

CHAPTER V

THE DEBATE BEGINS

ELIPHAZ THE TEMANITE (CHS. 4, 5)

THEN answered Eliphaz the Temanite, and said,

¹If one assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking?

²Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands.

³Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast confirmed the bowing knees.

⁴But now it is come unto thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.

⁵Is not thy fear of God thy confidence, and thy hope the integrity of thy ways?

⁶Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the upright cut off?

⁷According as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow mischief, reap the same.

⁸By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger are they consumed.

⁹The roaring of the lion, and the voice of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions, are broken.

¹⁰The old lion perisheth for lack of prey, and the whelps of the lioness are scattered abroad.

¹¹Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a whisper thereof.

¹²In thoughts from the visions of the night,

when deep sleep falleth on men,

¹³fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake.

¹⁴Then a breath passed over my face;

the hair of my flesh stood up.

¹⁵It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof; a form was before mine eyes: and I heard a still voice,

¹⁶Shall mortal man be just before God?

shall a man be pure before his Maker?

¹⁷Behold, he putteth no trust in his servants; and his angels he chargeth with folly:

¹⁸how much more them that dwell in houses of clay,

whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed like the moth!

¹⁹Betwixt morning and evening they are destroyed:

they perish for ever without any regarding it.

²⁰Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them?

they die, and that without wisdom.

5. Call now; is there any that will answer thee?

and to which of the holy ones wilt thou turn?

²¹For vexation killeth the foolish man, and jealousy slayeth the silly one.

²²I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation.

- 4His children are far from safety,
 and they are crushed in the gate,
 neither is there any to deliver
 them.
- 5Whose harvest the hungry eateth
 up,
 and taketh it even out of the
 thorns,
 and the snare gapeth for their
 substance.
- 6For affliction cometh not forth of
 the dust,
 neither doth trouble spring out of
 the ground;
- 7but man is born unto trouble,
 as the sparks fly upward.
- 8But as for me, I would seek unto
 God,
 and unto God would I commit my
 cause:
- 9which doeth great things and un-
 searchable;
 marvellous things without number:
- 10who giveth rain upon the earth,
 and sendeth waters upon the fields:
- 11so that he setteth up on high those
 that be low;
 and those which mourn are exalted
 to safety.
- 12He frustrateth the devices of the
 crafty,
 so that their hands can perform
 nothing of worth.
- 13He taketh the wise in their own
 craftiness:
 and the counsel of the froward is
 carried headlong.
- 14They meet with darkness in the
 daytime,
 and grope at noonday as in the
 night.
- 15But he saveth from the sword of
 their mouth,
 even the needy from the hand of
 the mighty.
- 16So the poor hath hope,
 and iniquity stoppeth her mouth.
- 17Behold, happy is the man whom
 God correcteth:
 therefore despise not thou the
 chastening of the Almighty.
- 18For he maketh sore, and bindeth
 up;
 he woundeth, and his hands make
 whole.
- 19He shall deliver thee in six
 troubles;
 yea, in seven there shall no evil
 touch thee.
- 20In famine he shall redeem thee
 from death;
 and in war from the power of the
 sword.
- 21Thou shalt be hid from the scourge
 of the tongue;
 neither shalt thou be afraid of
 destruction when it cometh.
- 22At destruction and dearth thou
 shalt laugh;
 neither shalt thou be afraid of the
 beasts of the earth.
- 23For thou shalt be in league with
 the stones of the field;
 and the beasts of the field shall be
 at peace with thee.
- 24And thou shalt know that thy
 tent is in peace;
 and thou shalt visit thy fold, and
 shalt miss nothing.
- 25Thou shalt know also that thy seed
 shall be great,
 and thine offspring as the grass of
 the earth.
- 26Thou shalt come to thy grave in a
 full age,
 like as a shock of corn cometh in
 its season.
- 27Lo this, we have searched it, so it is;
 hear it, and know thou it for thy
 good.

OF Job's three friends Eliphaz is by far the most attractive. He is an obvious gentleman, sympathetic and courteous. While he will not compromise with his convictions, he does his best not to obtrude them too crudely until Job virtually forces him to. Then, for such is the character of an Eliphaz, he goes much farther than the others (ch. 22). However anachronistic it

may be, I always see him, not in the robes of an eastern gentleman, but in frock coat, striped trousers and top hat, the revered vicar's warden or senior deacon of a wealthy and fashionable church.

Orthodoxy is in itself a very precious thing. It becomes hard, cruel and narrow when it becomes the expression of something other than a continuous living fellowship with the God of truth.

For Eliphaz his religious life revolved around a revelation that God had given him in a dream (4: 12-21):

A spirit glided past my face;
 the hair of my face stood up.
 It stood still,
 but I could not discern its appearance.
 A form was before my eyes;
 there was silence, then I heard a voice:
 "Can mortal man be righteous before God?
 Can a man be pure before his Maker?" (R.S.V.)

His dream left Eliphaz with a profound realization of the sinfulness of man, and it coloured his whole outlook on life from then on. But, as is so often the case with religious experiences, it became something complete in itself, something by which men could be measured and judged. There is absolutely nothing in all that Eliphaz says that suggests that it ever brought him to see that he was the chief of sinners, or that it drew him nearer God.

A religion without personal experience to which testimony can be borne is a poor thing, but there is a very real danger that where there is experience it may be equated with religion. When this happens, the victim of this delusion comes to think that there is little more to be reached, and that his experience is an infallible yard-stick by which he may measure the religion of others. We see this attitude all around us today; there are even denominations that make certain experiences the test of conversion or spirituality.

Eliphaz has much that is beautiful and true to say:

Who ever perished, being innocent?
 or where were the upright cut off?
 According as I have seen, they that plough iniquity,
 and sow trouble, reap the same. . . .
 But man is born unto trouble,
 as the sparks fly upward. . . .
 Behold, happy is the man whom God reproveth:
 therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. . . .

He shall deliver thee in six troubles;
yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.

But behind all this truth and solicitude Job feels himself being poured into the mould of Eliphaz' experience. He may be too kind to pass judgment on his friend, but his whole bearing proclaims what the judgment would be, if it were spoken.

We have much to learn from Eliphaz. A gospel without experience will seldom warm the hearts of men, but an experience preached as the gospel will repel all but those cut in our pattern, while an experience that becomes the yard-stick of truth will turn itself into falsehood.

JOB'S REPLY TO ELIPHAZ (CH. 6)

THEN Job answered and said,
²Oh that my vexation were
 but weighed,
 and my calamity laid in the bal-
 ances together!
³For now it would be heavier than
 the sand of the seas:
 therefore have my words been rash.
⁴For the arrows of the Almighty
 are within me,
 the poison whereof my spirit
 drinketh up;
 the terrors of God do set them-
 selves in array against me.
⁵Doth the wild ass bray when he
 hath grass?
 or loweth the ox over his fodder?
⁶Can that which hath no savour be
 eaten without salt?
 or is there any taste in the white of
 an egg?
⁷My soul refuseth to touch *them*;
 they are as loathsome meat to me.
⁸Oh that I might have my request;
 and that God would grant the
 thing that I long for!
⁹Even that it would please God to
 crush me;
 that he would let loose his hand,
 and cut me off!
¹⁰Then should I yet have comfort;
 yea, I would exult in pain that
 spareth not:
 for I have not denied the words of
 the Holy One.

¹¹What is my strength, that I should
 wait?
 and what is mine end, that I should
 be patient?
¹²Is my strength the strength of
 stones?
 or is my flesh of brass?
¹³Is it not that I have no help in me,
 and that effectual working is
 driven quite from me?
¹⁴To him that is ready to faint kind-
 ness *should be shewed* from his
 friend;
 even to him that forsaketh the
 fear of the Almighty.
¹⁵My brethren have dealt deceitfully
 as a brook,
 as the channel of brooks that pass
 away;
¹⁶which are black by reason of the
 ice, *and* wherein the snow hideth
 itself:
¹⁷what time they wax warm, they
 vanish:
 when it is hot, they are consumed
 out of their place.
¹⁸The caravans *that travel* by the way
 of them turn aside;
 they go up into the waste, and
 perish.
¹⁹The caravans of Tema looked,
 the companies of Sheba waited
 for them.
²⁰They were ashamed because they
 had hoped;

- they came thither, and were confounded.
- ²¹For now ye are nothing; ye see a terror, and are afraid.
- ²²Did I say, Give unto me? or, Offer a present for me of your substance?
- ²³or, Deliver me from the adversary's hand? or, Redeem me from the hand of the oppressors?
- ²⁴Teach me, and I will hold my peace: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred.
- ²⁵How forcible are words of uprightness! but what doth your arguing reprove?
- ²⁶Do ye imagine to reprove words? seeing that the speeches of one that is desperate are as wind.
- ²⁷Yea, ye would cast *lots* upon the fatherless, and make merchandise of your friend.
- ²⁸Now therefore be pleased to look upon me; for surely I shall not lie to your face.
- ²⁹Return, I pray you, let there be no injustice; yea, return again, my cause is righteous.
- ³⁰Is there injustice on my tongue? cannot my taste discern mischievous things?

ONE word spoken by Eliphaz had pricked Job—*ka'as* (5: 2, 6: 2). *Ka'as*, which appears with far too wide a range of renderings in the A.V., is our natural reaction of vexation, impatience, grief and even anger, when faced with injustice and offence. Only a fool will show it when rightly rebuked (Prov. 12: 15f), and only a fool will react this way when chastened by God. (5: 2). The R.V., R.S.V. and I.C.C. render "vexation," while Knox prefers "impatience," but entirely misses the point in Job's answer by using "provocation" in 6: 2; Moffatt's "passion" is misleading. Eliphaz was in fact very unfair, for Job had shown exemplary behaviour when calamity had fallen on him (1: 20f.; 2: 10).

Faced with this determination on the part of his friends not to take him as he is, but as a vindication of their principles, Job reacts with his first vigorous rebuke. He pleads that calamity as great as his may reasonably be allowed an outlet. In our estimate of Job we must never forget his frank avowal that his words have been rash (6: 3, R.V.) or wild (Moffatt). They have been torn from him by anguish and are not the calm reflection of theological reasoning.

We have an interesting confirmation in 6: 6, that Job's sufferings were primarily spiritual. He compares them to tasteless unsalted food and to the *slime of the purslane* (R.S.V., I.C.C.). This would be a strange comparison if he were thinking of violent pain that left him without a moment's ease, but we can see the force of it, if he is thinking of mental suffering that makes him

shudder whenever he allows the thoughts to invade his mind, as he shudders when faced with such food. Sooner than live with them he would die (6: 8f); the sense becomes clear when we realize that the *pain that spareth not* (6: 10, R.V.) is the last pain of death.

Many have found difficulty in *For I have not denied the words of the Holy One* (6: 10). It is argued with justice that Job consistently speaks of Sheol, the abode of the dead, as a place where all the dead are equal (3: 13-18), etc., hence it would make no difference to him after death whether he had kept the words of God or not. But Job is typical of so many truly godly men. He had been able to accept the popular view of rewards and punishments without much thought, but when it was challenged by experience he was prepared to abandon orthodoxy to feel after God. Similarly, while he shared in the then orthodox view of Sheol, in the moment of crisis his knowledge of God told him that there must be something beyond orthodoxy, and that at the last God could not be indifferent to the life lived by man. This is his first step that is to lead him to that ray of light that for a moment pierced beyond the grave (19: 25ff.).

The gist of Eliphaz' advice was that Job should submit himself to God and wait trustfully: Job's scornful answer is that he will be dead long before his friend's hope can be fulfilled (6: 11-14). We are reminded of James' angry sarcasm in his Epistle (2: 15f.). The three friends are then compared to one of the wadies of Trans-jordan "bringing down great floods of dark and troubled waters in spring," when they are least needed; but in the hour of need in the summer heat it is dry. All Job had asked of his friends was understanding and sympathy, not money (6: 22) or valiant deeds (6: 23). Ironically enough, but entirely consistently with human nature, he would probably have received the latter had he asked for them. True sympathy and understanding are always costlier than charity.

THE MISERY OF LIFE (CH. 7)

Is there not a time of service to
man upon earth?
and are not his days like the days
of an hireling?

²As a servant that earnestly desireth
the shadow,
and as an hireling that looketh for
his wages:

³so am I made to possess months of
vanity,
and wearisome nights are appointed
to me.

⁴When I lie down, I say,
When shall I arise? but the night
is long;
and I am full of tossings to and

- fro unto the dawning of the day.
- ⁵My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust;
my skin closeth up and breaketh out afresh.
- ⁶My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
and are spent without hope.
- ⁷Oh remember that my life is wind:
mine eye shall no more see good.
- ⁸The eye of him that seeth me shall behold me no more:
thine eyes shall be upon me, but I shall not be.
- ⁹As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away,
so he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more.
- ¹⁰He shall return no more to his house,
neither shall his place know him any more.
- ¹¹Therefore I will not refrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
- ¹²Am I a sea, or a sea-monster,
that thou settest a watch over me?
- ¹³When I say, My bed shall comfort me,
my couch shall ease my complaint;
¹⁴then thou scarest me with dreams,
and terrifiest me through visions:
¹⁵so that my soul chooseth strangling,
and death rather than *these* my bones.
- ¹⁶I loathe *my life*; I would not live
always:
let me alone; for my days are
vanity.
- ¹⁷What is man, that thou shouldest
magnify him,
and that thou shouldest set thine
heart upon him,
- ¹⁸and that thou shouldest visit him
every morning,
and try him every moment?
- ¹⁹How long wilt thou not look away
from me,
nor let me alone till I swallow
down my spittle?
- ²⁰If I have sinned, what do I unto
thee, O thou watcher of men?
why hast thou set me as a mark
for thee,
so that I am a burden to myself?
- ²¹And why dost thou not pardon my
transgression,
and take away mine iniquity?
For now shall I lie down in the
dust;
and thou shalt seek me diligently,
but I shall not be.

IT was probably the look of troubled or cold incomprehension on his friends' faces that made Job look away from them to God. *Remember* (7: 7) is in the singular, and is addressed to God, not to Job's friends; there is no need to doubt that this holds good for the whole chapter.

As we trace our way through the book we find that Job's sufferings bring him not only to a truer knowledge of God but also to a more living knowledge of his fellow men. As he turned from the puzzled incomprehension of his friends, he suddenly realized with a start that it was not only he whom they failed to understand, and that his lot was far from being unique. It was all very well for Eliphaz to fold his hands over his plump belly and say sententiously, *Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward*. It was true enough, but it meant all too little to him.

But when Job breaks out, *Is there not hard labour for man upon earth? and are not his days like the days of an hireling?* (7: 1), for a moment we are introduced to the solidarity of suffering. But it is only in Christ that the solidarity of suffering can become really constructive. For Job it only increased his burden, for now he saw it as only an aggravation of misery ample in itself.

Remarkably enough, Job's increased vision of suffering did not shake his trust in God. With a touching naïvety he says, *Thine eyes shall be upon me, but I shall not be* (7: 8). It is quite understandable that the rabbis should be upset by a man like Choni the Circle-drawer,* of whom Simeon ben Shetach said that he behaved petulantly before God as a son behaves before his father. But both in public and in private prayer there is a strange lack of willingness among many Christians to be completely frank with their heavenly Father. This is one of the greatest lessons we can learn from Jeremiah and Job. They never hesitated to open their hearts to God, even though men might call their words blasphemy. Here Job suggests that God has in some strange aberration forgotten His normal behaviour and that when the mood is over He will look for Job to be kind to him again, but it will then be too late, for he will be among the dead.

There follow some of Job's bitterest words (7: 11-21), which he must have regretted with all his heart, after God had revealed Himself to him. Job has been led to reject the orthodoxy in which he had been reared and which Eliphaz has been repeating to him, but so far he cannot grasp that God may be doing something entirely alien to man's beliefs about Him. It is a weakness of ours to assume, when in real or pretended humility we acknowledge that we do not understand God's working in any particular circumstance, that we are dealing merely with an uncommon variant of the normal. Man hates to say that he does not understand what God's intentions may be. That is why our comfort and advice so often miss the mark with those who suffer. So Job assumes that his sufferings must have some relation to his sins. He tells God, using popular mythological language, that after all he has never been, like the powers of Chaos, a rebel against Him, nor has his sin, whatever it may have been, injured the majesty

* Among the stories told of him is that in a time of great drought he drew a circle in the dust and told God that he was not going to step outside it until God gave rain. When a downpour followed, he told God that they did not want a flood but suitable rain for the fields. In this too he was heard.

of the Almighty. Once again, in v. 21, he takes up the thought of v. 8, and says that when God changes His mind it will be too late, for he will be gone.

BILDAD THE SHUHITE (CH. 8)

THEN answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said,

²How long wilt thou speak these things?

and *how long* shall the words of thy mouth be *like* a mighty wind?

³Doth God pervert judgement?

or doth the Almighty pervert justice?

⁴If thy children sinned against him, and he delivered them into the hand of their transgression:

⁵if thou wouldest seek diligently unto God, and make thy supplication to the Almighty;

⁶if thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee,

and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.

⁷And though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase.

⁸For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and apply thyself to that which their fathers have searched out:

⁹(for we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)

¹⁰shall not they teach thee, and tell thee,

and utter words out of their heart?

¹¹Can the papyrus grow up without mire?

can the reed-grass grow without water?

¹²Whilst it is yet in its greenness, and not cut down,

it withereth before any *other* herb.

¹³So are the paths of all that forget God;

and the hope of the godless man shall perish:

¹⁴whose confidence shall be cut off, and whose trust is a spider's web.

¹⁵He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand:

he shall hold fast thereby, but it shall not endure.

¹⁶He is green before the sun, and his shoots go forth over his garden.

¹⁷His roots are wrapped about the heap, he beholdeth the place of stones.

¹⁸If he be destroyed from his place, then it shall deny him, *saying*, I have not seen thee.

¹⁹Behold, this is the joy of his way, and out of the earth shall others spring.

²⁰Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he uphold the evil-doers.

²¹He will yet fill thy mouth with laughter, and thy lips with shouting.

²²They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame;

and the tent of the wicked shall be no more.

BILDAD is in many ways the most dogmatic of the three friends. He is not as downright brutal as Zophar, but he is more pitiless. He is the only one to refer to the fate of Job's children:

If your children have sinned against Him,

He has delivered them into the power of their transgression

(8: 4),

where the "if" is of course a polite "because." Left to himself he would probably have been a humble and likeable man, but he had constituted himself a champion of the orthodoxy of the past. If he had lived at a later period, he would willingly have burnt Job's body in the hope of saving his soul.

His position is made clear in 8: 8ff.:

For inquire, I pray you, of bygone ages,
and consider what the fathers have found;
for we are but of yesterday, and know nothing,
for our days on earth are a shadow.
Will they not teach you, and tell you,
and utter words out of their understanding? (R.S.V.)

Bildad is a pillar of the Church and a champion of orthodoxy. We can ill do without him and he has a rare gift of recognizing the first insidious inroads of false doctrine. Just because he has no axe to grind, because he is the faithful depository of the wisdom and experience of the past, he is often a valued and revered teacher. But for all that he is apt to be the Church's worst friend in the hour of change and of crisis. Above all, when men are sore tried and distressed, and the landmarks of life are hidden, it is seldom to Bildad that they turn.

I cannot think of Bildad without contrasting him with John Robinson at Delfshaven in 1620, as he speaks to the members of his church leaving for the new world:

"I charge you before God and His blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveals anything to you by any other instruments of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth by my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of those reformed churches which are come to a period in religion, and will go, at present, no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. . . ."

Entirely consistently with his inherited theology, Bildad can

only see life as it conforms to the pattern set for it. Characteristically, where Eliphaz had spoken of the foolish and had seen all men with their share of suffering, Bildad speaks of the perfect—*tam*, cf. 1:1 and p. 31—and the evil-doers (8:20), and the wicked (8:22). These last, the *resha'im*, are to recur repeatedly from this time on. We would do well to notice that it is not sinners in general who are intended. A study of the passages where they are mentioned will show that they are rich and mighty men, such as Job was before his calamity, who, however, flaunt their wickedness in the sight of God and man. The problem of the wicked in Job is not concerned with the secret sinner or the small man ground down in life, but with those for whom there is no excuse in their sinning.

It would seem at first reading that Bildad was merely shocked at the wildness of Job's words and that he was really convinced of his essential innocence (8:20f.). When, however, he says,

Will the papyrus rise up proudly without mire?

Will the reed-grass grow without water? (8:11, I.C.C.)

he seems to be suggesting that there is no smoke without fire. His real feelings are suddenly revealed at the very end, when he says, *And the tent of the wicked shall be no more* (8:22b); we cannot doubt that he is thinking of Job's loss of all things. Though he is holding open the door of repentance to Job, he leaves no doubt that he considers him one of the wicked on whom the well-merited judgments of God have fallen.

JOB'S REPLY TO BILDAD (CH. 9:1-24)

THEN Job answered and said,
²Of a truth I know that it is so:
 but how can man be just with
 God?

³If one should desire to contend
 with him,
 he could not answer him one of a
 thousand.

⁴*He is wise in heart, and mighty in
 strength:*
 who hath hardened himself against
 him, and prospered?

⁵Which removeth the mountains,
 and they know it not,
 when he overturneth them in his
 anger.

⁶Which shaketh the earth out of
 her place,
 and the pillars thereof trem-
 ble.

⁷Which commandeth the sun, and
 it riseth not;
 and sealeth up the stars.

⁸Which alone stretcheth out the
 heavens,
 and treadeth upon the waves of the
 sea.

⁹Which maketh the Bear, Orion,
 and the Pleiades,
 and the chambers of the south.

¹⁰Which doeth great things past
 finding out;

- yea, marvellous things without number.
- ¹¹Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not:
he passeth on also, but I perceive him not.
- ¹²Behold, he seizeth *the prey*, who can hinder him?
who will say unto him, What doest thou?
- ¹³God will not withdraw his anger;
the helpers of Rahab did stoop under him.
- ¹⁴How much less shall I answer him,
and choose out my words *to reason* with him?
- ¹⁵Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer;
I would make supplication to mine adversary.
- ¹⁶If I had called, and he had answered me;
yet would I not believe that he hearkened unto my voice.
- ¹⁷For he breaketh me with a tempest,
and multiplieth my wounds without cause.
- ¹⁸He will not suffer me to take my breath,
but filleth me with bitterness.
- ¹⁹If *we speak* of the strength of the mighty, lo, *he is there!*
and if of judgement, who will appoint me a time?
- ²⁰Though I be righteous, mine own mouth shall condemn me:
though I be perfect, he shall prove me perverse.
- ²¹I am perfect; I regard not myself;
I despise my life.
- ²²It is all one; therefore I say,
He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.
- ²³If the scourge slay suddenly,
he will mock at the calamity of the innocent.
- ²⁴The earth is given into the hand of the wicked:
he covereth the faces of the judges thereof;
if *it be not he*, who then is it?

JOB knew Bildad from of old, and doubtless he anticipated all he had to say as soon as he opened his mouth. So there are no wild reproaches in his answer.

I pointed out in ch. II that we are dealing with wisdom literature, with men striving by their wisdom to discover the ways of God. The everlasting power and divinity of God are revealed to us in God's creation (Rom. 1: 20), but the moral character of God is only truly recognizable in the sphere of redemptive revelation—and Job and his friends were not even within the covenant of Sinai, still less the new covenant. We should never forget that man's conscience is very far from being an infallible guide to God's moral demands on men. Its purpose is rather to insist that God does make such demands.

Job accepts Bildad's insistence on the justice of God (8: 3), but sets it in a new setting. When Eliphaz said, *Can mortal man be righteous before God?* (4: 17), he was thinking of the sinfulness of man. Job takes up the thought (9: 2), but makes it mean that man is not in the position to establish his right before God, for God always has the *power* to prove him wrong. There are in the law of Moses certain apparently arbitrary commandments which

have been the despair of commentators. The only reasonable interpretation to be placed on them is that they are a revelation of a sovereign power that has the right to impose arbitrary commands. Certainly in the experience of the saints there are happenings which cannot be explained by finite man, though doubtless we shall understand them in eternity. Job tells his friends that—apart from revelation—there is no evidence of God's moral government in the affairs of this world.

He then strangely anticipates God's own revelation to him, and on the basis of God's all-might challenges the possibility of knowing God's ways;

Lo, He goeth by me, and I see Him not:

He passeth on also, but I perceive Him not (9: 11)

is a challenge to the whole concept that God's ways are essentially understandable. What to his friends is even worse, he flatly denies their whole interpretation of life:

The earth is given into the hand of the wicked:

He covereth the faces of the judges thereof;

if it be not He, who then is it? (9: 24).

We shall see that the major part of their later discussion revolves around this statement by Job.

But how is it that men living in the same land, brought up together, can come to such diametrically opposed views of society? Life around us is so rich and manifold that if we are to understand any of its manifestations we must learn to choose those phenomena that are significant and virtually to ignore the rest. That is what the scientist is doing all the time. But few of us are trained scientists or observers. We normally see what we want to see, and overlook or minimize that which does not suit our theories. The teaching of the Wise was based on carefully selected facts. When Job had to suffer, his eyes were opened to the suffering around him; when he felt the smart of injustice, he saw for the first time clearly the prevalence of injustice around him. We know that Job's friends were wrong; we must not jump to the conclusion that Job was right. They and he alike are giving us partial views of reality, but, for all that, Job tends to see more of the essentials than they do. Each in his own way, Job's friends see the world through the spectacles of their respective theories. Job has no theory; he is an explorer of new realms.

Even though his observation is distorted by passion and suffering, it still remains nearer the truth than the picture which has to conform to preconceived ideas.

We do well to remember this. God's estimate of man and his life is not the sinner's, and the world is seldom willing to welcome the proclamation of human sin. It is seldom, however, that the man caught up in a system sees the world as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. The more authoritarian the system, the more distorted its view of the world and of man. The captives of the system, especially our Bildads, sincerely reverence God's revelation and wish to know His will and do it. For all that they insist that revelation and will must conform to their understanding and tradition, and so they fail to grasp either.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY (CHS. 9: 25-10: 22)

²⁵Now my days are swifter than
a runner:
they flee away, they see no
good.

²⁶They are passed away as the ships
of reed:
as the eagle that swoopeth on the
prey.

²⁷If I say, I will forget my complaint,
I will put off my *sad* countenance,
and be of good cheer:

²⁸I am afraid of all my sorrows,
I know that thou wilt not hold me
innocent.

²⁹I shall be condemned;
why then do I labour in vain?

³⁰If I wash myself with snow,
and cleanse my hands with lye;

³¹yet wilt thou plunge me in the
ditch,
and mine own clothes shall abhor
me.

³²For he is not a man, as I am, that
I should answer him,
that we should come together in
judgement.

³³There is no umpire betwixt us,
that might lay his hand upon us
both.

³⁴Let him take his rod away from
me,
and let not his terror make me
afraid:

³⁵then would I speak, and not fear
him; for I am not so in myself.

10. My soul is weary of my life;
I will give free course to my com-
plaint;
I will speak in the bitterness of my
soul.

¹I will say unto God, Do not con-
demn me;
shew me wherefore thou contend-
est with me.

²Is it good unto thee that thou
shouldest oppress,
that thou shouldest despise the
work of thine hands,
and shine upon the counsel of the
wicked?

³Hast thou eyes of flesh,
or seest thou as man seeth?

⁴Are thy days as the days of man,
or thy years as man's days,

⁵that thou inquirest after mine
iniquity,
and searchest after my sin,
⁶although thou knowest that I am
not wicked;
and there is none that can deliver
out of thine hand?

⁷Thine hands have framed me and
fashioned me
together round about; yet thou
dost destroy me.

- Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast fashioned me as clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?
- ¹⁰Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?
- ¹¹Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.
- ¹²Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.
- ¹³Yet these things thou didst hide in thine heart;
I know that this is with thee:
- ¹⁴If I sin, then thou markest me, and thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.
- ¹⁵If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet shall I not lift up my head; being filled with ignominy and looking upon mine affliction.
- ¹⁶And if *my head* exalt itself, thou huntest me as a lion:
- and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me.
- ¹⁷Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me, changes and warfare are with me.
- ¹⁸Wherefore then hast thou brought me forth out of the womb?
I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me.
- ¹⁹I should have been as though I had not been;
I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.
- ²⁰Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,
- ²¹Before I go whence I shall not return,
to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death;
- ²²A land of thick darkness, as darkness *itself*;
of the shadow of death, without any order,
and where the light is as darkness.

JOB had not proclaimed the power of God to his friends as a mere abstract principle. The time was soon to come when the knowledge of the all-might of God, not as grasped by his own intellect but as revealed by God Himself, would bring peace to the wounded soul of Job. But that was not yet. At the moment he was overwhelmed; shut in on every side by a power he neither knew nor understood, he refused to abandon his belief that it was merciful and loving, and yet he could see no signs of mercy and love. He longed to come before His judgment seat and reason his case before Him, and yet he knew he could never prove his case. So when he had thrown down his challenge to Bildad (9:24), he turned to speak to God. In this section Job no longer speaks about God, but to Him; indeed we may question how far his friends were even intended to hear him.

There are few more affecting passages in Scripture. Here is a broken man, who has lost all. Racked with pain and troubled in heart, he yet refuses to listen either to his fellow townfolk or to his friends. He knows himself a sinner, yet he cannot believe that God has cast him off. He longs for a daysman, an umpire,

between him and His God, but not to Job was there given a vision of the Mediator who was to come. So he turns in trembling hope to his Creator, but all he can ask for is a few days of brightness before he goes *to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death* (10: 21).

ZOPHAR THE NAAMATHITE (CH. 11)

THEN answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said,

²Should not the multitude of words be answered?

and should a man full of talk be justified?

³Should thy boastings make men hold their peace?

and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?

⁴For thou sayest, My doctrine is pure,

and I am clean in thine eyes.

⁵But Oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee;

⁶and that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom,

that it is manifold in effectual working!

Know therefore that God remitteth unto thee of thine iniquity.

⁷Canst thou find out the deep things of God?

canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

⁸It is high as heaven; what canst thou do?

deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know?

⁹The measure thereof is longer than the earth,

and broader than the sea.

¹⁰If he pass through, and shut up,

and call unto judgement, then who can hinder him?

¹¹For he knoweth vain men:

he seeth iniquity also, even though he consider it not.

¹²But an empty man will get understanding,

when a wild ass's colt is born a man.

¹³If thou set thine heart aright, and stretch out thine hands toward him;

¹⁴if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away,

and let not unrighteousness dwell in thy tents;

¹⁵surely then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot;

yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear:

¹⁶for thou shalt forget thy misery; thou shalt remember it as waters that are passed away:

¹⁷and *thy* life shall be clearer than the noonday;

though there be darkness, it shall be as the morning.

¹⁸And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope;

yea, thou shalt search *about thee*, and shalt take thy rest in safety.

¹⁹Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid;

yea, many shall make suit unto thee.

²⁰But the eyes of the wicked shall fail,

and they shall have no way to flee, and their hope shall be the giving up of the ghost.

WHETHER or not Job intended his words to God to be heard and taken in by his friends, they drove Zophar to fury, and he could hardly refrain from interrupting. As soon as Job had finished, he brushed all to one side as just "words." He is the typical man of common sense, for whom life holds few

problems, and who is suspicious of him who finds them, and still more of him who discusses them.

It is not that he is not a God-fearing man, but simply that the mysteries of God do not concern him, for they are too high:

Canst thou find out the deep things of God?

Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?

It is high as heaven; what canst thou do?

deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know? (11: 7f).

For him Job's "Why?" is Job's greatest sin, the supreme proof that he had not even begun to walk in the paths of Wisdom:

An empty man will get understanding,

when a wild ass's colt is born a man (11: 12).

All Job has to do is to set his heart aright and pray and put away iniquity (11: 13f.) and all will be perfectly all right.

All of us are familiar with Zophar. He is the man who is perpetually demanding the simple Gospel, by which he does not mean the greatest mystery of God's love expressed so that a child can understand it, but God's love stripped of all mystery. He looks on every doubt as being in itself sin, and every difficulty as the sign of an evil heart of unbelief. The neurotic and the mentally ill receive short shrift at his hands, and he generally has some authority, not over profound, appeal to whom settles every controversy. He is uneasy the moment intellectual discussion begins, and he finds the late Professor Joad's famous opening gambit, "It all depends on what you mean by . . .", a sign of intellectual dishonesty. To suggest to him that a verse of Scripture may bear a different sense than does its plain meaning in the Authorised Version is the cloven hoof of modernism, while to appeal to the Greek and the Hebrew is mere sophistry.

The Church needs its Zophars. They are a salutary check upon us when we grow too abstract, too clever, too intellectual, when we feed the flock on wind and speculation. Their shrewd common sense will often show a committee the obvious, and they often strip the veil of make-believe from man's heart. But for all that, God have mercy on Job when he falls into Zophar's hands!

Eliphaz is too gentlemanly to be over-harsh with Job, until Job rouses him to theological fury. Bildad is too humble to want to sit as judge on Job himself; he would rather that the voices of the past should judge. But Zophar does not hesitate: *Know therefore*

that God remitteth unto thee of thine iniquity (11: 6), i.e. compared with what Job's sin deserves his calamities are very forgiveness itself.

JOB'S REPLY TO ZOPHAR (CHS. 12: 1-13: 19)

- T**HEN Job answered and said,
²No doubt but ye are the people,
 and wisdom shall die with you.
³But I have understanding as well as you;
 I am not inferior to you:
 yea, who knoweth not such things as these?
⁴I am as one that is a laughing-stock to his neighbour,
 a man that called upon God, and he answered him:
 the just, the perfect man is a laughing-stock.
⁵In the thought of him that is at ease there is contempt for misfortune;
 it is ready for them whose foot slip-peth.
⁶The tents of robbers prosper,
 and they that provoke God are secure;
 that bring *their* God in their hand.
⁷But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee;
 and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee:
⁸or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee;
 and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.
⁹Who knoweth not by all these,
 that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?
¹⁰In whose hand is the soul of every living thing,
 and the breath of all mankind.
¹¹Doth not the ear try words,
 even as the palate tasteth its meat?
¹²With aged men is wisdom,
 and in length of days understanding.
¹³With him is wisdom and might;
 he hath counsel and understanding.
- ¹⁴Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again;
 he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening.
¹⁵Behold, he withholdeth the waters,
 and they dry up;
 again, he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth.
¹⁶With him is strength and sound wisdom;
 the deceived and the deceiver are his.
¹⁷He leadeth counsellors away spoiled,
 and judges maketh he fools.
¹⁸He looseth the bond of kings,
 and bindeth their loins with a girdle.
¹⁹He leadeth priests away spoiled,
 and overthroweth the mighty.
²⁰He removeth the speech of the trusty,
 and taketh away the understanding of the elders.
²¹He poureth contempt upon princes,
 and looseth the belt of the strong.
²²He discovereth deep things out of darkness,
 and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.
²³He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them:
 he spreadeth the nations abroad,
 and bringeth them in.
²⁴He taketh away the heart of the chiefs of the people of the earth,
 and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way.
²⁵They grope in the dark without light,
 and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.
13. Lo mine eye hath seen all *this*,
 mine ear hath heard and understood it.

- ⁸What ye know, *the same* do I know also:
I am not inferior unto you.
- ⁹Surely I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to reason with God.
- ⁴But ye are forgers of lies,
ye are all physicians of no value.
- ⁶Oh that ye would altogether hold your peace!
and it should be your wisdom.
- ⁶Hear now my reasoning,
and hearken to the pleadings of my lips.
- ⁷Will ye speak unrighteously for God,
and talk deceitfully for him?
- ⁸Will ye respect his person?
will ye contend for God?
- ⁹Is it good that he should search you out?
or as one deceiveth a man, will ye deceive him?
- ¹⁰He will surely reprove you,
if ye do secretly respect persons.
- ¹¹Shall not his excellency make you afraid,
and his dread fall upon you?
- ¹²Your memorable sayings *are* proverbs of ashes,
your defences *are* defences of clay.
- ¹³Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak,
and let come on me what will.
- ¹⁴Wherefore should I take my flesh in my teeth,
and put my life in mine hand?
- ¹⁵Though he slay me, yet will I wait for him:
nevertheless I will maintain my ways before him.
- ¹⁶This also shall be my salvation;
that a godless man shall not come before him.
- ¹⁷Hear diligently my speech,
and let my declaration be in your ears.
- ¹⁸Behold now, I have ordered my cause;
I know that I shall be justified.
- ¹⁹Who is he that will contend with me?
for now shall I hold my peace and give up the ghost.

FACED with Bildad's appeal to the past, Job must have felt helpless trying to answer a man who would not think for himself. Faced with Zophar's brutal common sense that made all revolve around his own understanding, he felt hopeless, and for a moment he broke out in bitter sarcasm: *No doubt but ye are the people* [i.e. all the wisdom of the world is found in you, and so] *wisdom shall die with you* (12: 2). Sarcasm has its place in the Christian's armoury, for sometimes it is the only way to deflate the proud complacency of the self-satisfied. But Job's barb is too weak to puncture the hide of these champions of orthodoxy. He would have needed a harpoon at the least: as it is he only pricks and angers them.

A new thought now begins to emerge. The fact that his friends failed to understand him, were unable to comfort him, and even condemned him for imagined sin, were painful but bearable. But now has come Zophar's bitter jibe about the ass's colt (11: 12, R.V. mg.). Job sees his position among the Wise denied, attributed doubtless to his skill in learning the right answers by rote; his asking of awkward questions is considered merely a sign of stupidity. Job's friends have been caught in the trap that always

lies hidden for the defenders of orthodoxy, however the term be defined, *viz.* the belief that failure to agree with the dominant majority must be due to intellectual, moral or spiritual faults. With their falling into this trap the discussion tends to move from Job and his personal sufferings (though these remain in the forefront) to the wider problem of whether the experience and speculation of the Wise enable them to dogmatize on the working out of God's will among men.

Had the wisdom shown by his friends been something exceptional, it might have been bearable, but Zophar's shallow agnosticism is infuriating. What of it if a righteous man like Job becomes a laughing-stock? God used to answer his prayers—no matter! Men used to find nothing to criticize in him (*perfect*, 12: 4)—what of it? On the other hand, violent men, who know no other god than their weapons (*that bring their god in their hand*, 12: 6, R.V. mg.), prosper—oh, well, God knows the answer to such anomalies! The all-might of God is something so obvious that even birds and beasts and fishes know that God stands behind all that happens (12: 7)—though modern man has often fallen below the level of the brute creation in this! For Zophar to suggest that Job did not know this is a gratuitous insult (13: 1f.).

There is little agreement as to how we should interpret 12: 11–25 R.V. mg., Moffatt, Peake, I.C.C., Strahan all find a contrast between vv. 12 and 13; in other words Job is rejecting the basis of Bildad's confidence (8: 8) and inferentially of his friends as well, and proclaiming that in God alone is wisdom. To me it seems far more likely that Job is continuing his sarcasm. After re-affirming the maxim they had constantly heard, when they had first sat at the feet of the Wise:

With aged men is wisdom,
and in length of days understanding (12: 12),

he heaps afforism on afforism:

All God's doing; his are the wisdom and the power; to him belong prudence in act and discernment. The ruins he makes, none can rebuild, his imprisonment none can escape; withholds he the rain, all is dried up; sends he rain, it floods all the ground. Yes, he is strong, he is wise; reads the knave's heart as easily as the fool's. He can thwart the counsellor, bemuse the judge, exchange the king's baldrick for the rope of a prisoner, lead the priest away ungowned, dispossess the noble, bewitch the lips

that never erred, rob the elder of his prudence, bring princes into contempt, unman the strong. Things deep hidden in darkness he reveals, kindles the light where death's shadow lay, brings growth or ruin to a people, and what he has ruined restores. The hearts of chieftains he bewilders, leading them by false paths to vain ends, till all light fails, and they grope about in darkness, wander aimless like a drunkard after wine (12: 13-25, Knox).

Yes, of course all this is true, and Job can say it as well or better than his friends, but the unspoken question remains: How much nearer are we to understanding God's ways and works?

But Job cannot believe that God is merely the Unknowable. He wants to speak to the Almighty and argue things out with Him (13: 3). His original cry of "Why?" had been an invitation to his friends to help him in this quest. But he had found them mere windbags, standing up for God with sophistries and empty maxims. The wish to defend God from the attacks and complaints of men may be natural and laudable, but in the case of Job's friends, as so often, there was less concern for God's glory and more for a parade of their own wisdom. But even where the motives are correct it is apt to be love's labour lost. God can look after Himself, and we always run the grave risk of re-creating Him in our own image before we are ready "to justify His ways to men" (13: 4-12).

It had been agony for Job to lose his comfortable, ready-made views of God's providence, and he recognizes that it is taking his life in his hand (13: 14) to seek an interview with God and to argue things out with Him. To this many will say Amen; they will point to those who, unsatisfied with the old orthodoxies, have sought to know more and more fully and have made shipwreck of their faith. This is, alas, all too true, but where this is so, the motive of the search has often been at fault, and they have sought the answer by the wrong means. We must hesitate in judgment, however, for often enough the heresies of yesterday are the orthodoxies of today, and where we have thought of shipwreck, they have been sailing unknown seas and gathering great wealth.

Job is emboldened in his undertaking, for he knows that a godless man would not and could not so come before God (13: 16). So strongly does his faith blaze forth that he assures his genuinely horror-struck friends, *I know I shall be justified* (13: 18), and tells

them that if any can bring a justified charge against him, *then would I hold my peace and give up the ghost* (13: 19). Job is so confident that, if God will but lift his afflictions for the moment and veil His glory, he is content to be either plaintiff or defendant.

JOB PLEADS HIS CAUSE (CHS. 13: 20-14: 22)

- ²⁰ ONLY do not two things unto me,
then will I not hide myself from thy face:
²¹withdraw thine hand far from me;
and let not thy terror make me afraid.
²²Then call thou, and I will answer;
or let me speak, and answer thou me.
²³How many are mine iniquities and sins?
make me to know my transgression and my sin.
²⁴Wherefore hidest thou thy face,
and holdest me for thine enemy?
²⁵Wilt thou harass a driven leaf?
and wilt thou pursue the dry stubble?
²⁶For thou writest bitter things against me,
and makest me to inherit the iniquities of my youth:
²⁷thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and markest all my paths;
thou drawest thee a line about the soles of my feet:
²⁸though I am like a rotten thing that consumeth,
like a garment that is moth-eaten.
14. Man that is born of a woman
is of few days, and full of trouble.
¹He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down:
he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.
²And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one,
and bringest me into judgement with thee?
³Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
not one.
⁴Seeing his days are determined,
- the number of his months is with thee,
and thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;
⁵look away from him, that he may rest,
till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.
⁷For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.
⁸Though the root thereof wax old in the earth,
and the stock thereof die in the ground;
⁹yet through the scent of water it will bud,
and put forth boughs like a plant.
¹⁰But man dieth, and wasteth away:
yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?
¹¹As the waters fail from the sea,
and the river decayeth and drieth up;
¹²so man lieth down and riseth not:
till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake,
nor be roused out of their sleep.
¹³Oh that thou wouldest hide me in Sheol,
that thou wouldest keep me secret,
until thy wrath be past,
that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!
¹⁴If a man die, shall he live *again*?
all the days of my warfare would I wait,
till my release should come.
¹⁵Thou shouldest call, and I would answer thee:
thou wouldest have a desire to the work of thine hands.
¹⁶But now thou numberest my steps:

- dost thou not watch over my sin?
- ¹⁷My transgression is sealed up in a bag,
and thou fastenest up mine iniquity.
- ¹⁸And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought,
and the rock is removed out of its place;
- ¹⁹the waters wear the stones;
the overflowings thereof wash away the dust of the earth:
- and thou destroyest the hope of man.
- ²⁰Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth;
thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away.
- ²¹His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not;
and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them.
- ²²But his flesh upon him hath pain,
and his soul within him mourneth.

AFTER his bold declaration of confidence as to the outcome of his hearing before God (13: 20ff.) Job begins by demanding to know what God has against him: *How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin* (13: 23). This is not in itself a declaration of guilt. All along Job's thesis is that, while he is a sinner, he is not so in a measure that would justify his sufferings. He offers God the unexpressed alternative of revealing sins that would justify his sufferings or of motivating his sufferings on some other ground. Obviously it is the latter that he really expects.

Here we must imagine a dramatic pause. Job looks vainly to the brazen vault of heaven for an answer, while his friends huddle together in startled fear lest a thunderbolt or fire from heaven should silence the blasphemy. But neither hope nor fear is fulfilled.

Job continues by pleading that if there are no such sins to reveal he is too insignificant for God to make such an example of him (13: 24-28). By *the iniquities of my youth* we must not understand that Job had sown his wild oats as a young man. He is rather suggesting that the only conceivable reason for his suffering is as insignificant as the sufferer himself.

Since God will not answer Job's plea, Job turns and arraigns God. He affirms that not only is God's treatment of Job unworthy, but so is His treatment of men in general (14: 1-12). Job cries, *Oh that a clean thing could come out of an unclean! Not one can* (14: 4). Since all the severity of God can never transform man, God should *look away from man* in his frailty, for all too soon he will go to his "long home." Job is not here asking God to cease being from the judge of all the earth. Even when he later questions the morality of God's rule, he does so with fear in his

heart, lest by any means he might be correct. He is here concerned with the ordinary man, more sinned against than sinning, more labouring than enjoying the fruits of his lands, more suffering than rejoicing.

The ancient Israelites, or rather those among them from whom sprang the writers of the Old Testament, so lived in consciousness of Jehovah's presence and favour that they were normally able to live in the passing moment, looking neither to the disappointed hopes of yesterday nor to their fears for tomorrow. For them the present, blessed by the presence of God, was essentially good, and so the Old Testament tends to be an optimistic book. From time to time, however, the writer detaches himself from the present and looks on life as a whole. Then a pessimistic note, gilded it is true with the sunshine of God, breaks through. Death stands there in the shadows, bringing to naught all man's efforts and achievements. Job sees the irony that while the cut-down or dying tree may yet live (14: 7ff—a common phenomenon in tropical and sub-tropical climates, cf. Is. 6: 13, 11: 1, R.V., and better R.S.V.) no such hope awaits man.

Western civilization today is essentially optimistic. We can so drug ourselves with luxuries, machine-made entertainment and the "security" of the welfare state that neither the certainty of death nor the threat of nuclear weapons brings us to look on life as a whole. "Life is worth living" is the slogan of our age. Is it mere coincidence that the suicide rate is highest in those lands and among those social classes where it is easiest to refuse to see life as it really is? It is interesting how there is a growing tendency, which reaches its climax in North America, to wrap death in decent obscurity by the skill of the undertaker, the crematorium and the park-cemetery. The modern man revolts against the old hymn:

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

For all that there stands written over all life, even more clearly than for Job, "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment."

SHEOL

We cannot think otherwise of God than as the origin of all wisdom and rational thought. For all that, there is in God's wisdom and logic an element too high for man's mind to grasp; He says, "My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Logically the view should be correct that when man dies he ceases to exist. Man is above all *nephesh*, which in suitable contexts our older translations consistently render "soul." This is most unfortunate, for neither in popular use nor in the normal understanding of dogmatic theology do the two words approximate in meaning.

Nephesh is the *totality* that results when body and spirit are united. The R.S.V. and Moffatt render Gen. 2: 7 far more satisfactorily by "and man became a living being"; Knox's "a living person" is perhaps even better. When the body returns to the dust and the spirit returns to Him who gave it, logically the *nephesh*, the personality of man, should vanish. In fact the Old Testament teaches that it continues a shadow existence in Sheol (New Testament, Hades). It is a shadow existence because there is no spirit to impel it to action, and no body through which it can act, but for all that the *nephesh* continues to vegetate unimpaired.

In 3: 11-26, Job had craved death, but subsequently we find the conflict between this longing and the desire for a little peace and sunshine before the inevitable end comes. In ch. 14 Job reacts doubly against death: not merely is there the longing for a few peaceful hours, but his natural fear of death and its finality has reasserted itself. Once more (cf. 7: 8, 21) the thought rises that God's anger with him must be some strange passing aberration. He fears, however, that he cannot hold out until it passes, and so he prays (14: 13) in agony that he may enjoy all the advantages of death without its finality. Then, startled, he realizes where his thoughts have led him: *If a man die, shall he live again?* The answer implied is clearly "No." We must, however, note clearly that Job is not thinking of resurrection in Christian terms, but of a continuance of life which death has interrupted. Even if we were to supply the answer "Yes," the end of this living again would again be death.

Though as yet it is a striking thought regretfully to be pushed away, were it possible for him to have a new span of life lived out

under God's smile and favour, he would gladly bear *all the days of my service* (14: 14) in the agony of this life and in the waiting in Sheol. As it is, all he has to hope for is a period of unexplained suffering followed by a name forgotten among men, and the hopeless and purposeless existence of Sheol.

Thou destroyest the hope of man.

Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth;

Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away.

His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not;

And they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not.

So ends the first round of the debate. Job's three friends have revealed clearly how each, according to his own character and experience, has prejudged him whom he called friend by trying to accommodate his case to his own wonted measuring rod. Job has writhed under his friends' condemnation and lack of sympathy and understanding. The heavens have been silent to reproach and appeal alike. Broken Job collapses on the dung-hill as he accepts that death with all its finality is all that he can expect.

It does not end here, however, for orthodoxy has been outraged and is on the war-path looking for blood.