterness of my soul.*
12. *Am I a sea, or a monster,  
That Thou settest a watch upon me ?*
13. *When I say, ' My couch shall comfort me,  
My bed may assuage my pain,'*
14. *Then Thou scarest me with dreams,  
And terrifiest me with visions,*
15. *So that my soul maketh choice of strangling  
And of death rather than a life like mine.*
16. *I waste away. I shall not live long.  
Let me alone ; for my days are but a vapour.*
17. *What is man that Thou shouldst prize him,  
And set thine heart upon him ;*
18. *That Thou shouldst visit him morning by morning,  
And try him moment by moment ?*
19. *How long wilt Thou not look away from me,  
Nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle !*
20. *I have sinned ! yet what have I done to Thee,  
O Thou Watcher of men ?  
Why hast Thou made me thy stumbling-block  
So that I am become a burden unto myself ?*
21. *And why wilt Thou not pardon my transgression,  
And cause my sin to pass away ?  
For I must soon lay me in the dust :  
Thou shalt seek me, but I shall not be.*

In Chapter vi. 2-13 we have Job's real answer to the argument of Eliphaz. This wise and devout Temanite had opened (Chapter iv. 2-11) with a reproof of the wild and excessive passion — passionate and uncontrolled expressions of emotion being always a grave offence to the Oriental mind — exhibited by Job, and had even intimated that passion so unbridled threw some doubt on his inte-

grity. If he were pious, should not his piety be a stay to him now? If he were upright, could he be so hopeless and despairing? As he went on, he had once more harped on this string (Chap. v. 2), censuring "passion" as a mark of impiety and "indignation" as a proof of folly. To this censure Job replies in his opening words. (Compare Chap. vi. 2 with Chap. v. 2.) He affirms that his "passion" was perfectly consistent with his integrity, since it was not out of proportion to his "misery,"—the word here used for "misery" being a peculiar one, and denoting, as Schultens has pointed out, "an abyssal and boundless misery." If this profound and immeasurable misery were *laid* or *lifted*—the Hebrew verb indicates its *weight*—into the balance against it; if the misery and the passion were placed in opposite scales, the misery would be found immeasurably the heavier of the two, heavier even than that proverbial indication of the countless and immeasurable, "the sand of the sea." He justifies his passion, therefore, as only the natural expression of a misery so profound. Yet he confesses that his words have been "wild," or "hot;" and pleads in excuse for it that his very spirit within him has been dried up, absorbed, by the poison shot into it by the arrows of the Almighty, so that he is no longer master whether of himself or of his words. (Chapter vi. 3 and 4). He pleads still further that "the terrors of God," *i.e.* all the terrors which even Jehovah can summon up and combine together, have advanced in battle array against him, so that his struggles, however "wild," and his outcries, however "hot," are but the natural and instinctive motions of



a soul exposed to the onset and siege of a host so vast, potent, irresistible.

How natural his outcries and complaints are he illustrates by citing two proverbs (*Verses 5 and 6*). No creature complains without cause; so long as he has a due and meet supply of his needs the ass does not bray over his grass, nor the ox low over his fodder; they cry out only when they lack food, when they suffer want or pain. And, on the other hand, every creature complains at and refuses with disgust that which is contrary to its nature, which does not really meet its wants,—insipid or loathsome food, for instance. “Is it likely, then,” he argues, “that *I* cry out without cause? Do not the very wildness and violence of my outcries indicate the extremity of misery to which I am reduced?” It seemed to him that his natural cravings had been crossed, that all savour and joy had gone out of his life; that to be shut up to a life so full of loss and misery and shame was like being set down to a loathsome and diseased food which his soul disdained (*Verse 7*).<sup>1</sup>

As he once more contemplates the life which has been assigned him, his old impatience comes back

<sup>1</sup> The weight of modern authority preponderates so heavily for the reading of *Verses 6 and 7* given in the text, that I feel compelled to bow to it. At the same time much might be said in favour of the older interpretation, which saw in them Job's revulsion from the kind of consolation pressed upon him by Eliphaz as the spokesman of the Friends. There is nothing in the Hebrew to render such an interpretation impossible, or even forced. And while I yield to the authority which gives the preference to the later reading, I for myself still prefer the former. It seems to me that we reach the more natural sense of the words when we take them as expressing the impulse of scorn quickened in the breast of Job by the insipid and unwelcome moralizing of the Friends, of the disgust which their “solemn and im-

on him, and once more he virtually curses his day. Eliphaz had threatened him with death (Chap. iv. 19-21, and Chap. v. 2), as the last of ills, should he refuse to submit himself to the correction of the Almighty. Job retorts that this last of ills is now his first and only hope, that it is the one and only consolation left him (Chap. vi. 8-10). In a charming flow of beautiful and tender figures Eliphaz had promised him a restoration to the Divine favour if he would but accept the chastening of the Lord (Chap. v. 17-26); and now (Chap. vi. 11-13) Job declares that it is too late for him to indulge such a hope as that; he is out of love with life, and would not "stretch out his spirit" toward happier and wealthier conditions, even if he could.

The one thing he longs for (*Verses 8-10*) is that God would bring his life and sufferings to an end; for he still holds fast his integrity, and could therefore meet death without fear or shame. It is not simply that he desires extinction; but he desires it while yet he is unconscious of having denied, or renounced, the words of the Holy One. Into what sins a life of shame and misery may plunge him he pertinent prosing" excited in him. I admit, indeed, that to take them in this sense causes a break in the continuity of Job's thoughts; but such sudden changes and revulsions of mood are characteristic of him, as they are of every man who speaks under the pressure of excessive passion, of extreme misery or pain. And surely nothing could be more true to nature than that Job should hold the words of Eliphaz, in so far as they were true, to be as insipid and savourless as the white of an egg eaten without salt, because not pertinent to his case; and that, in so far as they hinted suspicion of his guilt—in so far, that is, as they were not true—he should regard them as a loathsome and poisonous food against which his gorge rose, "which his soul refused so much as to touch." So that while I defer to the authority of far better scholars than myself, I do so somewhat reluctantly, and as one who would like their verdict to be reconsidered.

cannot tell ; but as yet he has no fear, no such sense of sin as would lead him to fear standing before God and being called to account for all his actions to Him. Hence he would "exult"—literally, "leap and dance for joy"—under the most unsparing pain, the keenest torture, were he only assured that it would put an end to his existence. Whatever death was, and meant, there could be nothing terrible in it to one who had a conscience void of offence toward God and man.

No other hope than that of death is left him (*Verse 11*) ; all expectation of recovery was lost ; he must soon succumb to his terrible malady. If there was nothing to fear in the future, assuredly there was nothing in the present to regret. What conceivable "end," or "term," was before him, that he should "still be patient"—literally, "still stretch out his spirit," as one who hoped to tide over a dark interval and pass on into a happy future ? He was not made of stone, or of brass (*Verse 12*), that he could hope to come unscathed through such fiery and searching trouble. All "help" from within was gone, all the inward springs of life were exhausted ; and all "resource," all power of rallying from his exhaustion (*Verse 13*). It was vain to talk to him of recovery and restoration to the providential favour of God ; he was past all that : his life was shattered and poisoned to the very centre, his hope plucked up from the very root.

Thus far, then, the reply of Job is logical enough ; he has taken up the leading points of the argument of Eliphaz and answered them. Eliphaz had reproached him with excess of passion ; Job replies

that his passion was immeasurably less than his misery. Eliphaz, however gently, had intimated his conviction that the calamities of Job were the consequence and punishment of some great sin, though perchance his sin had sprung only from the frailty he shared with all men; and Job replies that he has never consciously and wilfully "denied the words," *i.e.* disobeyed the commands, of God. Eliphaz had invited him to repentance and confession, in order that through these he might rise into an ampler and more enduring happiness; and Job replies, both that he has nothing to confess and that the very desire for recovery to happier conditions has died out of him, that he loathes life however fair it may be, and longs only for the death which others fear.

And, now, having disposed of the arguments of Eliphaz, having repulsed the assault which the Friends, through Eliphaz, had made on him, he, in his turn, delivers (in *Verses* 14-30) an assault on them. He charges them with having been wanting in common humanity, with having condemned him for sins of which he is innocent, and challenges them to speak out to his face, if they can and dare, the accusation which in their hearts they prefer against him.

Job starts with a general and admitted principle (*Verse* 14). Pity, compassionate kindness, should be shewn by his friend to one who lies *all dissolved in affliction* (such is the force of the Hebrew for "the afflicted"), "lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty," or "because he is in danger of forsaking" that fear. The Original will admit of either sense. Whichever we take, the thought at the bottom of the verse is the

same, viz. that under the pressure of great calamity a man is likely to lose his confidence in the sympathy of God unless his faith in God be reinforced by the sympathy and kindness of man; and that, therefore, his friends should deal gently with him and shew him all the kindness they can, and thus save him from altogether losing touch with God. "You have violated this admitted principle of conduct," says Job to his Friends; "you have failed in the supreme duty of friendship, and so have made it hard for me to hold fast my trust in *the Friend*."

This charge he elaborates in the figure of *Verses* 15-20. He compares his "brethren" to a treacherous torrent which promises a succour it does not yield. But no sooner is the torrent mentioned than the Poet sets himself to achieve another of those literary feats of which we have already seen a sample in Chap. iv. 10, 11.<sup>1</sup> Or, rather, no sooner does he light on this simile than he *sees* the torrent rushing and foaming down its rough stone-strewed bed; and with his quick love of all that is picturesque he is drawn on to paint a finished and elaborate picture of what he so vividly perceives. With admirable precision he seizes on the main features in the appearance and functions of such a water-course as he had in his eye; and with astonishing power he compels them each and all to contribute to the moral he had it at heart to enforce. That he took the imagery of this passage from the Hauran is probable enough; for, like many other districts in the East, the Hauran is intersected by deep ravines, *wadys*, which, while they are for the most part dry,

<sup>1</sup> See the comment on that passage.

are filled to overflowing when rain falls on the neighbouring heights. In summer no river waters the land; though in a few of the wadys a little surface water may trickle down from pool to pool; but in winter the land is alive with sudden and violent torrents. The streams of the wady *are* treacherous, therefore; they do "pass away:" in the winter months they become "black," or "turbid," with ice and with the snows which slip into them from the hills and precipices between which they run. Full and noisy when they are little in request, in the cold months, when travellers are few: when it waxes warm, and caravans frequent the roads, the waters "dry up," evaporate, and "vanish," leaving only heaps of shingle or piles of boulders, though the banks of the wadys still attract the unwary traveller by their unusual verdure and brightness. Even the caravans of travelled and experienced traders go out of their way, "divert their track," in order to drink and to fill their water-skins at some of these torrent-beds in which an occasional pool may be found, and "perish" in the desert to which they return for lack of the water they vainly hoped to find in it. Nor is the Poet content with the mention of caravans in general. He must throw in a touch of local colour by instancing the caravans of Tema and of Sheba,—Tema, to the north of the Hauran, the seat of a clan of wandering Ishmaelites, and Sheba far away to the south, the emporium of those wealthy "merchants" of whom we have already heard as adding to their wealth by raids on distant lands as well as by traffic with most of the larger cities of the East.<sup>1</sup> These caravans,

<sup>1</sup> See comment on Chap. i. 15.

known familiarly to the Hauranites, since they frequented the great road from Damascus to Egypt, are adduced to exemplify the fate of all travellers who "trust" to these treacherous streams. They are "ashamed" to have put their trust in that which had often failed them before, in which experience should have forbidden them to confide.

Having thus elaborated the simile, lingering over it, and adding touch to touch, the Poet represents Job (*Verse 21*) as hurling it, with its accumulated force, at the Friends: "Even so now, *ye* are nought," —are "gone to nothing," like the torrent. "I looked to you for comfort, as the caravans to the stream; my very life, like theirs, hanging on the issue: and, like them, I looked in vain. Ye have seen a terror, and are terrified:" *i.e.* "Ye have seen the abject and ghastly condition to which I have been reduced, and, instead of succouring me, ye have shrunk away from me in dismay."

I have spoken of the astonishing power with which the Poet, while elaborating his simile, compelled every feature of it to contribute to the moral he had in his mind: and it may be worth while to point out how exactly every touch of his description finds an analogy in the conduct of the Friends. The stream of the wady rolls in a boiling and resounding torrent in the winter, when it is little needed by men; and so Job's friends had been loud and profuse in their professions when he was "great before all the Sons of the East" and had no need of their help. Even in the summer, when the torrent is dried up, it holds out a promise of succour in the bright and abounding verdure of its margins; and so the

Friends, when they first came to visit Job in his affliction, seemed so full of a tender and considerate kindness that he had been drawn on to throw off all reserve and, by uttering his despair, to solicit their sympathy. The torrent cheated and mocked those who had trusted in it, yielding them no succour when they most craved it ; and in like manner the Friends had disappointed the confident hopes which Job had reposed in them. For the caravans who had been cheated by the treacherous torrent there was nothing left but to return to the desert and die ; and, in like manner, now that his Friends had failed him, Job felt as he shrank back into his misery that no resource was left him, that his sole prospect was death, his one longing a sudden and immediate death.

*Verses 22, 23.*—As he had looked to the Friends for nothing but sympathy, he is the more betrayed. It was not much that he had asked of them ; they might have granted his prayer, and been none the poorer for it. With bitter irony he expatiates on this thought, acknowledging that it might have been unreasonable of him had he counted on them for any costly or impoverishing proof of friendship, and reproaching them that, when he had asked nothing but “the simple boon of pity,” even that slight strain on their friendship had proved too severe.

*Verse 24.*—As they have no pity, no sympathy, to give, let them at least convict him of the sin which has averted it. Let them openly charge him with the transgression which they had covertly insinuated against him, which Eliphaz had assumed throughout without a shadow of proof, and in which, no doubt,



both Bildad and Zophar by their looks and bearing had intimated their concurrence. Let them, if they can do no more for him, at least "make clear wherein he has erred."

*Verse 25.*—There is nothing he more heartily respects than to be plainly taught and honestly reproved; but what is their covert and evasive insinuation of guilt meant to convey?

*Verse 26.*—Are the "wild" words of his curse the sin that shuts up their bowels of compassion against him? Pshaw! The words of a man crazed with misery are no proof of guilt, no sufficient ground for suspicion and rebuke. Idle as the wind, they should be left for the wind to blow away.

*Verse 27.*—Men who would make him an offender for "the wild and whirling words" of his curse were capable of any baseness. They must be pitiless as men who should enslave an orphan for his dead father's debt, and then cast lots whose he should be, —as pitiless and inhuman as men who would barter away their best friend for pelf; for were they not trying to gain an added reputation for wisdom and piety, or an added sense of their own piety and wisdom, by condemning the assumed follies and sins of their friend?

In *Verses 28-30* he once more challenges them to speak out in plain blunt terms the charge which they have been ambiguously giving out. Let them look him in the eyes, and say whether he is so wanting in moral sense and honesty as to lie to their face, by asserting that he is innocent when he knows himself to be guilty.

To explain the repeated "Return," or "Come

again," of *Verse 29*, Renan supposes that, stung by the irony and keen reproaches of Job, the Friends had made a movement to retire. But there is no need for such a supposition. The meaning of the phrase seems to be that, still daring them to be open and sincere with him, Job affirms that, "come" as often as they will, renew their investigation as often and carry it as deeply as they may, they will still find "his cause just," still find "that the right is in it,"<sup>1</sup> if only they come without prejudice, without assuming the guilt they are bound to prove.

In *Verse 30* "the tongue" and "the palate"—*i.e.* the sense of taste is used by a common Oriental metaphor for the moral sense, the power to discern good and evil. What Job demands of the Friends is whether they believe his moral sense to be so perverted that he can no longer discriminate right from wrong. On no other hypothesis can he account for their assuming him to be guilty of sins of which he feels and avows himself to be innocent. Why do they not accept his assertion of his integrity? Can they look him in the face and affirm either that he is wilfully deceiving them, or that he no longer knows himself?

There are both resemblances and differences between Chapters vi. and vii. In Chapter vi., as we have seen, Job addresses himself to the Friends, (1) replying with logical force and directness to the arguments of Eliphaz, and (2) breaking out into keen reproach against the men who professed so

<sup>1</sup> So Ewald translates "noch hab' ich Recht darin;" and Heiligstedt, "adhuc justitia me in eo (ea re) est, adhuc causa mea justa est."

much love for him, but shewed so little. In Chapter vii. he addresses himself to God, (1) at first (verses 1-11) indirectly, stating his case to Him and appealing for compassion; and (2) then (verses 12-21) directly, breaking out into passionate reproaches against the God who could listen to his appeal unmoved. So that, in form, Chapter vii. corresponds very closely with Chapter vi. *There* he first argued with his Friends, and then reproached them; *here* he first argues with Jehovah, and then reproaches Him. This is the main resemblance between the two. The main difference between them is that, while Chapter vi. has more of the form of a reply to the argument of the Friends, Chapter vii. is cast more in the form of a soliloquy, in which, turning from men, Job broods over those sufferings of his soul which were the soul of his sufferings, and cries out both to God and against Him.

But, at first, though he no longer addresses himself to those who sat in the *mezbele* with him, he does not wholly forget them or the rebuke they have uttered by the mouth of Eliphaz. He does wholly forget them in the latter section of the Chapter, the sense of the Divine Presence overshadowing and engrossing his thoughts: but in the earlier section his thoughts are, consciously or unconsciously, shaped by the words to which he had just listened, and that in two ways. Eliphaz had censured Job's craving for death as unreasonable and impious; Job now vindicates it as the only reasonable course left open to him. Eliphaz had drawn (Chap. v. 17-26) a charming and seductive picture of human life, describing the Divine Providence as engaged in sending men rain

and fruitful seasons, as raising the lowly, saving the poor and needy, and causing all things to work together for the good of those who accepted instruction and correction; and now, over against this bright conception of human life, baseless for the moment to Job as the fabric of a vision, he sets his own dark and lurid conception of it: to him it seems a term of hard service, in which days of toil and weariness alternate with nights of trouble and unrest. As he elaborates his conception we become aware that, though he had the words of Eliphaz in his mind at the outset, he is gradually edging away from him and his fanciful picture of the ways of God with men, turning toward God and sub-audibly appealing to Him, until (at verse 8) the sub-audible appeal becomes audible in the words, "*Thine* own eyes shall look for me, but I shall not be." As if appalled, however, at the sound himself had made, he instantly falls back into an impersonal and indirect tone; and it is not till he utterly despairs of extorting any response from God by indirect and pitiful appeal that he breaks out, in the second section of the Chapter, into direct and vehement reproaches against the cruelty of God in turning a deaf ear to his supplication. He has cried to Heaven for pity and redress till he is weary; and as there is neither voice nor any to answer, nor any that regarded, he resolves to let loose his anguish, to pour out all the bitterness of his soul. Perhaps insult and reproach may provoke an attention denied to supplication and appeal. But we must now consider the opening section of this Chapter more in detail.

In *Verses 1-11* Job sets the dark and lurid conception of human life which he had inferred from the facts of experience over against the bright and hopeful conception of it which Eliphaz had spun out of his mere imagination or the baseless assumptions of his theology. He projects his own dark shadow across the whole world of men, or, rather, looking out on them with darkened eyes, he can see nothing but darkness in their lot. On three features in the universal lot of man he lays special emphasis: (1) its misery (verses 1-5); (2) its brevity (verses 6-8); and (3) its irrevocableness (verses 9, 10). That the several counts of his complaint are inconsistent with each other is obvious and undeniable; for if life be so utterly and intensely miserable, why should a man complain either that it is brief, or that, ended once, it is ended for ever? But the very inconsistency of his complaint is but another touch of nature: for men grievously wronged and afflicted are rarely consistent in their complaints; they seize on and brood over every aspect of their condition which will feed their resentment or their grief, and are not careful to harmonize the one with the other.

In *Verse 1* he compares, not his own life simply, but the general life of man, to a term, a hard term, of military service. In *Verse 2* he compares it to the bitter lot of a slave who pants for the shades of evening that he may know a little rest. In each case the figure is heightened in effect by the introduction of the word "hireling." It is the *hired* soldier on hard military duty whom he has in his mind; the soldier, therefore, who is no longer under the command of the chief of his own clan, no longer

serves one who, from mere self-interest, if not from ties of kinship, might take some thought of him : he has been let out to a foreign despot, who little heeds how many men he squanders so that he may win the day. And, in like manner, it is not the domestic slave, but the *hired* slave, whom he has in his mind ; not one who has been born in his master's house, and for whom his master may have a feeling of compassion, or liking, or even of affection, but one that has been let out to a stranger who has no need to spare him to-day that he may be fit for to-morrow's work, and still less any friendly motion of the heart toward him. Job's conception of human life, then, is as bitter and as sombre as it well can be. God appears to him like an alien despot who squanders his soldiers without pity and without remorse on every field ; like an alien taskmaster who spares not to overtask his slaves, but exhausts them with heavy toils, that he may get the utmost possible service out of them during the brief term for which he has hired them, insomuch that they have no thought or hope but only this, "When will the day be done ? when will our term expire ?"

In *Verse 3* Job applies this sombre conception of human life to himself, and finds that it accurately corresponds to his condition. *He* has been made "to inherit months of vanity," "nights of weariness have been allotted him ;"—a very fine verse, full of choice words and epithets. Both the verbs indicate that Job had done nothing to cause, or to deserve, his misery ; it is "a heritage" on which he has been compelled to enter, and which he had done nothing to shape or prepare ; it has been "allotted" him,

without his will, against his will. The epithets in which he describes the misery of his life are equally striking and graphic. No man who has known what it is to have whole days or weeks cut out of his life by some disabling pain of brain or nerve, to be rendered incapable of "aught that wears the name of action," but will enter with keen sympathy into Job's complaint of "months of *vanity*," months, *i.e.* of unreality, months that come and go but leave nothing behind them save a dreary sense of wasted opportunities, months in which a man is rendered unfit for any of the sweet or active uses of life. Nor will any man whose rest is often broken, who is often and long denied the boon of sleep,

"That knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, *sore labour's bath*,  
*Balm of hurt minds,*"

fail to comprehend what he meant by "nights of toil" or of "weariness." Most men have known what it is to long for the light of returning day even as they lie down on a bed that has no rest for them, to feel the night, as he graphically puts it (in *Verse 4*), "*lengthening itself out,*" and to lie tossing till day-break, half persuaded that daybreak will never come.

But, happily, there are very few who will ever know *all* that he endured. For (in *Verse 5*) he adds a new and terrible feature to his misery. Not only is he a slave worn out and spent by intolerable toils by day, and then denied the solace of repose, "*sore labour's bath,*" at night; but also he is so terribly unfit for toil and watching, laden as he is and broken down with the languors and disgusts of a

most loathsome disease. The Verse records some sickening symptoms of his strange and terrible disease. As *elephantiasis* develops, ulcers are formed in the body, in which maggots breed; the skin gets hot, dry, rough as it stretches, till it looks like the lumpy and corrugated hide of the elephant. These are the "vermin" and this "the earthy crust" of which he complains; and in these same ulcers, over which the skin stretches and contracts, and then bursts to let out a feculent discharge, we have the explanation of the line,

"My skin stiffeneth, and then dischargeth."

The first verb denotes violent contraction, and the second purulent discharge.

This, then, is Job's description of the misery of human life in general, and of his own life in particular; a misery so great, so indescribable, as to warrant him, at least in his own judgment, in craving for death, even as the weary overtaken slave pants for the shadows of declining day, and the mercenary whose life is lavishly and carelessly exposed longs for the end of his term. In Deuteronomy xxviii. 65-67 we have a still finer and more pathetic description of human life burdened and oppressed with misery, which should be compared with these graphic verses:—"*And among those nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing eyes, and sorrow of spirit; and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and thou shalt not believe in thy life. In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were*



*even ! and at even, Would God it were morning ! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."*

In *Verse 6* Job turns from the misery to the brevity of human life. He compares it to a weaver's shuttle, "by means of which the web is shot between the threads of the warp as they are drawn up and down. His days pass as swiftly by as the little shuttle passes backward and forward in the warp."<sup>1</sup> And, quickly as they pass, they "come to a close without hope," *i.e.* without hope of any to succeed them, of any life beyond the present worthy of the name. This point, the brevity of life, is a favourite theme with moralists ; but, as usual, Shakespeare beats them easily on their own ground ; for what finer moral can be drawn from the brevity of life than that we should use it nobly ?

"O gentlemen, the time of life is short:  
To spend that shortness basely were too long  
If life did ride upon a dial's point,  
Still ending at the arrival of an hour."

In *Verse 7* we have the first sign that the thought of God as present is predominating in the mind of Job, that he has begun to lose sight of the Friends. He does not yet name God, or openly address himself to Him. But his, "O remember that my life is but a breath !" can only be meant for the God whom he has known from his youth, and with whom he has been wont to speak as a man speaketh with his friend.

In *Verse 8* this covert appeal for pity becomes patent. "When my brief life is ended, men will see

<sup>1</sup> Delitzsch *in loco*.

me no more ; and even *Thine* eye shall look for me in vain." All the more significant is it that, with the sense of the Divine Presence full upon him for the moment, his entire conviction that the dead will never be restored to life in this world is balanced—as yet—by no hope of a life beyond that of this world. Nothing can be more hopeless than the tone of *Verses* 9 and 10. Life is like a cloud which, once dissolved, is no more seen. Those who sink into Sheol, the dim Hadean kingdom peopled by the thin ghosts of departed generations, will never revisit the warm upper air. Egyptian tradition had affirmed that if a man were justified in Hades, if he could pass the scrutiny of the final Judge, he might any day come forth from it, "and return to his own house." "Alas, it is not true!" sighs Job. "When once he has gone, no man can so much as *revisit his home*, and see how it fares with his beloved ; his place will know him no more. Life, once lost, is irrevocably lost."

Therefore, as his life, vexed with misery, is fast coming to an end, and there is no hope of justice or compassion beyond the grave, he resolves (*Verse* 11) to "unpack his heart with words." Why should he curb himself ? Nothing is to be lost by plain speaking, for he cannot be more wretched than he is ; nothing is to be gained by silent submission, for he has no hope for the future. He will, therefore, speak out the anguish of his spirit and give vent to the bitterness of his soul.

These words introduce the final section of his reply to Eliphaz,—his open complaint of the cruelty of

Jehovah, who will vouchsafe no answer to his solemn and pathetic appeal. And here we must prepare to see Job at his worst; though, even taken at his worst, it is hard to say why he should be singled out as a sinner above other good men. Jeremiah,<sup>1</sup> for example, cries out against God, "Wilt thou be altogether as a liar unto me, and as waters that fail?" And if we can excuse his audacity because of his perplexity, his honesty of intention, his desire to see that God was true though He seemed to be false, why should we condemn Job? He, too, was terribly perplexed; he, too, was honest and sincere; he, too, desired to see that God was true and kind though He seemed false and cruel; he, too, appealed against God only to God Himself. And, bitter as was his complaint, we shall hear from him no words more bold and desperate than we may hear again and again from the prophets of a later age. All that God Himself charges him with is "darkening counsel with words devoid of wisdom," *i.e.* with aggravating his own perplexity and misery by these foolish impulsive outcries: and why should we suspect him of more than this?

The burden of his complaint is, that he is watched and beset on every side as though he were likely to rise in mutiny against God, or as though he had incurred an unpardonable guilt, although he is unconscious of any wilful transgression or of any treasonable design. With sad irony he demands, first, whether in his weakness and misery he can be *formidable* to God, that he is so incessantly dogged and checked and smitten; and, then, with sad indig-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xv. 18.

nation, he demands whether he, who is unconscious of any wilful fault, can have so *sinned* that his sin cannot be forgiven him.

*Verse 12* is patient of two different interpretations. Some commentators remind us that in the Bible (Isa. xix. 5), and they might add in the Coran (Sura xx. 39), the Nile is called a sea; that the rising of the Nile was carefully watched, and its overflow guided and confined by dykes lest it should ravage instead of fertilize the land: and these suppose Job to ask whether, like the Nile, he is so dangerous that he needs to be straightly shut in, or like the monster of the Nile, the fierce untameable crocodile, needs to be watched and ensnared lest he commit havoc and destruction. Others doubt this allusion, and prefer to take the words in a more general sense; and these make Job ask whether he is like the heaven-assaulting ocean to which God Himself had set a bar and gates; or like one of those monstrous

“dragons of the prime  
That tare each other in their slime?”

In either case the meaning of the Verse is clear, and Job complains that he, a man, “noble in reason, infinite in faculty,” capable of appreciating and responding to an appeal to conscience and understanding, should be handled roughly and severely as though he were void of sense and reason.

*Verses 13 and 14.*—No alleviation of his misery, no respite from restraint is allowed him. If he thinks to *share* his pain with his bed, to dull his sense of it in slumber, it only grows more intense and terrible; frightful dreams and visions conspire with the pangs of disease to complete his misery. There

is an allusion here, no doubt, to his malady; for Avicenna says that hideous dreams constantly torment those who suffer from elephantiasis.

So is there also in *Verse 15*; for from the same authority we learn that this disease commonly terminates in suffocation. It is to this that Job refers when he affirms that he is rendered so desperate by his pangs and his hideous dreams as to prefer "*strangling* and death to such a life as his;" literally, to "*such bones* as his;" and here the allusion is to the exposure and rotting of the bones as this dreadful malady eats away the flesh and corrupts the very bones beneath it.

"Let me alone, then," he cries in *Verse 16*, *i.e.* "Depart from me," implying that his life depends on the Divine Presence, that he cannot even die till God withdraw from him. "My days are but an unsubstantial vapour; let it dissolve and pass." Is he—poor, wasted, short-lived wretch that he is—to be treated like the deep, or the monsters of the deep? Is *he* likely to prove formidable to the Almighty Ruler of the universe?

In *Verses 17* and *18* we have the transition to the second point of complaint,—that he is treated as a heinous and unpardonable offender. With bitter irony he wonders that the great Creator of men should so incessantly busy Himself about a creature so mean and frail, as if He set an enormous value on him, as if He could not put him out of his mind, as if He could let no morning pass without coming to inspect him, no moment without putting him to the proof!

This sense of being for ever watched and dogged

and spied upon has grown intolerable to him (*Verse 19*). In his impatience and resentment he cries,

“How long wilt Thou not look away from me,  
Nor let me alone *till I swallow down my spittle?*”

the last words being a proverbial expression for the minimum of time, like our “in the twinkling of an eye,” or “while I draw my breath.”

*Verse 20*.—Granted that I have sinned, as what man is he that sinneth not? yet *in what* have I sinned, sinned *against Thee?* in what part of the duty I owe to Thee have I failed? Tell me that, “O Thou Watcher of men,” or even, “Thou *Spy* upon men!” For the epithet here cast up at God, although not in itself unworthy of Him, is used with a certain bitterness which turns the blessing of God’s watchful and incessant care over men into the irritating curse of espionage.<sup>1</sup> To him it seemed that, by some miserable fatality, he was always in God’s way, that, so to speak, God was always stumbling against or over him, so that his life had become a mere burden to him; and this, not through any fault of his own, but rather from the malicious pleasure which God took in striking him from his path. In short, he felt as we feel when, for no reason in ourselves that we can discover, everything goes wrong with us, and we are perpetually brought into hostile contact with the infinite Power which pervades the universe.

*Verse 21*.—It was inconceivable to him why the sins of his infirmity—and he was conscious of no wilful and deliberate offence—should not be forgiven

<sup>1</sup> Renan forcibly conveys this sense to the Continental mind by translating the phrase, “*O espion de l’homme.*”

him, why God, who used to be so merciful and compassionate, should make so much of them, and why his appeal for pity and pardon should pass unheard.

“ Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd, being down ? ”

He cannot see as yet that many of the calamities which come on men are only undeserved in the sense that men have not and cannot deserve so great a blessing as they contain and disguise ; and as yet he does not see that he is being led on, by a deepened sense of the inequalities of the life that now is, to infer the life to come,—an issue, however, to which every step of the argument is bringing him nearer and nearer.

S. COX.

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*THE NEW TEACHER ; THE KINGDOM OF  
HEAVEN.*

ST. MATT. IV. 17 ; ST. MARK I. 14-15 ; ST. LUKE IV. 14-32.

JESUS emerged from the desert to enter on his great career as the preacher of “the kingdom of God.” The season was the spring, with its bright heaven, its fresh sweet earth, its gladsome, soft, yet strengthening air, its limpid living water. And within as without all was spring-time, the season of million-fold forces gladly and grandly creative, of sunlight now clear and blithesome, and now veiled with clouds that came only to break into fruitful showers. “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee,” and Galilee felt and owned the Spirit