

THE BOOK OF JOB.

I.—THE PROLOGUE. (*Concluded.*)

THE Second Trial of Job was probably divided from the First by a considerable interval. The Targum places a full year between them; other authorities place a month: neither the one assumption nor the other, however, has any more solid foundation than the conjecture that the Poet conceived of the heavenly Cabinet as meeting at stated and regular intervals. But though we cannot pretend to determine dates, it is surely reasonable to infer from what we know of the moral history and experience of man that the first temptation would be allowed time to *work*, to develop its force and bitterness, to accumulate its full weight; and that the heart of Job, rocking to and fro under so amazing a stress of misfortune, would be long before it regained its poise and so far adjusted itself to its new condition as to be able to say,—

“Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken;
Blessed be the Name of Jehovah.”

Whatever the interval, we may be sure that the second temptation came soon enough; for, in some respects, it was far more searching and penetrating than the first. Mere physical health does more to sustain the spirit than we suspect until our health

is seriously impaired. The calamities which had already befallen Job were only too likely to expose him to the suspicion and scorn of the tribes, as a man smitten by God for his sins; but it was barely possible that they might see unparalleled misfortune in them rather than unparalleled guilt. When, however, the very person of Job was invaded by a rare and monstrous form of disease, which made him loathsome to all who saw him as well as to himself, his monstrous guilt would be assumed as past all doubt. And, in any case, the loss of health was an *additional* trial; it came on the back of all other losses, all other causes for wonder, and sorrow, and resentment. If, in this second trial, God's eulogy of the afflicted Patriarch is warmer and his pity for him more profound, on the other hand, the malignity of Satan is sharpened against him by a sense of failure, and he strikes, the very moment he gets permission, with his utmost force.

This Trial is recorded in Chapter ii., verses 1-10.

Verses 1-3 are, for the most part, a repetition of Chapter i. verses 6-8, and call for little remark. But it should be observed that verse 3 ends with a new phrase, in which Jehovah complains, with a touch of indignant reproach, of the malice of Satan in instigating Him to afflict Job "without cause," and speaks of his faithful servant with even more than his former love and pride. Satan had affirmed that the integrity of Job was bound up with his gains, and that when the gains were taken away he would fling his integrity after them. And, now, Jehovah calls on the Adversary to mark, and to confess, that, although all that

he had been taken away from this perfect man, "he still holds fast his integrity," his whole-hearted devotion to God, and will not let it go.

Here already, then, the professed zeal of Satan for the honour of God is detected and exposed. He had affected to believe that Job was imposing on the generous credulity of Jehovah, and to be indignant that the imposture should succeed. But now, in that "thou did'st move me against him *without cause*"—a phrase in which a rueful pity for the sufferings of his servant and pride in his constancy are strangely blended—the real hypocrite is unmasked. It was not the honour of the King of Heaven for which Satan was eager, but the destruction and disgrace of the perfect man whose disinterested fidelity was a standing rebuke to his own infidelity and selfishness. The charge alleged against Job had been proved to be untrue, and therefore it recoiled on the head of him who had advanced it.

Verse 4.—This challenge to confess his malice only exasperated the malice of Satan. He had been content before to charge Job with impiety; now he charges him also with utter inhumanity. He implies that Job really cared for no one but himself, not even for his sons and daughters; and that so long as he walked in a whole skin the genuine nature of the man would never be revealed. The proverb in which this atrocious insinuation is conveyed—as if the very devil himself were a little ashamed of it, and did not choose to be considered the author of it—has long been discussed by scholars; but as yet they are able to agree only in its general import: and *that*, by the way, is determined for them by the context.

“A skin for a skin” (or, as it might be even more literally rendered, “*Skin for skin*, and all that a man hath, he will give for his life”) bears some resemblance, however, to other proverbs which may help us to explain it. Thus, for example, the Jews have a saying, “*One gives one’s skin to save one’s skin*” —i.e. gives a part to save the rest, “*but all to save one’s life*,” which very closely resembles that here quoted. Possibly, “A skin for a skin,” in the sense of “A hide for a hide,” was an Arab proverb in the time of Job, familiar to the lips of their traders, and was used by the *literati* to point the selfishness of men who only give when they expect to receive a full equivalent. Perhaps, “*Give a hide to catch a hide*” would convey its sense to an English ear; or the rural proverb, “Give an apple to him that has an orchard;” or, even the vulgar saying, “Give a sprat to catch a herring.” Satan, who, in his self-absorption, can recognize nothing unselfish in the whole round of human motives, meant that Job’s piety was purely selfish, a mere barter of one good thing against another and a better; nay, that his very humanity extended only to himself; that he cared little for the loss of his children; that so long as life was left him, if he believed he owed it to God, he would affect to serve Him. “Take away *that*, so that he shall account his very life to be gone from him, and his assumed piety will open and disclose his real and utter selfishness.” It is edifying to hear this *pious* devil declaiming on the impiety of man, this *humane* devil, who only longed to do Job harm, declaiming on the inhumanity of man; or, in one word, this *disinterested* devil declaiming on the selfishness of man!

Verses 5, 6.—For the greater good and glory of his servant Job, Jehovah permits even this issue to be raised and tried. Satan is authorized so to “touch” Job that he shall account death better than such a life as his (Chap. vii. 15), in order that the trial may be complete; but he is not allowed to take life itself, in order that, if Job should stand the trial, his faith and patience may receive a due reward.

Verse 7.—The foul disease with which Job was smitten, and of which he himself details many of the symptoms, was clearly *elephantiasis*, the severest and most terrible form of leprosy. Beginning with “grievous ulcers,” it eats, like a cancer, through the whole body, swelling the limbs, especially at the joints, into monstrous lumps, till they resemble the limbs of an elephant (whence its name), and even causing them to rot off piecemeal.

Verse 8.—These ulcers were too loathsome and fetid to be touched. Hence the use of the “potsherd,” or piece of broken earthenware, to remove the feculent discharge. Rosenmüller says (*in loco*) that Orientals sometimes used an instrument for this purpose shaped like the hand, and made of ivory.

For “ashes” the Septuagint reads “dung.” The two words mean the same thing. It is as correct as it is usual to speak of Job’s “dunghill,” although that unsavoury word is not once employed either in the Original or in our Authorized Version; for, from many of the allusions of this Story, it is quite certain that we are to conceive of the Patriarch as lying on what “the Sons of the East” call the *mezbele*: this indeed, is the very scene of the Poem. It is necessary, therefore, that we should learn what the Arabian *mezbele* is like.

Consul Wetzstein (in his valuable contributions to Delitzsch's Commentary on Job) gives an accurate and graphic description of it, from which I select the following sentences: "The dung, which is heaped up there, is not mixed with straw, because in warm dry countries no litter is required for the cattle. It is brought dry, in baskets, to the place before the village, and is generally burned once every month. . . . The ashes remain. . . . If a village has been inhabited for a century, the *mezbele* reaches a height which far surpasses it. The winter rains turn the ash-heap into a compact mass, and gradually change the *mezbele* into a firm mound of earth. . . . It serves the inhabitants of the district as a watch-tower and, on close oppressive evenings, as a place of assembly, because there is a current of air on the height. There the children play about the whole day long; *there the forsaken one lies, who, having been seized by some terrible malady, is not allowed to enter the dwellings of men; by day asking alms of the passers-by, and at night hiding himself among the ashes which the sun has warmed.* . . . Many a village of the Hauran has lost its original name, and is called *el-mezâbil*, from the size and number of these mounds, which always indicate a primitive and extensive cultivation. . . . And many a more modern village is built upon an ancient *mezbele*, because there there is a stronger current of air, which renders the position more healthy." It is on such a mound, or *mezbele*, as this that we are to think of Job as lying when, smitten by "a terrible malady," he was no longer "allowed to enter the dwellings of men."

Verse 9.—Job's wife—the Targum says her name was Dinah, and puts a long and violent harangue into her mouth; feeling it, no doubt, says an unfeeling commentator, an outrage on nature and propriety that, under the circumstances, “a woman should say so little”—has had hard measure meted out to her. Human characters, indeed, are so wonderfully complex that it is never easy in dealing with them to “judge righteous judgment.” And to infer an entire character from a single sentence uttered in a moment of intense excitement, is assuredly very hazardous, and is likely to be very unjust. Yet *this* is the measure which has been meted out to Job's wife, not only in the popular, but also, as a rule, in the scholarly, estimate of her character. For one passionate utterance, because she once spake “as the foolish women,” *i.e.* the impious or irreligious women, speak, she has become a by-word and a reproach, and figures as a kind of Scriptural Xantippe in the general imagination. That is very unjust. We, who so sorely need charitable construction ourselves, might surely construe her one foolish speech more charitably. There are few, men or women, who could endure to be measured against “the perfect man;” and therefore it is hardly a discredit to his wife if she fell short of him. Who would not? Then, too, she had endured all that he had endured. *She* had been brought to penury and dishonour with him. “The young people” who were killed in the house of the firstborn were *her* children as well as his. And, like him, she had borne the calamities of the first trial without a murmur. Very possibly this second trial was even heavier to her than to

him ; for to the sensitive womanly nature it is often harder to see another suffer than to endure suffering, and, on the spur of loving impulse, it often says far more and other than it means. If Job's wife were a woman of the finer sort,—and the wife of such a man, the mother of such children, is likely to have been “a woman nobly planned,”—it must have been far harder for her to see him sitting, stunned and hopeless, on the ash-heap, than to have sat there herself. She might have endured his sufferings, though she could not endure to see him suffer them. And so, in an impulsive, passionate, womanly way, she cries, “Renounce God, and die !”

“A very shocking speech !” Perhaps ; but let us remember of what a shock it was the echo, and not scan too severely the words of one half-maddened by an intolerable misery. *God* did not judge her harshly for them ; for she too was raised from the dust to share the sevenfold splendour and prosperity of Job, and to bear him sons and daughters.

None the less, however, must her passionate grief and despair have embittered Job's sufferings. The more he loved her, and the more worthy she was of his love, the more keen must have been his anguish at seeing her distraught with resentment, the more perilous must have been the temptation to take her desperate council, and to rush out of a world where all things seemed disordered and out of course. So that it makes *for* Job's constancy and patience, not against them, to adopt the nobler rather than the baser conception of his wife.

And, indeed, the more closely we study her words, the more we find in them which denotes

intelligence and largeness of soul. Obviously, when she asks, "Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity?" using the very words which Jehovah had used (verse 3), she had penetrated to the very heart of the question at issue, and saw that Job, in maintaining his righteousness was exposing himself to ever new trial and affliction. So, again, when she employed the very word (*bârêk*) which Satan had set himself to wring from her husband's lips, and which Job had uttered, in its good sense, at the close of the first trial, she may have meant "Curse God, and die!" or she may have meant, as I am disposed to think she did, "Bless this God of yours again, and you will surely die." Her meaning may have been, and probably was: "Do not any longer stand on your righteousness, but confess your sin—confess anything God wants you to confess, say anything He wants you to say, lest you perish. You blessed Him before (Chap. i. 21), and He did but send new disasters upon you; bless Him again, and you will lose all that is left you—life. It is not blessing or praise that He wants of you, but contrition, confession. Give Him whatever He wants, and have done with Him."

This may have been the sense in which "Dinah" spoke; but even if it were not, even if we put the worst possible construction on her words, is she to be condemned for a single passionate outburst? "Think ye to reprove words!" cries Job to Eliphaz (Chap. vi. 26). "But the words of the desperate are for the wind to blow away." Should not the words of his wife, then, driven desperate by misery, be left to the winds? He himself, too, afterwards

spoke many "wild and whirling words;" yet God did not condemn him for them, but affirmed rather that his servant Job had "spoken of him aright" (Chap. xlii. 7), despite the outbursts of passion and reproach forced from him by despair and misery. Shall we not, then, make the same generous allowance for his wife?

Verse 10.—Keen as the trial was, Job held fast his integrity. The issue of the second trial resembles that of the first. As before he had recognized God's right to take away as well as to give, so here he admits it to be man's duty to accept evil from God as well as good. Neither any hope of good nor any fear of evil will induce him to palter with his own conscience and confess sins of which he is unaware, or to acknowledge that God has dealt unjustly with him, however amazed and perplexed he may be at so wide a departure from the usual method of Providence.

His second victory is announced to us in the words, "In all this Job sinned not with his lips." "Not *with his lips*, indeed," insinuates the Targum: "that means he had already begun to sin and murmur *in his heart*." How *can* men be so hard on men? how can they, as Chaucer puts it, "so gladlie demen to the baser end"? There is not the slightest ground for the insinuation of the Targum. What the phrase really means and suggests is, that not so much as a sinful word was wrung from Job even under the pressure of so great a misery; that he kept his very lips pure, and not offending in word, had thereby proved himself to be, according to the standard of St. James (Chap. iii. 2), "a perfect man." His wife had not

been able altogether to rule the unruly member ; but he had. Sin is not in words only, nor mainly ; but in the emotion of which words are but an expression. Had Job sinned *in his heart*, he had sinned indeed.

With the arrival of the three Friends, Job's third and severest trial begins. Up to this point he had maintained a noble humility and resignation under the pressure of doubts which were even more terrible to him than his unparalleled calamities. He himself, indeed, held the very creed held by the Friends, and, had he stood in their place, might have used the very arguments which they used. The problem which absorbed and tormented his mind was the self-same problem which they set themselves to solve, and was based on the same axioms or assumptions, but it was capable of two wholly different solutions. Believing, as they did, that all the miseries of life come from the hand of God and are sent to punish men for their sins, the problem over which Job brooded must have taken a double form, as thus : " God afflicts men only for their sins ; I am afflicted : and therefore I must have sinned." But this conclusion his good conscience entirely refuses to admit ; he is not conscious of sins which clamoured for punishment, and he will not confess sins of which he is unconscious. Inevitably, therefore, he was driven on the other horn of the dilemma : " If I have not sinned, and yet God has afflicted me as though I had sinned heinously and enormously, must not God be unjust ?" From this conclusion, too, he shrinks ; yet no other is open to him, if once his premises be granted : and it never occurred to him to doubt these.

And, therefore, he is content for a time to leave the problem unsolved, to dispense with any logical solution of it, to admit that in the providence of God there are mysteries which he cannot comprehend, and to hold, however illogically, both that he himself is righteous and that God is just.

But the Friends are of a more logical turn, as bystanders are apt to be. They insist on forcing the controversy to a conclusion ; nay, insist on Job's assent to that conclusion ; and as they cannot for a moment suspect the justice of God, to question the integrity of Job is the only alternative left them.

So that Job's third and severest trial consists, not in any new bereavement or loss, but in the interpretation put on his former losses and sorrows by the Friends, and, if by his friends, then by all his world. He had now to taste the bitter anguish of finding himself abandoned and condemned by men as well as forsaken of God, of standing alone, with absolutely nothing to back him save his conscience, against the whole world, against the whole universe. Those who have known what it is to enter into conflict with the very forms of thought and faith which they themselves once held, and which are still so firmly held by the men of their generation as that they are at once cut off from all fellowship and sympathy the moment they call them in question, are in some measure able to enter into the anguish which now pierced Job's spirit to the very quick. It is no wonder that the solitary man, hearing his own misgivings reflected in forms ever more harsh and offensive from the lips of the Friends, should at times grow well-nigh desperate, and meet their

suspensions of his integrity by challenging the justice of God. The only wonder is, that, even in the stress of a conflict so bitter, his heart clave to the God who had grown questionable to his intellect, and insisted on trusting One whom it could no longer comprehend.

But in doing justice to Job, let us not do injustice to the Friends. They were good men. That Job accounted them his friends says much for them. And, indeed, as they disclose themselves to us in their speeches, they say much for themselves. Pious they were, and devout, and even wise in the wisdom of their time. Their grave fault was—and it is a common fault with religious men, and especially with *eminently* religious men—that they were not looking for more light; that they thought the whole truth was included in the simple and portable creed which they had adopted: that they put dogma above fact.

Many commentators are enchanted with the delicate strokes and touches by which the Poet has characterized the three Friends, distinguishing one from the other. I must honestly and sorrowfully confess that I have failed to detect these subtle and delicate strokes, though I have looked for them carefully and often. All I can see of difference in the three men amounts only to this: Eliphaz—probably the eldest and wisest of the Three, with a considerable likeness to Job himself in the general cast of his character and his tone of thought—is of the prophetic order of men; his conclusions and arguments seem to have been framed very largely on oracles and revelations, although, like Bildad, he is also an erudite man and can readily cite the wisdom of the ancients: he has been brought into a closer

and more immediate intercourse with Heaven than his fellows, and, like Balaam, another son of the ancient East, he is a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. Bildad goes more on tradition, on the gathered and priceless wisdom of the ancients. A much lesser man every way than Eliphaz, with a much more contracted range of thought and sympathy, he deals in proverbs, in citations from the fathers, and takes a severer and more personal tone in addressing Job. But if Eliphaz is the prophet and Bildad the sage of the trio, what shall we say of Zophar? So far as I can read his character in his words, Zophar is the common good man of his day, the vulgar but sincere formalist; the man who thinks what he says will become true if only he says it often enough and forcibly enough; the man who implicitly believes what he has been taught and demands that every one else should not only believe it too, but also that they should accept it in the very forms in which it has commended itself to him, and, above all, that they should refuse to believe anything *more*. He is sharp, and bitter, and hasty in tone, moreover; he puts a coarse tearing edge on the insinuations of his companions; and prided himself, I dare say, on being a plain blunt man, who said what he meant and meant what he said. A dangerous man to differ from, or to outstrip; the kind of man with whom it is of no use to go a mile if you go but a single inch beyond him; the kind of man, too, who is very apt, as Lowell says of Carlyle, "to call down fire from heaven whenever he cannot conveniently lay his hand on the match-box."

These are the three figures which, for me at least,

loom dimly out of the past as I study this Poem ; and if their outlines are not very distinct or wrought out with much subtlety of thought, we can nevertheless see how admirably they would serve the Poet's turn. He was bent, not only on solving the main problem of the Book, but also on depicting the whole world of thought and emotion quickened in the hearts of men as they contemplated the inequalities and apparent iniquities of human life ; just as Tennyson, in " In Memoriam," sets himself, not simply to bewail a personal loss, but to express the whole round of thought and emotion to which such a loss as his gives birth. And, therefore, it was necessary that he should bring Job into relation with typical men, men who would say what, on the whole, the entire ancient world would have said. Only thus could he secure that full and comprehensive treatment of his subject which he desired. Accordingly, he selects a prophet, who could bring to the discussion the highest disclosures Heaven had yet made to earth ; a sage, who could pour the light of ancient wisdom on it ; and the ordinary good man, orthodox but creed-bound, formal but sincere, pious but uncharitable, who could contribute to the discussion whatever was to be found in the accepted formulas of the age.

How long an interval elapsed, after the second trial of Job, before the Friends came to comfort him, it is impossible to determine : some conjecture a year ; others, only a few weeks : but we may fairly assume, I think, that, as at the close of the first trial, a considerable period passed, in which Job would be permitted to enter into its full bitterness and adjust himself to his new conditions, before other and pro-

founder miseries were imposed upon him. Indeed his tone throughout the Poem implies that many months had intervened, months in which his kinsfolk drew back and stood aloof from him, his most inward friends learned to abhor him, and even the "baseborn and base" aborigines of the land, whose sires he had "disdained to rank with the dogs of his flock," had grown bold enough to make him their byword and reproach (Chap. vii. 3; xix. 8-22; xxx. 1-15). The fact, too, that his disease had made such havoc with his frame that the three Friends could no longer recognize him when they saw him, points to the same conclusion.

Verse 11.—Esau had a son named Eliphaz; and this Eliphaz had a son named Teman. (Gen. xxxvi. 4, 10, 11.) Possibly the Eliphaz of our Poem was a descendant of Eliphaz the son of Esau; almost certainly the district of Teman took its name from Esau's grandson. This district lay on the north-east of Edom, within easy reach of the Hauran. Its inhabitants were long famed for wisdom throughout the East, and especially for the wisdom which clothes itself in proverbs, parables, and dark oracular sayings. Thus Jeremiah (Chap. xlix. 7) asks concerning Edom: "Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom poured out?" *i.e.* to the last drop.

Bildad the Shuchite was possibly a descendant of Shuach, the son of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. xxv. 2), who appears to have given his name to a district lying to the east of the Hauran, which is now known as Shakka.

Zophar the Naamathite it is impossible to define or locate. Many places have been called Naamah in Syria and Palestine; but in all probability the home of Zophar was on the other side of the river, east of Jordan, and in the vicinity of the Hauran. The Septuagint brings him from Maon (now Maan), a district to the east of Petra, and so makes him close neighbour to Eliphaz. Probably they were all three of them nomadic princes, the sheikhs of wandering clans, with whom Job had become acquainted in his travels, or in his large and varied intercourse with the world.

These three men, when they had heard of all the evil which had befallen him, concerted together to come and condole with him and comfort him,—to pay him, as it were, a state visit; ceremonious visits of condolence being then, as now, a point of good manners in the East.

Verses 12 and 13.—Probably they sought him first at his home, and were there directed to the *mezbele* on which he lay; for, we are told, “they lifted up their eyes *from afar*”—the scene is evidently out of doors—“and knew him not,” his person being disfigured and blackened beyond recognition by the ravages of his disease. Amazed by the spectacle of his degradation and misery, now first realizing perhaps how low he had fallen, they gave mute but speaking expression to their grief and compassion. They rent their mantles; they “sprinkled dust upon their heads to heaven,” *i.e.* caught up dust in their hands, as the Arabs still do, and threw it up into the air so that it fell back on their heads. (Comp. Homer, *Iliad*, xviii. 22.) They

“sat down with him on the ground”—sitting on the bare earth being a customary sign of mourning (2 Sam. xii. 16; Jer. iii. 26; Lam. ii. 10); and not unfrequently, in cases of extreme sorrow, the mourning was protracted through “seven days and seven nights:” thus Joseph made “a great and very sore lamentation,” “a mourning for his father seven days” (Gen. lx. 10), and the men of Israel for Saul and Jonathan (1 Sam. xxxi. 13). It was also a sign of their intense and mournful sympathy that during these days “none of them spake a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.” In like manner Ezekiel, when he first came on his captive brethren by the banks of the Chebar, “sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days” (Ezek. iii. 15). “Among the Jews it is a point of decorum, and one dictated by a fine and true feeling, not to speak to a person in deep affliction until he gives an intimation of a desire to be comforted.” There was more here than the observance of Oriental etiquette, however. Probably the Friends, like Ezekiel, were “astonished”—stunned, overwhelmed—with wonder and pity, so that they could not speak. Probably they felt, as we feel, the sanctity of great grief, the impossibility of assuaging it with mere words, the fear of being intrusive, irreverent even, should they open their lips. Probably, too, as they sat silent by his side, they had already begun to ask themselves of what secret sin Job had been guilty that he should have been so sorely smitten by God; perhaps even to ask each other with their eyes what was the hidden flaw in the life of one whom they had accounted perfect.

But whatever their misgivings and suspicions may have been, Job was evidently unconscious of them; he saw nothing but friendly sympathy and compassion in their silence: he assumes that they are wholly with him, that they are on his side and will take his part. And it is one of the finest and most natural touches in the Poem that the man who had remained silent under the most terrible pressure of misfortune, holding down his unruly thoughts, letting his doubts and questions prey on his heart but refusing to utter them, resolving, like poor Lear,

“No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing,”

is surprised into utterance by the first show of sympathy and kindness. *Now* his pent up grief and rage and despair break all bounds; for he is confident that his friends understand him, and feel for him, and will lend him a credent and sympathetic ear. Deceived at this point, as he soon discovered that he was, he was “the more deceived;” he felt that the very citadel and sanctuary of his soul had been surprised and betrayed. S. COX.

OUR LORD'S WORDS TO HIS MOTHER AT CANA.

(ST. JOHN ii. 4.)

IT used to be quite an established thing, almost part of the “tradition of the faith,” to read in these words a rebuke to the Virgin Mother. And this not by any means exclusively or chiefly among Protestant writers, but very generally among the Fathers. Irenæus, Chrysostom, Augustine, all take the same