


ARTICLE IV. 

## THE BOOK OF JOB.—WHO WROTE IT ?

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THE authorship of the Book of Job is one of the things which never can be absolutely settled, one of the things upon which modern discoveries and inventions shed no light; and yet no one can read it, much less study it, without wishing the author were known. Unfortunately it presents a question which literary critics have not been able to solve; and yet their views upon the subject are entertaining, even though they fail to solve the problem, or to agree among themselves.

The writer, without presuming to influence the judgment of others, is thoroughly persuaded that the only basis upon which the question can be intelligently considered and reasonable probability of the fact established, is by a citation of well-known facts rather than by critical speculation, and therefore ventures to call the views hereinafter expressed a lawyer's argument.

1. The assumption that no one knew the writer of the book, and that no satisfactory evidence can be adduced to solve the mystery, I regard as entirely unwarranted. The person capable of such a wonderful achievement could not be unknown. It is hardly less than a moral impossibility. His scholarship, his intellectual endowments, must have rendered him distinguished. They are what always have and always must insure eminence. This is the teaching of universal experience.

To meet this objection Froude suggests that the author of the book may have led the life of an exile; but if a Hebrew exile had written it, that fact alone would have identified his name with his work. But, aside from this, no such work could have been conceived or accomplished by a hermit. It is instinct with human sympathy; its hero has distinguished himself by his conspicuous discharge of all his duties and obligations to society; he has remembered the poor; he has made the widow's heart sing for joy; he has administered judgment in righteousness, and in every particular has performed his duties to the community in which he lived. It is utterly unthinkable that a hermit, or one who had exiled himself from society, should have chosen such a theme for the exploitation of his powers. The achievement of such a masterly production compels the conviction that the writer must have been dealing with a theme which appealed to him, and challenged all his energies of heart and mind. To suppose a recluse writing the Book of Job, is like supposing the author of "Home, Sweet Home," exploiting the value of celibacy.

The author of this book was a person of education, of wide observation, familiar with social and economic affairs and civic conditions. He understood the functions of courts and judges and their relations to orderly government. He was an expert in the construction of sentences and the use of apt language. He comprehended the value of the dramatic element in such a poem, and employs it with marvelous skill. He would be distinguished in any age for his intellectual resources, and it is impossible to think of such a person as shunning society and choosing the life of a recluse. It is equally difficult to think of a person so richly endowed as unknown to his contemporaries.

One would naturally think that a search instituted in good faith for the purpose of ascertaining the author of this rare production, would be directed toward some one in that distant period capable of producing it, rather than to credit it to some unknown author. But it must be remembered that to certain minds there is a fascination in mystery. It is also true that certain literary critics, like expert witnesses, are inclined to advance theories of their own in regard to mooted questions, as seen in the attempt to show that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays.<sup>1</sup>

2. The Jewish traditions located the date when the book was written as coincident with the period when Moses was in the land of Midian. If this be true, and no adequate reason has ever been disclosed for disputing it, the author of the book is at once suggested; and it must be conceded that he is the one and only person capable of producing the work.

Among all the ancient Hebrew writers of whom we have any knowledge, there is not one to whom such a production can be credited, except the great lawgiver; and when we recall his wonderful career, and contemplate his wholly unique and exceptional intellectual equipment, we can readily understand why for centuries he was accepted as its author.

The name of David has been suggested in this connection; but David's inclinations and ambitions were in a different domain. He chose to devote his pen to devotional literature, in which field he stands in a class wholly apart from and above all others. In the Twenty-third Psalm he has left the world the choicest gem of religious literature ever penned.

<sup>1</sup> One of these critics gravely urges that the book must have been written before the time of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because it contains no reference to those eminent characters. The same argument might, with equal propriety, be invoked to locate the production before the Flood.

But there is absolutely no ground for believing he wrote the Book of Job. It is as far removed from his chosen domain as the east is from the west.

It has also been surmised that Ezra may have been the author. What should have prompted such a suggestion it is difficult to conceive. All we know of him is as a chronicler of events. He prepared certain historic data which have been assigned their place in the sacred record, but there is not a line of original thought in his writings. It is also to be remembered that, in the time of these Jewish writers, the authorship of such a work could not have been left in doubt.

On the other hand, when we come to examine the subsequent writings of Moses, we find evidences of versatility, of literary finish, of dramatic art and skill, which shed a flood of light on our inquiry. The peculiar characteristics disclosed in the inimitable story of Joseph are too suggestive to be ignored or cast aside in support of the theory that some unknown exile wrote this book. This story is the work of a master. Not a word can be added or erased. No writer has ever essayed to criticize it, and no intelligent person can read it without feeling that it bespeaks a practiced hand. The Song of Miriam and the Song of Deliverance also furnish additional evidence of the literary accomplishments of the writer.

There is also another incident which, though it may be thought trifling, is worthy of attention in passing. In the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, when instructing the judges, Moses uses this language: "Thou shalt do no unrighteousness in judgment. Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." In the twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Job we are told that when he took the

seat of justice, he "put on righteousness, and his judgments were as a robe and a diadem." The exalted conception of the judicial function is identical in the two cases, and the same word is used to express it. Critical experts are apt to make much of such a coincidence.

Froude calls attention to the fact that no allusion is found in the book to the plagues of Egypt, to the passage of the Red Sea, or to the events which surround Mount Sinai. But this omission, if it can be credited with any significance, only tends to show that it was written prior to those historic events; in other words, while Moses was tending his flocks in Midian. If written after Israel became a nation, such an omission might be difficult to explain.

In this connection it is proper to suggest that the settings of the poem are distinctly pastoral. Wealth is measured not by gold, but by flocks and herds. The incidents which attend agricultural pursuits are made prominent. The poem moves on amid rural scenes.

3. What was the motive behind the production? This is a factor which cannot be overlooked in any rational attempt to solve the problem. Whoever the author, he must have been moved and inspired by some adequate motive. Obviously it could not have been written for gold, or the writer's name would be known. Can any motive be discovered in the conditions which obtained after the Exodus? None has ever been disclosed, and it is safe to affirm none can be. But when we consider the circumstances under which Moses departed from Egypt, we cannot resist the conviction that the condition of his brethren in bondage must have been the subject of his deepest solicitude, the burden of his earnest and anxious thought.

He was now dwelling amongst Gentiles. They knew from

his own lips all the incidents of his own eventful life, as well as the history of the chosen people. They understood his loyalty to that people and to the Hebrew faith.

How natural for them to urge that if the Israelites were the chosen people of God, he would not suffer them to remain in bondage for centuries. Thus this illustrious servant of the Most High found himself confronted with a problem which excited his deepest interest. "Is the fact that God should allow his chosen people to remain in bondage for generations, evidence that he has forgotten them?" Over this question he pondered long. Watching his flocks under that Oriental sky, what daydreams challenged his meditations we shall never know. But this vital inquiry he could not dismiss, nor could he answer it lightly. It was something to ponder over. The great productions over which the world loves to linger are not the emanations of the passing moment. Into them have entered all the writer's resources and powers of mind and heart. The average observer looks at the rough block of marble on the sculptor's frame and sees nothing in it but its exterior outline; the artist sees in it the face of the Madonna, and cuts away the stone till he finds it. "There is infinite truth in everything," says Emerson; "we see only up to the measure of our capacity."

Such a masterly production as the Book of Job compels us to look for a masterly mind. Fortunately we do not have to look in vain. Here in Midian at the time when this book was probably written, we find the object of our search—the greatest mind of antiquity. This is the mind engaged in dealing with the mighty problem which confronted him until finally the great poem is conceived and in due time molded into shape to take its place with the choicest achievements of the human intellect. How long he was engaged

in accomplishing his object we cannot know; but we must assume, from the construction and finish of the poem, that it was prepared with the utmost deliberation and painstaking care. Froude suggests that it does not harmonize with Jewish theology, but this is hypercritical. When the fact of its Hebrew origin is admitted, such lack of harmony, if any, sheds no light on the mooted question. But, aside from this, the poem was not written to exploit the Jewish theology. The fact is that, up to the incident of the burning bush, Moses had no knowledge of the events which were later on to be written into the history of the Hebrew people, — and we may add into the history of the human race, — and no conception of the part he would take in that history. He had no knowledge that he might not live and die in the land of Midian. He had heard the tradition, as Froude suggests, among the Gentiles, of some great and good man of the Oriental world who had passed through such a remarkable experience as that unfolded in the poem, and seizes upon it and employs it to demonstrate that, however good men may suffer for a time, the Most High does not forget them if they trust in him; and so, when contending with the “physicians of no value,” he says, Hold your peace, let me alone. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him. If our contention as to the time when the book was written and as to the person who wrote it is correct, then it was written primarily not for Hebrew readers, but for the people with whom he mingled, and hence was at once a vindication of his own faith and an answer to his Gentile readers “out of their own mouth.” The book is so crowded with rich thought felicitously expressed, and so thoroughly pervaded with devotion and loyalty to God, that the Hebrews were proud to accept it as part and parcel of their national literature, and well they might be.

4. How did it find its way into the sacred canon, particularly as the author's name was not subscribed to it, or indorsed upon it — an interesting inquiry, but easily answered. When Moses went down into Egypt as the servant of the Most High, he left his property and effects in the custody of his family in Midian. When his father-in-law and family came out to visit him in the wilderness, they took with them this manuscript which they knew he prized, and doubtless other of his personal effects, and thus the poem passed into the custody of the author and was preserved with his later writings.

5. Why did he neglect to identify it? There are two sufficient reasons. He might have assumed that, being with his other writings, its authorship could not fail to be known; or he might have felt, after his name became illustrious as the chosen servant of the Most High, and the great statesman and lawgiver of Israel, that the authorship of the poem was entirely inconsequential. It was a mere incident in his career; and inasmuch as he was the only Hebrew thus exalted, he is the only one who could claim the benefit of the inference. Other writers would have followed the Hebrew custom of signing the manuscript.

To illustrate: after Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation and reestablished the republic, his standing in the world's esteem would not be affected if the Gettysburg speech were omitted from his public utterances. The merits of that address may be conceded, but it is not essential to his fame, and he could afford, without impairing his standing and his rank in history, to be indifferent to its preservation. Had it never been published, as the poem never had been, he would be none the less "Lincoln, the great historic figure"!

We have seen that the settings of this poem are pastoral,



and one can think of no surroundings more inspiring or more conducive to meditation than those of the shepherd watching his flocks in such a country and in such an age. The picture is one on which we love to linger. It is rural. It is free from disturbing incidents. It invites contemplation. It is the natural domain for daydreams, and it is impossible to think of a resourceful mind content to remain inactive in such environment for forty years. I prefer to think that here, and not in the hut of the exile, must we look for the mind in which this wonderful book was conceived and wrought into undying phrase; and I prefer, also to associate the book with a name which became in God's good time the most illustrious on the pages of world history.