

CHAPTER IV

MY GOD! WHY?

AFTER this opened Job his mouth,
and cursed his day. ²And Job
answered and said:

- ³Let the day perish wherein I was
born,
and the night which said,
There is a man child conceived.
⁴Let that day be darkness;
let not God inquire after it from
above,
neither let the light shine upon
it.
⁵Let darkness and the shadow of
death claim it for their own;
let a cloud dwell upon it;
let all that maketh black the day
terrify it.
⁶As for that night, let thick dark-
ness seize upon it:
let it not rejoice among the days of
the year;
let it not come into the number of
the months.
⁷Lo, let that night be barren;
let no joyful voice come therein.
⁸Let them curse it that curse the
day,
who are skillful to rouse up levia-
than.
⁹Let the stars of the twilight thereof
be dark:
let it look for light, but have none;
neither let it behold the eyelids of
the morning:
¹⁰because it shut not up the doors of
my *mother's* womb,
nor hid trouble from mine eyes.
¹¹Why died I not from the womb?
why did I not give up the ghost
when I came out of the belly?
¹²Why did the knees receive me?
or why the breasts, that I should
suck?
¹³For now should I have lien down
and been quiet;

I should have slept; then had I
been at rest:

¹⁴with kings and counsellors of the
earth, which built up waste places
for themselves;

¹⁵or with princes that had gold,
who filled their houses with silver:

¹⁶or as an hidden untimely birth
I had not been;

as infants which never saw light.
¹⁷There the wicked cease from
troubling;

and there the weary be at rest.
¹⁸There the prisoners are at ease
together;

they hear not the voice of the task-
master.
¹⁹The small and great are there;
and the servant is free from his
master.

²⁰Wherefore is light given to him
that is in misery,
and life unto the bitter in soul;

²¹which long for death, but it
cometh not;

and dig for it more than for hid
treasures;

²²which rejoice exceedingly,
and are glad, when they can find
the grave?

²³Why is light given to man whose
way is hid,
and whom God hath hedged
in?

²⁴For my sighing cometh like my
meat,
and my roarings are poured out
like water.

²⁵For the thing which I fear cometh
upon me,
and that which I am afraid of
cometh unto me.

²⁶I am not at ease, neither am I
quiet, neither have I rest;
but trouble cometh.

As his friends sat there day after day, full of sympathy but unable to comfort—for what words of comfort can one speak to the sinner?—Job realized that it was not only the wicked of his own town and the fickle mob that had turned their backs on him, but also the wisest and best among his own friends. It may well be that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were rising to leave, their period of mourning ended, when Job broke out into one of the most moving passages of the Bible.

As literature Job 3 is magnificent; so much so that it sweeps us along by its very vehemence and keeps our minds from asking what it all means.

He cursed the day of his birth (v. 1, R.S.V.). It is, alas, no rare experience to meet the man who has enjoyed health, riches and honour, who in middle life has lost all three and who longs for death. But it is most rare for such a one to say, at least with any conviction, unless indeed his conscience is already making him feel the flames of Hell, "I wish I had never been born." He has lived, and for most of the time living was good; even the final suffering cannot rob the earlier years of their sweetness. But it is precisely this that Job is saying with such vehemence. It is true the chapter ends (vv. 20–26) with the wish that he were dead, but this is subsidiary to the main thought.

There is only one strictly comparable passage in the Bible, viz. Jer. 20: 7–18). Not only is there an obvious literary resemblance between Jer. 20: 14–18 and Job 3: 3–10, however it is to be explained, but I believe a striking spiritual similarity between the two men can be demonstrated as well.

As a young man Jeremiah had followed the call of God to be a prophet. He could have reasonably expected recognition and honour, at least from the better elements among his people, and the joy of fellowship with God in his own heart. He found himself rejected by all and had apparently lost his relationship with God. I believe that in a very much simpler way this was true of Job as well. It is to be noticed that in this tremendous outburst Job does not refer to his material loss and physical affliction at all, unless it is by implication. It is only our knowledge of the circumstances that tempts us so to understand v. 24:

For my sighing comes as my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water (R.S.V.).

There is some element of doubt in vv. 25f. as to the best translation, but there can be little doubt that the translators of the A.V. were misled by preconceived theory. The R.S.V., which is substantially the same as the R.V., seems to give the meaning:

For the thing that I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest; but trouble comes.

This is surely looking to something quite other than his physical afflictions.

Let us take a closer look at Job himself. Throughout the book he is presented, as are his friends, as a member of the highly respected class of the Wise. He was obviously brought up in the strict orthodoxy of the time, for which it was beyond dispute that prosperity was the result and reward of godfearing goodness, and disaster and suffering of wrongdoing. He is portrayed to us as *tam* (1: 1, 8, 2: 3). The meaning of the word is "completeness" rather than "perfection." All sides of his life and character were harmoniously developed. The R.S.V. and Moffatt in rendering "blameless," are probably as near as we can get to the thought of the Hebrew. The whole orthodoxy of the time proclaimed that this man should prosper, and in fact for many years he did. Then disaster, absolute and horrible, swept over him. Since Job never claims sinlessness, he might have welcomed some normal trouble as the acceptable chastisement of God. But with the afflictions that are his there is only one logical course for him to follow. He must agree with the unanimous voice of the world and of his friends and accept that he is the chief of sinners.

Here is Job's problem. If his theology is correct, he is the chief of sinners, but he *knows* he is not. But if he listens to the testimony of his own heart, then his theology, on which he has built up his whole life, must be wrong. The fact that his concepts of God and man are rudimentary compared to the highly developed ones of Christian dogmatics does not mean that we are not entitled to use the word theology, when speaking of him. This thought is more agonizing even than the thought that he may be the chief of sinners. So he finds that the firm moorings of his life have vanished; that the ship of his life is adrift on the dark ocean, without chart, without light, being carried he knows not where.

He turns to his friends for sympathy, advice and comfort, but dogmatic orthodoxy has ever been without heart or understanding. It cannot conceive of religion as a vitally free fellowship with God, but insists on confining it to the Procrustean bed of man's limited understanding of the omnipotence and all-wisdom and love of God. But though they have no understanding for the plight of their friend, it is the three who really help Job back to peace, for they so increase his anguish that they drive him back to God. It is noticeable that in virtually all of Job's answers to his friends, while he first reacts to what has just been said, he then turns from his friends to God. Much that he says in his anguish is false and exaggerated, and some of it is virtually blasphemous, but what matters is that he turns to God.