

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE BOOK OF JOB.

VII.—THE INTERVENTION OF ELIHU.

FOURTH DISCOURSE (CHAPTERS XXXVI. AND XXXVII.)

AMONG the many charges which Job had launched against the Almighty was the complaint that He hid Himself from men in a darkness which even the righteous could not penetrate, that He made his providence an inscrutable mystery which it was as impossible to vindicate as it was to apprehend (*e.g.*, Chap. xxiii. 3-9). It is to this charge that Elihu replies in his fourth and last Discourse. He contends that though men must not hope to solve all the mysteries of the Divine Character and Government, yet the providence of God is not so inscrutable as Job had affirmed it to be; that the very sufferings and calamities which seem to obscure it are really designed to open the eyes of men on the rules by which their life is governed, and to make them aware of the modes in which, often unconsciously, they violate them. For all practical, *i.e.*, for all moral, purposes, he maintains the design of Providence to be sufficiently evident. Practically, all the difficulties which encompass it spring from its darker aspect, from the miseries, undeserved or inexplicable, which it inflicts on the children of men. But if these miseries are intended, as he is sure that they are, to teach men that they have sinned, or to purge them from their sins and defects, we know enough to reconcile us to the tribulations we are called to endure; enough, therefore, to explain and vindicate the way God takes with us. In short, Elihu once more falls back on his fundamental idea - his main

contribution to the argument of the Poem—viz., the didactic and disciplinary function of suffering.

This idea, after a characteristic introductory phrase or two (Chap. xxxvi. Vers. 2-4) Elihu proceeds to develop and adapt to his present purpose. He argues the Divine Providence to be both intelligible and just, (a) because God obviously renders "justice" to the distressed, and "will not let the wicked live" (Verses 5-7); (β) because the very distresses of men are intended to illuminate their minds, quicken their conscience, and reform their lives (Verses 8-10); and (γ) because if they hearken and repent, they "complete their days in good;" while if they will not hearken, they perish in their sins (Verses 11-15).

Having thus thrown his little beam of light into the darkness which vexed and obscured Job's thoughts, Elihu makes a personal application of his argument. He assures him (Verses 16-25) that the intention of God in afflicting *him* is both intelligible and just, since his afflictions are designed to lead him through strait and narrow into broader and happier conditions, *per angusta ad angusta*; warns him of the inevitable results of his impatience of the Divine corrections; and begs him not to yield to the despair which moves him to loathe his very life, but to repent of the sins his afflictions were intended to correct and to lay to heart the lessons they were intended to teach.

As his Discourse draws to a close, Elihu becomes aware of a tropical storm which is labouring up through the disordered sky—fit emblem of the tempest which had swept across the soul of Job, blotting out all the lights of hope. With exquisite tact the Poet prepares us for the next and closing section of this great poem

by setting him to describe the tempest out of which Jehovah is about to speak, and so to describe it as both to suggest to Job that God had been in that very storm of calamity which had obscured his vision of the Almighty, and to give us a glimpse, a forecast, of that sun of prosperity and favour which is yet to "come forth in gold," to shine on Job with dazzling and enriching lustre, when the bitter wind of adversity has blown by, and the clouds that have so long overshadowed him have been swept away.

The mere description, viewed simply as a work of art, has, I suppose, never been equalled, much less surpassed; not even by David, although in Psalm xxix. he makes us hear peal after peal of thunder breaking on seas and mountains and woods as the storm comes nearer and nearer still, from the first crash of its fury rolling and reverberating among the hills till it dies away into faint and distant mutterings, only to break out on us in its full strength once more. Compared with this grand picture, or even with the less sublime description of David, the famous passage in the Coran (Sura ii. v. 18), albeit it is said to have converted the poet *Lebid* by its mere beauty and power, sinks into utter significance. It may be well, however, to quote this other Arabian description of a great storm, if only that the reader may make the comparison for himself. Speaking of unbelievers, Mohammed says: They are like those who, "when a storm-cloud cometh out of heaven, big with darkness, thunder, and lightning, thrust their fingers into their ears because of the thunder-clap, for fear of death. God is round about the infidels. *The lightning almost snatcheth out their eyes.* So oft as it gleameth on them, they walk on

in it; but when darkness cometh upon them, they stop. And if God pleased, of their ears and of their eyes would He surely deprive them. Verily, God is Almighty!" There is, indeed, one graphic line—I have italicized it—in this much admired passage; and it has this in common with the description of Elihu, that it sees, and makes us see, *God* in the storm: but who does not feel that, whether for picturesqueness or sublimity, it is on a wholly different and much lower level than that of either Elihu or David?

And yet it is not for its beauty mainly, or for its sublimity, that the pencil of the inspired Artist lingers over it. The ends he has in view are moral chiefly, though no doubt he takes his wonted delight in feats of literary skill. He describes the tempest thus lovingly and impressively because it is the tempest out of which Jehovah is to speak to the perturbed spirit of the man who has so long been challenging and entreating Him to appear. He makes Elihu recognize and emphasize the presence of God in the storm which rolls and thunders above their heads, because it is Elihu's chief aim to make Job recognize that same mighty but gracious Hand in the great tempest of affliction which has swept over his soul. He lingers and lays a special emphasis on the clear shining after the rain, on the new glory of the heaven and the earth from which the storm has swept all that darkens and defiles, because he would thus convey to Job the hope that, when he has been tried and cleansed, he too shall enter on a brighter happier day. And, moreover, he expends his full power in his description of the tempest which veils the Almighty, because he sees, and would have us and all men see, that kindred religious emotions are

aroused in us by the great convulsions of Nature and by the tribulations which desolate the soul—both inducing awe, humility, fear, the sense of weakness and of our need of a Divine Stay; because he knows, and would have us know, that in the spiritual as in the natural world the very forces which seem most irresistible and most adverse to us are really God's ministers for our good.

CHAPTERS XXXVI. AND XXXVII.

CHAP. XXXVI. *Then Elihu spake further :*

2. *Wait for me a little, and I will shew thee
 That I still have words for God ;*
3. *I will fetch my knowledge from afar,
 And will ascribe righteousness to my Maker ;*
4. *For truly my words are not feigned,
 One of sincere thoughts is with thee.*
5. *Behold, God is mighty, yet He despiseth none,
 He is mighty by strength of heart.*
6. *He will not let the wicked live,
 But rendereth justice to the distressed ;*
7. *He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous,
 But seareth them with kings on thrones for ever,
 And they are exalted :*
8. *If they be bound in fetters,
 And held in cords of affliction,*
9. *Then He sheweth them their doings
 And their transgressions—that they have become vainglorious ;*
10. *He also openeth their ear to reproof,
 And commandeth them to turn from evil :*
11. *If they hearken and do Him service,
 They will complete their days in good
 And their years in pleasures ;*
12. *But if they hearken not,
 They fling themselves on the sword
 And expire for lack of knowledge.*
13. *Thus the impious of heart heap up wrath ;
 They cry not to Him when He bindeth them :*

14. *Their soul dieth in youth,
And their life passeth away among the unclean :*
15. *But He delivereth the afflicted by their affliction,
And openeth their ears by calamity.*
16. *Thee also will He lure out of the jaws of the strait
Into a broad space, where there is no straitness,
And that which is on thy table shall be full of fatness.*
17. *But if thou hast filled up the cause of the wicked,
Therefore have cause and judgment taken hold of each other.*
18. *Because there is wrath,
Beware lest He drive thee forth with strokes,
And a great ransom fail to deliver thee.*
19. *Shall thine outcries deliver thee from thy distress,
Or all the struggles of thy strength ?*
20. *Pant not for the night,
In which men descend into Hades.*
21. *Beware lest thou turn to wickedness,
For thou hast preferred this to affliction.*
22. *Lo, God exalteth by his power !
And who is a teacher like to Him ?*
23. *Who hath prescribed his way to Him,
Or who can say, "Thou doest wrong" ?*
24. *Remember that thou magnify his works
Which men do sing,
On which all men gaze,
Contemplating them from afar.*
26. *Behold, God is great, and we know Him not,
Nor can we count the number of his years !*
27. *When He draweth up the drops of water
They are fused into rain, and form his vapour
Which the clouds do distil
And drop down plentifully :*
28. *But who can understand the spreading of the clouds,
The crash of his pavilion ?*
29. *Lo, He spreadeth out his light around Him,
And covereth Himself from the depths of the sea ;*
30. *For by these He judgeth the nations,
And furnisheth food in plenty :*
- 31.

32. *He clotheth his palms with lightning,
And slingeth it against the foe ;*
33. *The crash thereof announceth
The fierceness of his wrath against iniquity.*

- CHAP. XXXVII. *At this also my heart throbs
And leapeth out of its place.*
2. *Hear ye, O hear, the tumult of his voice,
And the muttering that goeth forth from his mouth !*
3. *He stingeth its flash across the whole heaven,
And his lightning to the ends of the earth ;*
4. *After it roareth a voice,
With his majestic voice He thundereth :
He holdeth back nought when his voice is heard !*
5. *God thundereth marvellously with his voice ;
Great things doeth He beyond our reach :*
6. *For He saith to the snow, " Fall thou on the earth ! "*
 *Also to the streaming rain,
And to the heavy rain of his strength :*
7. *He sealeth up every man's hand,
That men may consider his handiwork ;*
8. *Then slink the wild beasts to their dens,
And abide in their lair ;*
9. *The whirlwind cometh from his secret place,
And the cold from his cloud-scattering winds ;*
10. *The frost is given by the breath of God
And the broad waters are straitened :*
11. *Yea, He chargeth the thick cloud with rain,
He driveth on the lightning cloud ;*
12. *By his piloting it is turned hither and thither
To accomplish all his behests
Over the face of the broad earth,
Whether He cause it to come for a scourge,
Or for the good of his land.*
13. *Hearken unto this, O Job !
Stand still, and scan the wondrous works of God !*
14. *Knowest thou when God ordained them,
And bade his clouds to gleam with light ?*
15. *Knowest thou the poisonings of his clouds,
The marvels of Him who is perfect in knowledge,—*

17. *Thou whose garments become warm*
When He stilleth the earth with the Southwind?
18. *Hast thou, with Him, beaten out the firmament, thin*
Yet strong, like a molten mirror?
19. *Teach us what we can say to Him!*
We cannot order our words for darkness:
20. *Shall it be told Him that I speak?*
If a man speak, it may be his destruction;
21. *For man cannot even look upon the sun*
When it is bright among the clouds,
Or a wind hath passed and cleared them off,
22. *When, after a Northwind, he cometh forth in gold.*
How awful, then, the majesty of God!
23. *The Almighty! We cannot find Him out.*
Great in strength and judgment, and of a perfect equity,
He will render an account to no man.
24. *Therefore let men fear Him*
Whom not even the wise in heart can behold.

At the close of his second Discourse (Chap. xxxiv. Ver. 33), Elihu had paused in his vindication of the Divine Justice, and called on Job to reply, if he had any reply to make. Job, taken at unawares then perhaps, had not responded to the summons. But now, it would seem, he had found, or thought he had found, some weak point in Elihu's argument, and by look or gesture indicates that he is about to reply to it. But now, too, Elihu sees that his argument is well-nigh exhausted, that he has but little to add to it; and hence (*Chapter xxxvi. Verse 2*) he courteously requests Job to "wait for him a little," to grant him a few words more, in order that, when he replies, he may reply to *all* the words for God which Elihu has to allege. In the wide realm of Nature and History, which Elihu has traversed, there is yet that which testifies to the righteousness of the great Maker and Ruler of the

world; and this he would fetch even "from afar," and add to what he has already advanced (*Verse 3*).

Yet, it must be confessed, that Elihu adds little, if anything, that is new or recondite to his exposition of the character and providence of God. As we shall soon see, he does but sum up all that he has said before—though he so sums it up as to suggest that the Divine Providence is not the wholly impenetrable mystery Job had affirmed it to be—and add a pungent personal application of his argument to the case of Job. It may be that he intended, after the brief *résumé* contained in Verses 5–15, to take a new departure, to soar to new heights, to wing his way afar in quest of new and more potent words for God; and that he was driven from his intention by the approach of the great tempest, or diverted from it by the grandeur and beauty of the storm-swept heaven and earth.

But whatever it was that broke his purpose off, he would be the less disconcerted by it, since it was not for victory, but truth, that he was contending (*Verse 4*), and contending with the most absolute sincerity. The second clause of this Verse is commonly rendered, "One of *perfect knowledge* is with thee," and has, of course, been cited in proof of the insolent and intolerable conceit of the Speaker by those who condemn him as a chattering coxcomb, a talkative fool. But though this rendering is an admissible, and even a literal, translation of the words in the original, it quite fails to convey their sense. For neither here, nor in any of the *Chokmah* writings, does the word for "knowledge" stand for universal knowledge, or the word for "perfect" stand for absolute

perfection. All that the words imply, when interpreted by Hebrew usage, is, as the parallel between the two clauses of this Verse should have suggested, that Elihu is perfectly convinced of the cogency of the arguments he is about to employ, that he is fully persuaded of the truth of that view of the moral government of God which he is about to oppose to the view maintained alike by Job and the Friends. It is not, in fine, "perfect knowledge" which he claims, but "absolute sincerity;" so that here, once more, the charge against him breaks down so soon as it is carefully examined.

After this brief but characteristic exordium, Elihu proceeds at once to argue that the providence of God, so far from being wholly inscrutable, is both intelligible and defensible because it is both just and kind.

There is a visible and obvious justice in it. For (*Verse 5*), though God is mighty, He neither—let Job say what he will—despises nor neglects the cause of any man, however lowly, however distressed. Though He is mighty, He is mighty "by strength of heart;" *i.e.*, according to the Hebrew idiom, the crowning and most conclusive proof of his power is the penetrating and sympathetic understanding which enables Him to discern at a glance the right or wrong of every cause submitted to Him, and leads Him to judge all men and all actions by an appropriate moral standard or ideal. He looks quite through the outward shows of men (*Verse 6*) and sees the motives by which they are inspired—detecting a wickedness unworthy to live even when it is shrouded under the most prosperous conditions, the most pious professions, and discovering a righteousness that commands his respect under conditions the most adverse and distressful. It is by these

inward moral qualities, and not by the outward forms and shows of life, that his awards are determined (*Verse 7*); the principle of these awards being, at least on its positive side, that even under the utmost pressure of adversity the righteous should be in his "eyes," *i.e.*, in his favour and regard, and that, in the end, their outward conditions should be as royal and affluent as their inward life; while in respect of the unrighteous we are left to infer that this same even-handed justice will

Commend the ingredients of their poisoned chalice
To their own lips.

In short, *Verses 6 and 7* contain the proof of the thesis stated in *Verse 5*. They shew that God is "mighty by strength of heart," by his searching and sympathetic understanding, since He penetrates through all outward disguises to the motives by which men are actuated, to the moral aims they pursue, and bases his awards on character, not on condition.

And if that be one of the ruling principles or intentions of God's providence, as Elihu is fully persuaded that it is, who can contend that his providence is utterly unintelligible, that his ways are wholly past finding out?

In *Verses 8-10* Elihu argues more distinctly that God's providence is kind as well as just, and that even when it most seems unkind. And here his main contention is that our best knowledge, and, above all, self-knowledge, is

Bought only with a weary care,
And wisdom means a world of pains;

or, if we prefer to take a summary from his own lips, his main contention is (*Verse 15*) that God delivers

men from their afflictions “*by* their afflictions,” and opens their ear to instruction by the very calamities which chastise their sins. He arrests and fetters them in “cords of affliction” (*Verse 8*), in order (*Verse 9*) “to shew them their doings,” *i.e.*, to expose to them the true character of their own acts, to make them see that their sufferings spring from some violation of the pure and kindly laws by which their lives are ruled. And in the final clause of the Verse—“that they have become *vainglorious*”—whether by accident or by intention, Elihu hits on the very transgression of which Job has really been guilty. He had been “*vainglorious*,” in that he had claimed his righteousness as his own, and had stood proudly upon it, not tracing it to its Divine origin—a sin which he afterwards confesses and bitterly repents (*Chaps. xl. 3-5; xlii. 3-5*). It may be that Elihu meant no more than to suggest, in passing, that the sin into which men most commonly and easily slip, and which lies at the root of most of their other sins, is self-confidence, an overweening conceit of themselves, of their own powers, virtues, and importance; and even in that case he shews a singular penetration; for daily experience proves how easily every man persuades himself that he stands at the centre of the universe and assumes that all things take colour and worth from their relation to him. But it may be that, while the Friends had been wildly groping after the transgression by which Job had provoked his sufferings, and, with the most obvious untruth, had charged him with the vulgar crimes of the vulgar tyrant of their age and clime, Elihu had detected his true offence, had seen that he carried himself too proudly in his controversy with God, that he had

been "consumed with confidence;" that even in his happy autumn days he had been too apt to say—

*I shall die in my nest,
And shall lengthen out my days like the phoenix;
My glory is fresh upon me,
And my bow reneweth its spring in my hand:*

while in the long and bitter winter of his affliction he had been too conscious of his integrity, too self-confident and self-asserting. And in this case it must be admitted that Elihu shews a really marvellous insight into the character of Job, and hits the very gold of his mark.

But the kindness of God appears not only in convincing men of their sins by the calamities which follow hard upon them, but also in that these calamities are intended to wean and save them from the sins of which they have been convinced (*Verse 9*). They open the ears of men to reproof; but they also "command them to turn from" the evils which they reprove. They not only say to men, "You have sinned, and this is God's sentence on your sins;" they also add—

and 'twere good
You leaned unto his sentence with what patience
Your wisdom may inform you:

if they are, and because they are, a Divine judgment, they are also a Divine call to repentance and amendment.

Two ruling intentions of the providence of God thus become clear to us, so clear that we can no longer pronounce it wholly unintelligible. God's rule is just; here is one shaft of light streaming through the great darkness. Even when He afflicts men God is kind, since He afflicts them only for their good; here is

another shaft of light stretching quite across the mystery by which our life is encompassed, and shedding sensible beams of comfort and hope into every troubled heart that can receive it.

Nor is this all. Elihu has discovered a third principle in the providential rule of God which at once illuminates and vindicates it. Men are not, as the Friends had argued, immediately condemned to receive the due and full reward of their sins. Spaces for repentance and calls to amendment are granted to the wicked no less than to the good. The final awards which determine their lot are not pronounced until they have taken the deliberate and final decisions which determine their character and bent. They are not left to fling away their lives heedlessly and in the dark. A course of Divine discipline, by which they are taught to know themselves as they are is vouchsafed them; they are both shewn their transgressions and warned to turn from them: in more modern terms, they are both convinced of sin and invited to repent. It is not till they sin against the light, or are quickened by it to a new and better life, that their fate is determined—deliberately determined therefore, and by themselves.

This view of the providence of God is, it must be confessed, not only more intelligible and reasonable, but also more inward, subtle, spiritual than that of the Friends, and commends itself to us as at once more true to fact and more consonant with our natural sense of justice. Elihu develops it in *Verses* 11–15. In *Verse* 11 he touches on the happy fate which they secure for themselves who learn the lesson of this Divine discipline, and abandon the sins for, and by, which they have been rebuked: they may miss the

grosser pleasures of sense and the vulgar forms of prosperity; but, as the words translated "prosperity" and "pleasures" in the Authorized Version imply, they gain "a finer and more inward sense of enjoyment," and find that "all pure sources of joy" have been thrown open to them: in their innermost substance all things are theirs—theirs at once *in right*, theirs *in fact* so soon as they are able to appropriate them. In *Verses 12-14* he dwells a little on the unhappy fate of those who will not learn the lesson of Discipline, but cleave to the sins from which they have been commanded to turn, and of the true nature of which they have been made aware. Continuing in and adding to their sins, they naturally provoke the hand of Justice (*Verse 12*); nay, in Elihu's fine graphic idiom, "they fling themselves on the sword," "precipitate themselves on the weapon" against which they have been warned, their sin in natural and due course bringing forth misery and death. Thus (*Verse 13*) they heap up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, since even when God binds them with cords of affliction (*Verse 8*) they will not be restrained, when He rebukes them they will not turn to Him in penitence, nor listen to his reproof. And that day of wrath will come upon them only too soon; for (*Verse 14*) "their soul dieth in youth," *i.e.*, they perish prematurely, like young men who have tainted life at its very spring by their unclean lusts, or like—for that is the implication of the word here rendered "unclean"—those most miserable lads were "devoted" to the service of Astarte and other heathen "divinities," and the traffic with whom is the most hideous blot in the civilization of the antique world. In *Verse 15* he returns on the happier alter-

native of Discipline, and states once more, and in a very pregnant and impressive formula, the Divine intention in all the afflictions of men—an intention, however, which only takes effect on those who turn at his reproof. That intention is to save men from their afflictions *by their afflictions*, to “uncover their ears,” to enlighten their minds and enlarge their scope by the very calamities which seem to darken their lives and restrain their steps.

By these three arguments, then, Elihu seeks to vindicate the ways of God with men. That providence, he contends, must be intelligible, and must commend itself to our intelligence, which we see to be just, and kind, and, at least in aim and intention, redemptive. Yet, as I have already admitted, in all this Elihu advances nothing new, fetches nothing “from afar:” for in Verses 5–7 he does but briefly sum up the argument of Chapter xxxiv., in which he had already contended for the justice of God’s rule; in Verses 8–10 he does but sum up the argument of Chapter xxxiii., in which he had already insisted on the goodness of God in teaching and saving men by their afflictions; while in Verses 11–14 he does but sum up the argument of Chapter xxxv., in which he had already argued that the righteous must be the better and the happier for their righteousness, and the wicked the worse and the more miserable for their wickedness.

From this summary of the principles which, as he reads it, regulate the moral government of God, Elihu advances to a personal application of them (*Verses 16–25*), which reveals the full difference of his tone from that of the Friends who had preceded him. *They*

had seen in Job's losses and sufferings only the Nemesis of his own acts, only a just vengeance on his sins; *he* sees in them a Divine mercy, an instant and urgent appeal to repent of his own overweening estimate of himself, of that trust in his own righteousness which converted it, or went perilously near to converting it, into self-righteousness. To them, especially when the heat of controversy and the sting of defeat had dulled the edge of natural kindness, it had seemed that they had done well to be angry with Job, and that they could prophesy nothing for him but utter ruin and despair: to him, it was equally clear that God was teaching Job a larger wisdom by his sorrows, and saving him by the very afflictions in which they read his condemnation, and that Job therefore, if only he could frame himself to the Divine purpose, should be strong in patience, in courage, and in hope.

Rising into something of a prophetic strain, he announces to Job the Divine intention *for him* in a tone of unwavering certitude, if not of absolute authority. He is so convinced of God's merciful purpose and aim in all the sorrows of human life that he can assure Job, without hesitation or misgiving, that it is God's intention to instruct and save him by his affliction (*Verse 16*), to allure him out of the jaws of the distress which threatens to swallow him up into all broad and happy conditions, and to replace the bread and water of affliction with that bountiful "table" which the poets of Israel so often employed to denote an abundance of life and joy. The only doubt he can possibly entertain whether the general Divine aim will be reached in this special instance springs from a fact on which he has animadverted more than once before

(Chap. xxxiv. 8, 36, 37). By his obstinate questionings of the justice and goodness of God, questionings appropriate only in the mouths of wicked men, Job had seemed to ally himself with evildoers, and committed a sin which carried its own punishment with it; his false judgment of God *being*, as well as provoking, God's judgment on him (this seems to be the sense of *Verse 17*, though it is very difficult to give an adequate rendering of it). If that be so, judgment has indeed trodden on the very heels of offence; and if Job persists in his sin there can be no hope for him: for how shall a man be saved from the punishment which a hard and false conception of God involves so long as he cleaves to that misconception? Hence (*Verse 18*) Elihu is very urgent with Job to avert his misery by turning from his sin, by abandoning his hard thoughts of God. He persuades him by "the terrors of the Lord." That God's wrath is abroad no man knows better than Job, on whom (as he himself believes at least) that wrath has fallen so heavily. Let him beware of it, then. Let him not, by holding fast, against his better mind, to such misleading thoughts of God as the wicked cherish, still further provoke that wrath, still further intensify his misery. For if he does, no ransom, however great, can possibly deliver him; and no wild and piercing outcries against the Divine justice, nor any furious struggle with his fate (*Verse 19*). Only a change of heart, nothing short of rising to truer better thoughts of God, could possibly save him from those wrong and hard thoughts of God which were the very soul and spring of his misery. Let him not "pant for the night," then (*Verse 20*); *i.e.*, let him not loathe his life and crave to be cut off from the

light. Hades itself—and on this last cast, or change, Job had come, as we have seen, to set great hope (*e.g.*, Chaps. xiv. and xix.)—could do nothing for him unless it gave him those calmer truer thoughts of God which were well within his reach even here. Instead of pressing forward to a change he was unprepared to meet, and by which, till he came to a better mind, he could not benefit, let him rather turn (*Verse 21*) from the debasing conception of God which he shared with the wicked, and by entertaining which he had shewn that it was easier for him to think badly of God than of himself, easier to question the Divine justice than to bear affliction patiently. With accent of surprise and joy, as his new conception, his discovery of the aim and intention of the Divine Providence, returns upon him, or with an accent of astonishment and rebuke that Job should be so blind to what was so clear to him, Elihu exclaims (*Verse 22*), “*Lo, God exalteth by his power!*” That is the golden secret of his rule. Not to punish men merely, and still less to destroy them by driving them to conclusions of despair, but that He may raise them to a larger wisdom, a firmer trust, an ampler freedom, has God made his power the servant of his law, or given his law power to execute and avenge itself, and “fix’d his canon ’gainst” the evils by which men wrong and injure their own souls. With an accent of triumph Elihu demands, as well he might, “Who is a teacher like to Him?” For, not by dreams only, nor only by supernatural disclosures of his Will, but also by their own daily experience of the facts of life God convinces men that they cannot do evil with impunity, and cannot do well without gaining by it.

Verse 23 may be a warning to Job, who had, no doubt, assumed to prescribe to God, to dictate to Him other and better ways than his own (*e.g.*, Chaps. xxi. 17-21; and xxiv. 1-12); but it is more in harmony with the general tone of this exhortation, I think, to take it as meaning that, while Job cannot claim his righteousness as purely his own, the goodness of God, the incomparable Teacher, the constant Redeemer and Benefactor of men, *is* purely self-derived; that if He is "responsible to no one," so that no man can say to Him, "Thou doest wrong," He "owes nothing to any one," but is just simply because it his nature to be just, and good simply because He cannot be other than good. Instead of criticizing or censuring his works, therefore, whether in nature or history, let Job "magnify" and celebrate them (*Verses 24 and 25*). They have been a theme for song in all ages and all lands, winning the admiration of men of every blood, and filling their lips with praise.

By this last touch Elihu prepares us for what is to come. It is a deft and happy transition. From the summons to a reverent admiration of all God's works, or of his whole method of working, we are led on to contemplate one of his grandest and most impressive works—a tropical thunderstorm—with an admiration which now deepens into awe and now rises into an adoring thankfulness and joy.

For it is at this point of Elihu's Discourse that a great tempest is supposed to have swept up from the distance. As he catches sight of it, and watches its approach, he breaks off from his argument to give a voice to the storm, to describe and to interpret it. The

opening exclamation of this new paragraph (*Verse 26*), however, may be only a point of transition, like Verses 24 and 25; and we may read it in a double sense. (1) In its backward aspect, its connection with Elihu's argument for the intelligibility of the Divine Providence, we may take it as frankly conceding that, while we can discover certain ruling principles in the moral government of God—can see, for instance, that it is just, that it is kind, that it aims at our redemption—we nevertheless cannot find out either God or the government of God to perfection. The mystery is lightened, not resolved; its pressure eased, but not removed. The Eternal cannot be wholly brought within the limits of time; the Infinite cannot be comprehended by the finite. We both know God, and know Him not; we may search into, but we cannot grasp, the whole circle of his activity, the whole compass of his intentions and aims. (2) In its forward aspect, its relation to the following description of the majesty of God as revealed in storm and tempest, we may take it as an ejaculation of profound awe and astonishment, as expressing Elihu's sense of his incompetence to reach an adequate description of a Majesty that overwhelms him; he may catch (*Comp. Chap. xxvi. 14*) some faint "whisper" of the Voice whose words are divine, but the "full thunder of its power," who can comprehend or convey?

Having moderated our expectations by this brief disclaimer, Elihu turns to the task he has set himself, or to which he has been unexpectedly summoned. From his point of vantage, the high-piled *mezbele*, he watches the storm as it sails swiftly through the labouring sky, and marks the conflict of light with darkness; he takes note of the flying clouds in the van of the storm,

clouds that change and scatter as they fly ; and, as the great heat-drops fall which announce the arrival of the tempest, he begins to describe what he sees, and the contrasts which this sublime spectacle suggests to his mind, never for a moment forgetting, or suffering us to forget, that it is *God* who stands behind all the change-ful phenomena of Nature and rules them by his will.

He commences with the mystery of the rain, and handles it so wisely, says the Talmud, that, had he only explained "the origin of the rain," it would have been enough to justify his intrusion on the scene. But the rabbis are very facile in their admiration of their own poets ; and it must be confessed that there is nothing very recondite in Elihu's treatment of this daily and beneficent mystery. On the most modern interpretation of which they will admit *Verses 27* and *28* do but tell us that the misty evaporations drawn up on high by the heat of the sun are condensed, or "fused" into water by the colder air of the heights to which they float, and are distilled and shed on the thirsty earth by those moving fountains, the clouds, into which they have been formed. But he does not profess to give us the "origin" of the rain in any scientific sense of that term, or to have solved the mystery whether of sunshine or of showers, of fair weather or of foul. For (*Verse 29*) he confesses that he does not understand, he affirms that no man can understand, either "the spreading of the clouds," or what he calls "the crash of God's pavilion." The image of the Verse is, no doubt, the setting up and taking down of the tent, or tabernacle, in which God is assumed to dwell. In the spreading out of cloud-curtains, with all their pomp of form and hue, when the heavens are still and serene,

Elihu sees the erection of that royal tent; while the roll of the thunder through the stormy sky is but the fall and rattle of the poles when the tent is struck, and He who sojourns within them is about to pass on his way. For, to him, natural phenomena are nothing apart from the Creative Spirit by whom they are informed; they are to be studied and admired only because they reflect his moods and reveal his purpose, only for the moral significance with which they are fraught. Hence (*Verses* 30 and 31), though Elihu is moved to admiration, astonishment, awe, as he sees Jehovah now clothe Himself with light and now conceal Himself behind the clouds He has drawn up from the depths of the sea, it is only, or mainly, because "by these," *i.e.*, these atmospheric changes, these marvellous phenomena, He both judges men and blesses them—condemning them to want and misery by excessive and untimely rain and heat or by withholding heat and rain, or sending them, through kindly warmth and seasonable rains, plenteous harvests and the joy of harvest. To Elihu at least, whatever it may be to us, it was clear that all the forces of Nature are ministers of God who do his pleasure; and that hence they subserve moral ends, and are adapted to the moral conditions of "nations," if not of individual men.

But the storm is rolling nearer as Elihu speaks; flash succeeds to flash, peal follows peal; and he can no longer waver between the contrasts of the skies or touch on their serener aspects, but bends his thoughts wholly on the dark, terrible, and threatening aspects they now turn upon him (*Verses* 32 and 33). To him the flash reveals a Divine Warrior emerging from his tent of clouds, "*clothing his palms with lightning and slinging*

it against the foe,”—a superb figure, classical, indeed, in its simplicity and strength, incomparably superior to Mohammed’s poor conceit of “the lightnings that almost snatch out our eyes;” and in the crash of the thunder he hears an awful Voice proclaiming the fierceness of God’s wrath against iniquity.¹ So fierce for a moment is the outburst of the storm that Elihu can think of nothing else. He is in a kind of extasy (*Chapter xxxvii. Verse 1*). His heart “throbs” as with a life of its own, and “leaps” out of its place, so profoundly is he moved by blended terror and admiration. He can only cry (*Verse 2*), as the shattering thunder rolls and reverberates above them, “Hear, O hear, the tumult of his voice, and the muttering that goeth forth from his mouth!” He can only point to the vivid lightning that stabs the darkness (*Verse 3*), and bid his crouching and astonished auditors look and see how God flings its flash across the whole wide space of heaven and to the very ends of the earth. And, as once more the peal follows the flash, he once more bids them (*Verse 4*) listen to the

¹ So, at least, I read Verse 33, not without some misgivings, however. Gesenius may well call this Verse *locus obscurissimus*. It is so obscure that we may reasonably suspect the text to be corrupt. The rendering of the Authorized Version, “The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour,” may have had an intelligible meaning in the minds of the Company of Translators, though it is difficult to see what meaning it could have had. Ewald, Delitzsch, and many more are at least intelligible when they render the Verse, “His voice,” or “His thunder announceth Him, and even the cattle that He is approaching:” for here, of course, the allusion is to the uneasy foreboding which renders the herds restless when a thunderstorm is in the air. But Gesenius, Hitzig, and Fürst vote for the reading adopted in the text. And though the weight of critical authority just turns, perhaps, against this reading, it is as close to the original as any other, if not, as Canon Cook thinks, closer. And in that case we may surely give the preference, the whole passage being so noble, to the nobler reading. To come down from that splendid Warrior, slinging his lightnings against the foe, to the dim prevision of the restless herds would be a terrible anti-climax; while to give the fierce crash of the thunder a voice, and make it proclaim a still fiercer wrath against unrighteousness, carries on the figure in a kindred strain, and puts, as it were, a challenge into the Warrior’s mouth.

Voice which thunders out its challenge against iniquity, and mark how at the "roar" of that mighty Voice "nothing is held back," the whole contents of the skies—rain, hail, wind—are discharged on the labouring and troubled earth.

For the moment at which the storm is at its worst his whole mind is dominated by the terrors of the scene; but it is only for a moment. For now, with the brief generalization of *Verse 5*, on the innumerable wonders by which God suggests "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls," he passes into a more sustained and reflective mood. The tempest reminds him of kindred manifestations of the Divine Majesty. *Verses 6-10* cover the entire season between the autumnal and the vernal equinoxes. We have the heavy "gush" or downpour of Autumn ("the *early* rain"), and the more genial showers of Spring ("the *latter* rain"); and, between these, the falls of snow, which often cause great havoc in the Hauran, and are always an evil portent to the Eastern mind, together with the keen frosty winds of the Syrian winter. During this wintry season the labours of the husbandmen, as well as the wanderings of the nomadic tribes, are interrupted by the severity of the weather, and every man, however unwillingly, is driven to take shelter and repose. This is the meaning of the curious phrase in *Verse 7*, "*He (God) scaleth up every man's hand,*" *i.e.*, brings all labour to a pause. For, as is his wont, Elihu sees the hand of God in all the vicissitudes of Nature and of human life. It is God who bids the snow fall, and the rain (*Verse 6*); God who summons the whirlwind from the secret place, the *penetralia*, the concealed and undiscoverable cave, or

storehouse, in which He has pent it up ; God who sends cold with his "cloud-scattering winds," and the frost which "binds the streams in bonds of ice," and so "straitens" or restrains their flow (*Verses* 9, 10). Nay, in this case, Elihu ventures not only to "scan the work" of God, but to "make it plain," to state the moral end God has in view in compelling men to pause from their toils by the wintry severities which silence the music of the streams and arrest the labours of the fields ; it is that, at leisure from themselves and the common aims of life, and awed by these manifest tokens of his presence and activity, they may "consider his handiwork" (*Verse* 7). And, no doubt, a new touch is added to the desolation of the wintry scene in *Verse* 8, and we are told how even the wild beasts are driven to their lairs and dens, in order that we may have a keener sense of its desolateness, and feel that man is left to stand in it alone, yet not alone, because face to face with God his Teacher.

Nay, more, in *Verses* 11-13, impelled perhaps by a fresh outbreak of the tempest, Elihu ventures even to define the moral significance of the thunderstorm, with its drenching tropical rain. It comes, he says, either as a scourge or as a benediction, to punish men for their sins or to reward and enrich them for their obedience.

A later and vastly inferior Arabian poet, Mohammed, supplies the best commentary on these Verses. In the Coran we read (*Sura* lxvi. vv. 50-52): It is the Lord who "sendeth the winds as the forerunner of his mercy (rain), and pure water send we down from heaven, *That we may revive by it a dead land ; . . .* And we distribute it among them on all sides, *that*

they may reflect : but most men refuse to be aught but thankless." And again (*Sura xxxii. v. 27*) : "See they not how *we drive the rain to some parched land, and thereby bring forth corn*, of which their cattle and themselves do eat? *Will they not, then, behold?*" And again (*Sura xxxv. v. 10*) : "*It is God who sendeth forth the winds which raise the clouds aloft, then drive them on to some land dead* (from drought), *and give life thereby to the earth after its death*. So shall be the resurrection." And once more (*Sura xxiv. v. 35*) : "Hast thou not seen that *God driveth clouds lightly forward*, then gathereth them together, then pileth them in masses? And then thou seest the rain coming forth from their midst; and He causeth clouds, like mountains charged with hail, to descend from heaven; and He maketh it to fall on whom He will, and from whom He will He turneth it aside."

With his usual artistic tact, the Poet has already in some measure prepared us, by the tone of Elihu's appeal, for the approaching Theophany. But now the preparation grows more obvious, the approximation of the two sections more marked; the transition is evidently close at hand. In *Verses 14-18* Elihu takes the very tone in which Jehovah Himself is about to speak; and in *Verses 19-24* he both takes and prescribes the very tone in which Job will respond to the Divine admonition and appeal: while yet, throughout the whole passage, we are made aware that the Storm, the fury of which we have just witnessed, is calming down and receding into the distance. The air is growing pure and fresh and warm as the wind veers to the sultry South (*Verse 17*); the earth is putting on a fresh face of joy after its tears; the sky is resuming its

tender brightness, nay, beginning to glow once more like a mirror of polished metal (*Verse 18*), its lustre enhanced by the gleaming lights of the clouds which fleck it (*Verse 15*), now that the tempest is over and the sun comes forth "in gold" to make the clouds, which concealed it for a while, the glasses and ministers of its pomp (*Verses 21, 22*).

It is easy, when once we have the clue, thus to pick out the phrases in which Elihu completes his description of the Storm, by depicting its subsidence and retreat, and shewing us how heaven and earth, after their fierce momentary strife, fling themselves into a still fonder embrace and glow with a more entrancing loveliness. But we should wholly fail to appreciate the power and beauty of this passage if we did not mark that we *have* to pick out these phrases, and piece them together, from what is virtually and intentionally an anticipation of the Theophany which is now to follow, and to crown, the Intervention of Elihu. The two processes, or aims, are subtly blended; but the more obvious of them is not the former but the latter. For if we look at all closely at these last words of Elihu, we see at once that he is for a moment anticipating the challenge which Jehovah is about to utter; that he is virtually saying to Job (*Verse 14*), as we shall soon hear Jehovah say:

Come forth into the light of things;
Let Nature be your teacher.

¶He asks some of the very questions, or questions of the very same kind, and fraught with the selfsame intention. Know you how the clouds are poised, so delicately balanced in the air that they do not sink to

earth, even when the very wind before which they sail is shedding its soft penetrating warmth upon you (*Verses 16, 17*)? Can you explain this mystery which is at once so near to you and yet so far from you? Or know you how it is that the thin vaporous expanse of the firmament is yet so strong that it retains its form and beauty notwithstanding all the storms which rage through it, and shines forth with new lustre the instant they have passed by (*Verse 18*)? If not, if even these familiar marvels and mysteries lie beyond your reach, how should you comprehend, how affect or claim to comprehend, the more recondite mysteries of human life and of the Providence which orders it? You cannot see the way God takes with you, or the end He has in view? O, wait! wait patiently for Him, and you *shall* see. A breath from Him will clear all mysteries from your life, just as a wind from Him sweeps the darkness from the sky (*Verses 21, 22*), and suffuses it with streams of golden light. And, meantime, bow with reverence before the awful majesty of Him whom you cannot find out for yourself, and hold fast to the conviction that He whom you cannot comprehend is nevertheless just and good and kind (*Verse 23*).

All this is in the very tone of Jehovah when He looks out upon Job from the retreating tempest, and speaks to the man who has so long yearned for Him and listened for his voice. And if Elihu here speaks for Jehovah, he also speaks for Job. He sets him an example of reverence and humility. He himself takes toward God the very attitude he wants Job to take, and which Job is compelled to take when he hears Jehovah speak instead of hearing others speak of Him.

(Comp. Chaps. xl. 3, 4; xlii. 1-6). It is not simply that Elihu, through the whole passage, bows before the mysteries which Job resents, and on the sharp edges of which he rends and tears his heart. In *Verses* 19 and 20, and again in *Verses* 22 and 23, we have the words of one who feels that in the immediate Presence of God man must not dare to speak; one of a spirit so modest and reverential that he does not so much as expect to comprehend the ways of Him whom at the best we can but know in part, but is content to rely on his absolute wisdom and justice and love.

Nor is the final touch, the last sentence (*Verse* 24), of this admirable homily or discourse less admirable than the many pregnant sentences and noble images and thoughts which have preceded it. Job had set all his hope on seeing God face to face, not suspecting what the vision of the Divine Majesty and Holiness must involve for sinful man beneath the sky. And the moment before that awful but long-desired vision breaks upon him, Elihu warns him that not even "the wise in heart" can endure to behold the God whom he has so often challenged to appear. The feeling and the significance of these final words are finely rendered in one of our most familiar hymns:

Eternal Light ! Eternal Light !
 How pure the soul must be,
 When placed within thy searching sight
 It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,
 Can live and look on Thee.

The whole *argument* of the Poem is now before us, for though, in the approaching theophany, Jehovah deigns to speak, He does not deign to argue. Probably the Poet felt that it would be an offence against good

taste, a violation of all dramatic propriety, to put arguments into the mouth of the Almighty, and represent Him as bandying logic with his creature. Still more probably he had himself passed through the deep spiritual struggle which he so nobly describes, and knew from his own experience that it is not by force of logic that the dark and trembling shadows of doubt are at last swept from the soul. What *can* be done by argument, moreover, he has already done, and done with a force and completeness of which even yet we may have but an imperfect conception. Charmed by the varied beauty or the sustained sublimity of those sections of the Poem we have already studied, we may have failed to bring together into a single and complete view the several arguments by which he has vindicated the ways of God with men. With his usual tact he puts all these arguments into the lips of men. We hear them from Elihu, from Job himself, or even from the Friends. And it will be worth while, I think, before we pass on to the final section of the Poem and listen to Jehovah as He answers Job out of the tempest, to gather up these scattered and half-concealed arguments in a few brief sentences, that we may see how they sustain each other and run up into a consistent and comprehensive whole.

For one of these arguments we are indebted chiefly to the Friends. Their main contention was that, even here and now, it fares well with the good and goes ill with the wicked. And though they stated the fact somewhat too coarsely, and applied it much too universally and too peremptorily, yet who can deny that their statement contains a truth of the gravest importance when once it is detached, as in the course of

their controversy with Job it is detached, from the bitter dogmatic exaggerations that turn it into a lie, and affords a very helpful clue to the mystery which encompasses our life? Elihu, again, makes a most valuable contribution to this great argument in his fundamental assumption, received, as he believes, by immediate inspiration from on high; viz., that the afflictions which men are called to endure, even when they are provoked by their own sins, are disciplinary and remedial in their intention rather than damnatory and punitive; a conviction which, so far as the practical conduct of life is concerned, goes far to solve the problem by which Job was perplexed. While Job himself, by his noble prevision of a judgment and a life to come, in which all the wrongs of time shall be redressed, and good shall come at last to all who have loved goodness and pursued it, throws the light of a great and most supporting hope into all the darkneses of earth and time.

Now if we weave these three lines of thought into a single argument, it may be doubted whether, even now that we hold the added thought and experience of some thirty centuries at our service, the most searching and inquisitive intellect can make any real addition to this ancient solution of the great problem of human life and thought. For when we have said that under the just and kindly providence of God good comes to the good and ill to the evil and unthankful; that the very sufferings imposed on men, whether they be the natural results of their own transgression or the strokes of a merciful and fruitful discipline, are intended for their instruction, correction, and redemption; and that whatever wrongs are not remedied here shall be remedied

hereafter, and whatever undeserved sufferings produce, no present fruit of happiness shall bear a richer harvest in the world to come: when we have said all this, what more or better has even the wisest of us to say?

*THE GREEK AORIST, AS USED IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

SECOND PAPER.

IN a former paper I stated, on the authority of several first-rate grammarians, that when a Greek wished to say that at some point, or during some period, of past time, known or unknown, an event had taken place, he used the aorist; and that he used the perfect only when he wished to direct attention to the abiding result of the past event. This distinction of the tenses I shall now attempt to illustrate by examples from the New Testament; and I shall at the same time discuss the correctness of some of the renderings adopted in our Authorized Version.

I shall begin by calling attention to four cases in which the Greek aorist is correctly used, but in which we are compelled to use the perfect.

1. Wherever the time is not in any way defined. For instance: in Luke xiv. 18, a man says that at some past time, which he does not further specify, he "*has bought* a field." The aorist is here sufficient. For, although the past purchase influences the man's present conduct, this is so plainly stated in the following words that it need not be expressed by the tense, as it would be if the perfect were used. Similarly, in Romans iii. 12, 23, St. Paul tells us that every man