

## THE BOOK OF JOB.

THE INSCRIPTION. (CHAPTER XIX. VERSES 23-29.)

THERE is no passage in the whole Poem which has attracted more attention than this, or has been more variously interpreted. It commands attention, for it breaks from the context like light from darkness; it soars and towers above it, like a mountain rising precipitously from the plain. From the very depths of his despair Job springs up to the sublime and immovable conviction that, on some happy though distant day, the God who now seems to be his Adversary will prove to be his Friend, clearing him from every charge, delivering him out of all his miseries, and avenging him on all who had set themselves against him. The transition is so abrupt, the inflow of light so sudden and unexpected, as of itself to arrest attention.

Obviously, too, the inspired Poet intended to arrest and fix our attention. *He* is as conscious as we are that his words are weighty with memorable significance, and rise high above their ordinary level; for he calls our attention to them by a brief preface in which he employs figures so striking as to quicken wonder and expectation. The words Job is about to utter are no passing expression of a passing mood. They embody his innermost and most abiding convictions. He is fain to have them written down in "*the book*," *i. e.*, in the Public Book, the State Chronicle, in which only

the most illustrious acts and sayings were preserved for the instruction of after ages. Nay, so weighty are they with meaning, and so convinced is he of their truth and value, he would even have them cut with an iron stylus, or chisel, deep into the face of some great rock, and the letters thus hewn into the stone filled up with lead, that they may withstand the devouring tooth of Time, and speak of him, and for him, for ever. Words so introduced must be of the gravest moment. Why should they be inscribed in the golden Book of State, why engraved in monumental characters on the eternal Rock, if he did not hold them to be of transcendent and immortal worth ?

For many reasons this Inscription demands and requires special and searching examination. The Poet himself has a high sense of its value. We cannot so much as glance over it without becoming aware that it enshrines truths which are of the utmost moment to us and to all men. In the Original, moreover, it is couched in the brief compressed phrases, with heavy pauses between the phrases, proper to a monumental record ; so that it is often difficult to catch the exact shade of thought in it, and the connecting links, or the transitions, from one thought to another ; *so* difficult that almost every phrase has been differently read by different commentators, and grave diversities of opinion still obtain even on the main sense, the ruling interpretation, of the whole passage. We must, therefore, devote special attention to it ; (1) seeking to define, by an accurate exegesis, the meaning of every separate word and clause ; and then (2) selecting that interpretation of the passage as a whole to which the meaning of its several parts most clearly points.

But, even before we commence our examination of it, we must try to fit this passage into the main drift and argument of the Chapter. In so far, then, as the passage is polemical, part of Job's reply to Bildad, it connects itself with it thus. Bildad had threatened him (Chap. xviii. 17-20) that his name and memory should perish; that posterity would either utterly forget him, or remember only to condemn him with horror and amazement. Job now makes a solemn and formal appeal to posterity. So far from forgetting or condemning him, he is sure that subsequent generations will remember the story of his faith and patience, and "the end of the Lord" concerning him, with sympathy and admiration: he is sure that he has at least one thing to say which the world will never let die, one bequest to make which cannot fail to bear his name honourably down the stream of time. This treasure is the truth, the fact, of a life beyond the grave, a *retributive* life, in which every man will receive the due reward of his deeds far more fully and exactly than in this present life.

Now great moral truths are never discovered by nations or races, but by individual men. And yet even the wisest and most forward-looking men but rarely discover a truth much in advance of the thoughts and yearnings of their own race, in their own generation. As a rule the new truth is in the air of the time; many have some dim consciousness or presentiment of it, and are groping after it, if haply they may find it. And at last one man, one happy man, prepared for the achievement by the peculiar bent of his nature, or gifted with the vision and the faculty divine, or driven onward by peculiar personal experiences into untrodden

regions of thought, grasps the present and widely-diffused but evasive truth, and compels it into a definite and permanent form. Of this common process of discovery we probably have an illustration in the case of Job. There are many indications that, both in the patriarchal age, *i.e.*, the time of Job himself, and in the Solomonic age, *i.e.*, the time of the Poet to whom we owe this *divina commedia*, the thought of a better and more enduring life, a strictly *moral* life, hidden from men by the darkness of death, was in the atmosphere; that the best and highest minds were reaching after it and yearning for it. And in Job this general thought took form, this common yearning rose to articulate expression, this wide-spread hope became a living and vitalizing faith. His personal experience, the wrongs and calamities he endured, the doubts and conflicts these miseries bred in his heart, prepared and qualified him to become the interpreter of the general heart of his time, to discover the truth which alone could satisfy it. It was simply impossible for him, since he believed the great Ruler of men to be just and unchangeable, to conclude that the God whom he had done nothing to offend was really hostile to him, though He seemed hostile, or that He would always continue to *seem* hostile to him, never acknowledging his integrity. And as he had lost all hope of being redeemed and vindicated in this life, as therefore he could no longer admit the present to be a strictly retributive life, he was compelled to look for, till he discovered, a retributive life beyond "the bourn." Fading out of this world, he looks for, and finds, a juster and a better world to come. *This* I believe to be the root of the whole matter, simple as it sounds; *this* the line along which Job's

thoughts travelled, or flew, to the lofty conclusion he reached; *this* the spring of living water that threw up the beautiful fountain of hope which still attracts our eyes.

I. Bearing the origin of Job's hope in mind we shall the better understand the Inscription in which it is most clearly and strongly expressed. This Inscription is introduced by a brief Preface, *Verses* 23, 24. Whatever may become of his other words—some of which he elsewhere admits were “windy words,” and therefore might well be left to be blown away by the wind,—he wants the words he is about to utter to remain. They express his deepest, his unalterable, convictions. His previous Speeches reflect all the fluctuating and uncertain moods and emotions of his soul,—his doubts and fears, his cravings and aspirations, his indignation against God and man: but now he is going to say only what he is *sure of*, what he *knows*. And, therefore, he wishes his words to be written down *in the book*, a book formed of skins or parchments, as the etymology of the Hebrew word denotes; he would have them enshrined in the most permanent form of ancient literature, in the public records in which only the most memorable words and deeds were inscribed (Schultens, *in loco*).<sup>1</sup> Nay, more, he is conscious of such a worth in his words that even parchment is not durable enough for him, nor are the public chronicles guarded with sufficient care. He would fain have them *cut deep in the rock*, raised above all the accidents of time,

<sup>1</sup> Although, on the authority of Schultens, I have assumed the existence of a public record, or state-book, in which memorable events were inscribed, I am bound to add that many of our best scholars deny that we have any proof of the existence of such a book or record among the Arab races of the time of Job, or even of the time of the Poet to whom we are indebted for this great drama.

that they may speak with an eternal tongue to the fugitive generations of men. And, in very deed, his wish has been more than fulfilled; for, as St. Chrysostom, commenting on these Verses, finely says: "Job's words have not been written down with an iron stylus, as he desired, but far more durably. Had they been written as he wished, time would have obliterated them; but they have been inscribed in the imperishable records of Holy Scripture. They are graven on the rock of God's Word, and there they are still read, and minister comfort to all generations."

But all this is only preface. The Inscription itself is contained in Verses 25-27. In the Hebrew it is written throughout in the true monumental, or lapidary, style, the style appropriate to words which were to be so laboriously hewn and engraved. The thought is crushed into the fewest possible phrases, the phrases into the fewest possible words; and, as might be expected in so memorable a sentence, a sentence designed to quicken thought and hope in many generations, at least some of the words are capable of a double sense, and the full intention of the whole is not to be arrived at save with labour and pains. Let us take it word by word.

*Verse 25.*—**I know.** The Hebrew verb denotes absolute perception, absolute cognition, absolute certainty of knowledge. It is no mere guess, speculation, yearning that we are to hear from him, but that of which he is intimately persuaded, profoundly and unalterably convinced; the very best and surest thing he has to tell us.

**My redeemer,** literally "*my Goel.*" This *Goel* is a name for the next of kin, who, among the Hebrews and

Arabs, was bound to redeem a kinsman who had fallen into debt or bondage, and to avenge his blood if he had been slain in a *vendetta*, in a family or clan quarrel. Job's choice of this remarkable and most expressive word may have been in part determined by a thought he had already expressed in Chapter xvi. 18, where, as we have seen, while formally appealing to the earth not to hide his innocent blood, he really appeals to the very God who had shed his blood to avenge it, to avow and establish his innocence. But we cannot here take the word at less than its full worth, as including the Redeemer as well as the Avenger. Though he now lies crushed and abandoned on the earth, Job is sure that his Goel will interpose, both to rescue him from his bondage to loss and pain, calumny and death, and to avenge him on those who, while professing to be his friends, are nevertheless his "adversaries without cause." And assuredly, Job had no mere man, or kinsman, in his thoughts. Men, even the best and most beloved, had utterly failed him, and revolted from him, deeming him to be accursed. Were they who added to his pains the most exquisite torture of all, stretching him on the rack of their pious suspicions and censures, at all likely to confront even men on his behalf? How much less, then, were they likely to confront the Almighty Himself? His Goel could only be the God whom he had already besought to decide for a man against Himself, of whose eternal justice he was so fully persuaded as to believe that He would raise and vindicate the very man whom He Himself had smitten to the earth. This point—an important one—is put beyond all doubt by the first clause of the next Verse, from which we learn both that Job expected to *see* this

Goel, and to find God in Him—"from my flesh shall I see God."

This Goel liveth. He has not to come into being; He exists. So much at least the verb implies, even if it does not imply, as some contend, that Job's Redeemer and Avenger, because He has life in Himself, always has lived and always will live. Probably the tacit antithesis in the Poet's mind was simply this: "I die, but my Goel does not; he lives."

And he shall stand; or, more literally, "*he shall rise up*" — "*rise up*," even after Job has "*gone down*" into Hades and the grave; rise up, as the word hints, like a conqueror, a redeemer, a redeemer being always a conqueror: for how should he deliver the captive save by subduing his captor? There will be a victorious apparition, manifestation, epiphany of the Goel, who is even now already resenting the wrongs of his kinsman and arming Himself for his deliverance.

At last. The original word is ambiguous, and may be taken substantively or adverbially. Many scholars take it in the first way, and render it by *ein Nachmann*, a Survivor. They understand Job to mean that this Goel, who lives and is to appear for him, is absolutely "the Last One," that He is to survive all men, that He remains unchanged through all the sorrowful and obscuring changes of time; that, as "the Last One," He has power and right to pronounce the final word of every controversy; that, as "the Survivor" of Job, He is bound to vindicate and avenge him. But, though in itself the word be ambiguous, the common Hebrew usage of it demands, I think, that it should be taken adverbially, that we should render it by "*at last*." Purposely or necessarily, because he did not know or

did not wish to say *when* his deliverance should come, Job leaves the time of it indefinite. He simply throws it forward far into the future, to some distant date unknown or undetermined.

**Over this dust.** "*Upon the earth*" is the rendering of our Authorized Version, and is perhaps as good and probable a rendering as that given in the text, although many recent Commentators give the preference to the former. Here, again, however, we have an ambiguous phrase, capable of more than one sense. It is not only that we may choose between "over my dust" and "upon the earth;" but even if we prefer the former, are we to take it literally? Could Job have meant that the victorious apparition of the Goel was to take place over his tomb? In all probability he was as ignorant of *the scene* of his deliverance as of *the time* and *the manner* of it; and had he been called upon to give it a local habitation and a name, would have placed it, as we shall see, in Hades, the unseen world beyond the grave, of which he knew so little. It is better, therefore, to take this phrase metaphorically, and to understand it as equivalent to "*after my death.*"

A German scholar (Oetinger) summarizes the Verse thus: "I know that He (the Goel) will at last come, place Himself over the dust in which I have mouldered away, pronounce my cause just, and place the crown of victory on my head." But, without adding anything to the sense of the words, I believe we may venture to draw out and expand his summary, that we may, indeed, more adequately summarize the contents of the Verse thus: "I, for my part, know—though I know not *how* I know—and am sure, that my Goel

already exists, and is preparing to take up my cause; that God Himself will be my Goel, that *He* will do a kinsman's part by me, both redeeming me from my miseries and wrongs and avenging me on those who have inflicted them upon me. *When* He will come I know not, nor what will be the scene and theatre of his interposition; but this I know, that at last—far off—long after I have sunk into the tomb, He will appear for me, clad in robes of victory and of judgment."

*Verse 26.*—**And after my body:** literally, "after *my skin.*" Possibly the word "skin" is here used for "body," because Job had just complained (*Verse 20*) that nothing was left of his body but skin and bone, that he had escaped only with the skin of his teeth. Possibly, as my friend Dr. Morison suggests—for the construction of the whole phrase is very rude and primitive—he may mean "when that which is *within* my skin," now dropping from me, has been destroyed. But however we account for the word or take the phrase, there can hardly be a doubt he means to say that the process of disease, which has already worked such strange and dreadful havoc in his flesh, will go on until his body, to the last fibre and integument of it, is consumed. For this meaning is sustained by the clauses which precede and follow this.

**Hath thus.** As he utters the word "thus," it is but natural to suppose him pointing to his rotting and emaciated frame.

**Been destroyed.** The verb implies extreme violence. It might be rendered, "*has been torn in pieces and devoured,*" and admirably denotes both the gnawing pangs of his disease and the dreadful waste and havoc it inflicted.

Taking the phrase, "*And after my body hath thus been destroyed,*" as a whole, there really seems no room to doubt that Job fully expected a speedy death, fully expected, therefore, that his deliverance would not take place till after his death. The conclusion is put, one should think, wholly beyond question when we combine with this phrase the final clause of the previous Verse, "*And he shall stand at last over this dust.*" And yet there are scholars who gravely maintain these phrases to mean no more than that Job believed he should be *reduced to a mere skeleton* before God appeared to save and clear him, that his rehabilitation would therefore take place in this present life! If he meant no more than that, he has surely taken the strangest way of conveying his meaning. A man whose body is torn to pieces, devoured, destroyed, reduced to dust, *should* be dead, if words have any force or significance. And, moreover, if Job only intended to predict an occurrence so common as the restoration of life, health, and wealth, to one emaciated by disease and broken by misfortune, why does he introduce his prediction with such an amazing pomp and emphasis? Why speak as though he had lit on some grand discovery so invaluable and transcendent that it deserved to be written in the State Chronicle and cut deep in the Rock for ever? The whole tone, no less than the express words, of the Inscription demand a far larger interpretation than this.

**Yet from my flesh.** Another ambiguity, and possibly another studied ambiguity, meets us here. For the Hebrew word translated variously "from," "in," "out of," "without," my flesh—"from" being the literal translation—may be taken, and indeed is taken, in

either of two senses. (1) Many take it, not wholly without reason, as equivalent to "*in my flesh.*" They regard the body as the place out of which Job is to look when he sees God. For them the phrase means, "*Looking out from my flesh.*" (2) Others take it as equivalent to "*free from,*" "*stript of,*" "*outside,*" my flesh. Unclothed by this body, or by any body, I shall look for and find my Goel. Thus Ewald renders it, "und *ohne* mein Fleisch;" and Heiligstedt, "*sine carne mea.*"<sup>1</sup> In the first case, Job counts on a restored physical life, a new body; and in the second, he expects a spiritual vision of God. And though the other conclusion is supported by some weighty authorities, I cannot but think that the latter of these two, a spiritual vision, agrees better than the first with the whole tone and movement of his thought. For, obviously, he is expecting a Divine Vindication of his integrity only after he lies in the dust; and it is not likely that, with this great hope suddenly invading his mind and taking instant but full possession of it, he would at once begin to speculate on whether or not, when he had shuffled off the loathsome coil in which he was entangled, he should be clothed upon with "flesh" in some new and higher form. Such a speculation would

<sup>1</sup> There is a striking illustration of the double sense which this word "*from*" bears, even in the English usage of it, in Shakespeare's *King Richard the Third* (Act. iv. Scene 4). In the dialogue between the King and his brother's widow, Queen Elizabeth, the following passage of arms occurs:—

*K. Rich.* Then know that *from* my soul I love thy daughter.

*Q. Eliz.* My daughter's mother thinks it *with* her soul.

*K. Rich.* What do you think?

*Q. Eliz.* That thou dost love my daughter *from* thy soul :  
So *from* thy soul's love didst thou love her brothers ;  
And *from* my heart's love I do thank thee for it.

*K. Rich.* Be not so hasty to confound my meaning ;  
I mean that *with* my soul I love thy daughter ;  
And mean to make her queen of England.

have been well-nigh impossible at such a time. That Job, rising from his long agony, his long inquest, to a sudden recognition of a great light of hope burning behind the dark curtains of death, and so far streaming through them as to give him courage to sustain a burden otherwise intolerable, should instantly fall into a curious speculation about "in the body," or "out of the body," would be contrary to all the laws which, as experience proves, govern the human mind at a crisis such as that at which he had arrived. And, therefore, though, with the best Commentators, we understand him to be simply looking forward to some spiritual vision of the Divine justice and grace, we shall do well to retain some word as ambiguous as his own, and to conclude that as he neither knew when, or in what form, the great deliverance for which he hoped would be vouchsafed him, so also he neither knew nor curiously inquired *how*, in what form, it would find him when it came. All he knew was that, somehow, after his loathsome body had been destroyed, God would redeem him; but whether he would then be in a body or out of a body, he cannot tell and does not speculate. It will be after death. It will be in Hades, perhaps; but of the physical conditions of Hades he knows, and professes to know, nothing.

**Shall I see God.** No one short of God can be his Goel in the region on which he is about to enter. And as he *must see* his Goel—for what to him is any vindication of which he is unconscious? and how can he be delivered without being sensible of it?—he must see God.

*Verse 27.*—On this point he is absolute, recurring to it again and again even in this brief Inscription.

As, for example, in the very next words. “Whom I shall see ;” and see “for me,” that is, *on my side*, redressing the wrongs which He Himself has inflicted, and clearing the character which He Himself has brought under suspicion ; no longer an Adversary, but a Champion ; no longer *against* me, but *for* me.

So, once more, in the next clause of the Verse. **And mine own eyes shall behold, not those of another :** by which, of course, he does not mean to assert that *no one but himself* will be cognizant of his vindication ; but that, come when it may, *he himself must be cognizant of it ;* that, even though it should come when men account him dead, he shall be alive unto God and to the action of God on his behalf. There are men among us now—men surely not more unselfish and generous than Job, nor in any way of finer moral calibre—to whom “immortal life” means only “posthumous energy” and influence, who flatter themselves that they shall be content to die, and may even be said to live, if only the good they do lives after them. But such a life as that is no life to Job. *He* cannot be content with a posthumous vindication of which he is to know nothing. He must himself be there to behold and share the triumph of his Divine Goel. That others behold it is not enough. Half, if not all, the pathos of his words springs indeed from this intense and passionate regard for his character, his righteousness. He cleaves to it, and will not let it go, though all the winds and storms of Heaven beat upon him. His one thought, repeated in many forms, is,—

The good I stand on is my truth and honesty ;  
 If these should fail, I, with mine enemies,  
 Will triumph o'er my person, which I weigh not,  
 Being of those virtues vacant.

But if this supreme good is not to fail him, if his truth and honesty—his integrity to Heaven—are to be vindicated, then he feels that the vindication will not be complete unless he, in his own person, is present to witness and rejoice in it.

It seems like trifling to come down from this high passion and flight of a much-tormented human spirit to observe that no sinister inference, no logical or dogmatic inference of any kind, can be fairly drawn from Job's use of the word "*eyes*." It *would* be trifling if some grave and learned Commentators had not seriously inferred from it nothing less than—the resurrection of the body! Job cannot mean, they argue, that he is to be redeemed in the world of spirits; for he is to see his Redeemer with his own eyes; and how can he have eyes unless he has a body? Hath not a spirit eyes, then? or, rather, do we ever conceive of one without? Has not God Himself, the great pure Spirit, eyes? or do not we, and the Hebrew prophets, and the Christian apostles, constantly speak of Him as having larger and keener eyes than ours, *i.e.*, keener and swifter perceptions? How *can* men study a poem so prosaically! How can even these dogmatic Dryasdusts so far forget the inevitable limitations of human language and thought as to make it necessary to remind them that the misuse of so common a figure of speech proves nothing except the blindness of those who misapprehend it!

For that, or, *for this*, my reins pine away within me. *My reins*, or, as we should say, "my heart:" "the reins" being with the Hebrews the seat of passion and yearning affection, as "the heart" is with us. It need hardly be added that what Job's heart pines for is

the coming of that Divine Epiphany which he has been foretelling, that glorious appearing of the great God his Saviour. His very hope was a new element of agitation and disturbance. He was to *see* his Goel; as yet he could only *hope* for his advent. And as hope deferred maketh sick the heart of man, we need not be surprised to find him, even after he has risen to this great height of faith, sinking back again into pining heart-sickness and despair.

The last two Verses of the Chapter, *Verses* 28, 29, are not part of the Inscription, although they complete both the figure and the sense of it. In relation to himself Job had thought of the Goel as a Redeemer; but he now turns on the Friends who "persecuted" him with their unfounded charges and insulting suspicions, and warns them that if they persist in their hostility, He who appears to deliver him will also appear to judge them, and to smite them with the sword of the Avenger.

II. This is the exegesis of this memorable Inscription—an exegesis to which I believe most of our living Hebrew scholars would, on the whole, assent. But now that we have arrived at the meaning of its several parts, we must address ourselves to the still more difficult and weighty task of fixing on that interpretation of the whole passage to which they most clearly point—a task in the course of which we shall be obliged to retread much of the ground we have already traversed.

What *is* the ruling Interpretation of this great passage, then? Put briefly, I would venture to state it thus: *Job is profoundly convinced of a retributive life to come.* He is fully and unalterably persuaded that,

after his death, God will appear to redeem and avenge him ; but *when* God will appear, and *how*, he neither knows nor speculates. *That*, probably, is the most reasonable interpretation to put on the words we have so closely examined, neither going beyond their obvious significance nor falling short of it. But as there are able and learned men who insist on seeing more in them than this, or refuse to see so much, we must, if possible, bring our Interpretation to some clear and decisive test.

It will be admitted, I think, that the fairest and most decisive test open to us is this: Does, or does not, this interpretation fall in with the general current of Job's thoughts and hopes in so far as we have already discovered them? Is, or is not, this passage, so read, the natural sequence and climax of the convictions and beliefs he has already expressed? Do, or do not, many of the lines of thought we have already traced in the Poem fairly lead up to it? In my exegesis of this passage I have already shewn incidently that our Interpretation fairly meets even this severe and conclusive test. I have pointed out that Job's Inscription only carries to a higher power, and conveys in a clearer way, thoughts and convictions to which he had previously given utterance. But, to make the argument complete, I must touch upon some of these points again, and add to them a new series of similar proofs.

I find, then, no less than six lines of thought in the previous Chapters of the Poem which run up into and are harmonized and combined in the passage before us.

1. There is his general conviction that, though for a while, and for purposes which he cannot fathom, God may seem to be his enemy, nevertheless, as he had

done nothing to offend and alienate Him, it was impossible that God could be really alienated from him, impossible that He should not be his Friend. This, as we have seen again and again, was the conviction by which Job was sustained throughout his long and weary controversy with "the men of his counsel," and to which, though he may lose sight of it for a time, he recurs with an added force. He had long since lost confidence in the doctrine he once held, and which the Friends still urge upon him, that, in this life, every man receives his due. *That*, since it is contradicted by the most intimate facts of his own experience, is no longer credible to him. But he has not, therefore, lost confidence in the justice of God: he is simply driven to the persuasion that the Divine Justice is of a larger scope than he had hitherto conceived; that it covers a wider space and demands longer periods for its full development, periods which stretch beyond the narrow span of mortality. He does not, and he will not, believe that

We shall be winnowed with so rough a wind  
That even our corn shall seem as light as chaff,  
And good from bad find no partition.

He is sure that they must find partition, so sure that, since the winds of time *are* so rough as to make many a man's corn seem light as chaff, he can only believe that we shall pass beyond the winds of time into some more equal atmosphere, in which the good will be separated from the bad and the corn be gathered into the garner of God. And what, after all, is his Inscription but a still clearer and weightier statement of this abiding conviction of his heart?

2. This conviction has already taken many forms. Thus, for example, while studying his appeal in Chapter

xvi. 18, "O Earth, cover not my blood!" we saw that, while formally calling on the earth to attest his innocence, it is really God to whom he appeals, and even *to God against God*. It is God who has shed his blood (Chap. xvi. 13), and yet Job is so sure of his justice as to believe that He will avenge the very blood which He has shed. And is there any very great and sudden leap from this conviction that God would not permit his blood to cry to Him in vain, to the conviction that, whenever God appeared to answer that cry, he, Job, should be there to see it? Is not the Inscription, after all, but the natural sequence and climax of the persuasion which found an earlier expression in this pathetic appeal?

3. This same general conviction of the Divine Justice, and of its inevitable manifestation in the life and lot of man, rises to a still bolder utterance in Chapter xvi. 21, where Job demands and entreats nothing less than that God would justify him against God Himself, against the wrongs which He Himself had done him, as well as against the suspicions and misconstructions of his fellows. And with this indomitable persuasion of a Justice in heaven so pure that it would even listen and respond to an appeal against itself, is it any wonder that Job was led on by it to the yet more definite persuasion that, if the response to that appeal were not vouchsafed within the bounds and coasts of time, it would be vouchsafed beyond them? Is not the one a natural and logical inference from the other?

4. Even so early as in his first reply to Bildad (Chap. x. 7), the man of Uz could assert his innocence, and God's knowledge of it, to God's face; he could say, "*Thou knowest I am not guilty*, though Thou hast

searched for my fault and made inquisition for my sin." And in his very next speech (Chap. xiii. 15-19) he repeats this assertion in a more elaborate form:—A sinner would not dare to come before God, whereas he longs for nothing so much; he is sure that he has right on his side; that, if only he could reach the Divine Presence, his innocence would be patent, and need no proof: if he believed that any man could justly allege aught against him, he would die of very shame. In short, as he shews in every word he utters, he is as fully convinced of his own innocence as he is of the justice of God. And if God be just, and man be innocent, must not God justify man,—redress his wrongs, release him from his sufferings, and grant him a clear and happy issue out of all his trials?

5. Another, and yet a similar, line of thought leads to the same conclusion. In Chapter ix. 32-35 Job gives vent to his longing for an Umpire, a Daysman, an Arbiter capable of bringing him and God together in judgment, and of enforcing his decision even on the Almighty. And what this prophetic yearning really implied was, as we saw, a craving for a humanized God, God in a human form; *God*, that He might have power with God; and *man*, that Job may not be overawed by dread of Him. In Chapter xvi. 21 he demands that this Umpire should be both his Judge and his Advocate, both pleading and deciding for him. In Verse 19 of the same Chapter he affirms that this Umpire and Judge is already his Witness; that God is testifying to him in heaven even while he is afflicting him on earth. And in Verse 3 of the next Chapter he begs God to be his Surety, surety with Himself, until the cause shall come on for trial and decision. Now, I

do not see how any one who has observed how many and what auspicious forms God has already taken in the mind of Job can wonder to find Him taking still another and a still more gracious form. It is natural, if not inevitable, that He who has already appeared as Umpire, Judge, Advocate, Witness, Sponsor, should also appear as *Goel*, *i.e.*, as Redeemer and Avenger: for to what end should God judge his cause, to what end should He advocate it, and testify to it, and go bail for him until it was tried, if He were not also to execute the sentence by which his wrongs would be redressed and his adversaries punished and defeated?

6. That Job should anticipate that his Redemption and Vindication would be deferred till he had passed, through the gate and avenue of death, into the dim Hadean Kingdom whose physical conditions were unknown to him, and whose *moral* conditions had hitherto been at the best but dimly seen; that he should therefore acknowledge the date and mode of his trial and acquittal to be hidden from him, while yet he was sure that he should be both acquitted and avenged, is in the most perfect accord with another line of thought along which he has led us again and again. One of the earliest and clearest expressions of it may be found in the prayer of Chapter xiv. 13-15. In that prayer he beseeches God to hide him in Hades, hide him with loving care as something too precious to be lost, until the day of wrath be past; he beseeches Him to fix a term beyond which He would not suffer his faithful servant to be wronged and tormented. If He would but do that, Job would stand, like a sentinel, at his post on earth until he fell at it, and then stand at his post in Hades, however long and hard the term might

be, until it pleased God to discharge and release him. This strain is resumed in Chapter xvii. 11-16, and the hope of a life beyond the grave is yet more elaborately wrought out. He is sure that God *will* appear for him, but *when* he knows not. He no longer anticipates that it will be in this life, for "his breath is spent, his days are extinct;" but he will carry his hope down into the grave with him. Beyond "that bourn," since not before he passes it, God will vindicate him. He will find rest and a home in Hades; and as, to reach that unknown kingdom, he must needs go through the grave, he is already familiarizing himself with it, crying to corruption, "Thou art my father!" "My mother, and my sister!" to the worm. Released by the stroke of death — whose sword ennobles while it smites — from this hindering mortality, he hopes, he believes, he is sure, that in his spirit he shall see God, and find in Him both a Judge and a Friend. And it is simply *this* conception carried to a higher degree of clearness and certainty that lends weight and force to his Inscription. A judgment in Hades, in which the Judge will shew Himself his Friend, in which all the tangled skein of his life will be unravelled by wise and kindly hands, and the insoluble problem of his strange and self-contradicting experience will at last be solved, — *this* is what Job still looks for on that happy day when he shall see God for himself, and find his *Goel* in that Almighty Deliverer. Just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through having no inheritance in the promised land, were led to look for a better country, even a heavenly; so Job, by being denied justice in this world, is driven to look for a better and more heavenly world, even that which is to come.

All the main lines of thought which we have already found in this Poem, then, run up easily and naturally into this noble and unique passage. If it rises like a lofty summit from the ordinary level of Job's thoughts, it nevertheless does not stand alone; it is but the crowning summit in a long chain of peaks to which their curves attract and conduct our eyes.

But, despite all these arguments, because they do not see them or because they do not feel their force, there are those who insist on seeing in this passage *more* than it fairly contains. They *will* find in it the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, as well as the assurance of a future retributive life. All that I can allege in favour of their interpretation is that it is graced by ancient authority. The Targum, for example, renders the passage thus: "I know that my Redeemer liveth; and hereafter his redemption will arise (become a reality) over the dust (into which I shall be dissolved): and *after my skin is again made whole* this will happen: and *from my flesh* I shall again behold God." But not to insist on the fact that even the more critical ancient authorities pronounce against this interpretation, and that almost the whole critical school of modern times utterly rejects it, I will only remark that it is a patent anachronism, that it carries a distinctively Christian doctrine back to a period long anterior to that at which, by his resurrection from the dead, Christ brought life and immortality to light; and that a physical, or a metaphysical, speculation such as this would have been in Job is utterly alien to the tone and movement of his thoughts. And I will only ask those who cleave to it in the teeth of evidence to bear in mind that,

by snatching at arguments for Christian doctrine which they themselves must confess to be dubious and opposed to the weight of critical authority, they do but shew their want of faith in it, instead of, as they intend, their faith. A doctrine which can stand on its own proper evidence, as the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead can very certainly do, does not need to be buttressed up by arguments which are widely disputed and condemned. To resort to such arguments is only, in effect, to render it as doubtful as the arguments themselves. Those who *will* adduce them can hardly be so sure of it as they profess to be.

But if there are some who will see more in this passage than it fairly contains, there are others who see *less*. A few learned and devout scholars, whose verdict is entitled to the gravest respect, refuse to admit that Job here asserts his conviction of a life beyond the grave. Their great argument is:—That if Job had once risen to so noble and consolatory a conviction, it is incredible that he should afterwards have sunk into such depths of despair as we find him in; and that therefore they are compelled, however reluctantly, to conclude that he looked for nothing more than a future deliverance within the limits of the present life, on *this* side the grave. Now I trust I have already shewn that Job's faith in a life beyond the grave finds expression, not in this Inscription alone, but in many other sentences of less, but still of great, weight; that, in fact, it pervades the whole Poem. But there are other arguments against what seems to me the wholly inadequate interpretation maintained by the scholars and commentators to whom I have referred, which I beg to

submit to their consideration, and to that of as many as are disposed to agree with them.

1. If Job had no more to tell us than this, why does he introduce his Inscription with such extraordinary pomp? Health after sickness, wealth after ruinous loss, peace after trouble, are not such extraordinary vicissitudes as to demand that they should be inscribed in the State Chronicle or graven on the eternal Rock.

2. It is questionable whether Job *does* afterwards fall into such utter despair as this hypothesis assumes. I suspect we shall find, as we study the subsequent Chapters of this Poem, that, from this point onward, the inevitable reactions from hope to despair constantly grow less forcible and marked.

3. And even if Job does, again and again, sink into despair, how is that to be reconciled with the fact of his being firmly persuaded that, within a few weeks or months, he was to be reinstated in health and wealth, name and fame, any more than with the fact of his being fully convinced that he should be redeemed and justified beyond the grave? The *nearer* hope should surely have been the more consolatory and sustaining.

4. The interpretation is, so far as I can see, alien to the whole tone of Job's mind as disclosed in the Poem. He had now reached a point at which he despaired of life. The foul leprosy which was devouring him limb by limb had already brought him to the borders of the grave; and more fatal even than the pangs of disease must have been the agony of his distracted mind and lacerated heart.

He cannot long hold out these pangs ;  
The incessant care and labour of his mind  
Hath wrought the mure, that should confine it in,  
So thin, that life looks through and will break out.

And why should he care to keep it in? Life had grown loathsome and abhorrent to him, and that for sadder reasons, and reasons of more weight, than even the fatal progress of his foul disease. He had discovered that he could not trust even those whom he loved best, and who had seemed to love him best. Wife, brothers, friends, clan, servants,—all had failed him. So sad and strange, so almost unparalleled, was his doom, that not even one heart seems to have been quite true to him. What, then, had life to offer him, however bright and favourable its conditions? Health to live in a world so overcast, wealth to lavish on those who had abandoned and betrayed him,—were these a boon so great that he should crave to have it inscribed in ineffaceable characters on an imperishable monument?

5. If it is easy for us, sitting placidly in our easy chairs, to determine that great convictions and inspiring hopes, once reached, can never be forgotten, that a man once possessed of them does not so relax his hold of them as to fall back into the despair from which they rescued him, none who have gone through the agonies of loss, public reprobation, bereavement, and the gnawing pangs of a fatal and loathsome disease, will be quite so sure of that. *We* believe, and are persuaded, that God's will concerning us is always a good and perfect will; but when that Will means loss of health to us, or loss of reputation, or loss of wealth—which, oh, shame on our manhood and our faith! we call "ruin"—are we instantly and invariably content with it? *We* believe, and are persuaded, on better and larger grounds than Job, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; but when wife, or

husband, or child is taken from us, does this sacred and assured conviction instantly and always save us from agonies of grief and hopelessness? No man, I think, who has felt the heavier blows of Change and Loss will be much surprised to find that a man of like passions with himself was sometimes untrue even to his most intimate convictions, and felt as though his most solid hopes had melted into thin air.

6. Job's very hope—a point to be much marked—was a new ingredient of agitation and suspense, cast into the seething passion of his breast, as he himself tell us in the words, "*For that my reins pine away within me!*" He knew and was sure that God would appear for him and redeem him; but he did not know when, or how. The cry of his heart was, How long, O Lord, how long! And if it was well for him that he had a sure and certain hope of deliverance, yet who that knows how narrow is the margin between despair and the sickness of hope deferred, will marvel that Job's hope did not at once allay the trouble and agitation of his spirit? His very hope would fill him with a sick, and almost heartbreaking, longing for its fulfilment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As the "Daily Review," in its notice of the January number of THE EXPOSITOR, was so good as to say, "The fact that Prof. Davidson of Edinburgh has carried his Commentary (on Job) no further than the end of the Fourteenth Chapter *might have something to do* with Mr. Cox's suspension of his work at that point," and to imply that I might never have resumed it had not the learned Professor "generously allowed" me the use of his notes on the Second Colloquy, it may be only right to state that, Professor Davidson being unable to find his notes on Chapter xix., I have been compelled, to my great regret, to dispense with his "valuable help" in my exposition of this Scripture. On the other hand, I have gratefully to acknowledge that, having submitted proof of the foregoing pages to half a dozen of our best Hebraists, and among them Dr. Davidson, he was kind enough, when he returned the proof, to write, "I agree with the whole of it thoroughly," and to add some compliments which it is not for me to repeat. To him, as also to Canon Perowne and Dr. Morison, I owe, and tender, my hearty thanks.