

THE BOOK OF JOB.

V.—THE THIRD COLLOQUY. (CHAPTERS xxii.—xxvi.)

THE argument we have so long pursued is now evidently drawing to a close. Within the limits as yet prescribed for it, it is, indeed, utterly exhausted. New premisses must be introduced into it, as they soon will be by Elihu, before any real conclusion can be reached. For the present all that deserves the name of argument is at an end, and this third Colloquy—which is virtually a duel between Eliphaz and Job—does but mark and record that significant fact. Bildad, as sententious as ever, has nothing but a trite generality to contribute (Chap. xxv.), which, as if conscious of its irrelevance, he tricks out in a vague magniloquence very unusual with him. “Bitter Zophar, with his blatant tongue,” is speechless with indignation or confusion. When Job pauses for him to speak, he has nothing to say. So long as Job simply questioned or denied any dogma of the accepted creed, Zophar could at least reaffirm it and denounce him for arraiging it. But now that Job has ceased to be negative, and become constructive, now that out of the very ruins created by despair he has built up the great hope of a retributive life beyond the grave, he has soared into a region into which, as authority had laid down no chart of it, Zophar is unable to follow him.

This, probably, is the reason why Zophar sits mute.

Possibly, too, he feels that there is no need for him to speak, since Eliphaz has already said all that it was in his own heart to say, and said it very much in his own manner. For, in this last Colloquy, we are saddened by an impressive illustration of the baneful effect of mere controversy even on a mind of the largest and most generous type. Eliphaz, the prophet, sinks well-nigh to the level of Zophar, the bigot. He does, indeed, make some brief show of argument (Chap. xxii. 2-4). He attempts to justify that inference of guilt from punishment, of sin from suffering, for which he had so long and earnestly contended,—arguing that, since God cannot be biassed by the considerations which disturb human judgments, his awards must be just, however unjust they may look. But he feels that he has not met the facts adverse to that inference which Job has adduced, and that he cannot meet them. And so, stung by the mortification of defeat, he breaks out into a string of definite charges against Job, accusing him of the most vulgar and brutal crimes (comp. Chap. xxii. 5-11), for which he could allege no shadow of proof, and of which the well-known tenour of Job's life was a sufficient refutation. In short, he holds fast to his dogma that sin is the sole cause of suffering, and infers from Job's suffering what his sins *must have been* in order to vindicate it. He paints him as he ought to have been according to his dogma, not as he knew him to be in fact. For it is inconceivable that Job, living in the fierce light which beat upon the chieftain of a great clan, could have concealed from his neighbours the crimes of cruelty and violence with which Eliphaz charges him; and it is therefore impossible to believe that even Eliphaz himself did not know in his heart

that these charges were untrue. No doubt he honestly believed that Job must have sinned, and sinned heinously, to provoke the calamities by which he was overwhelmed ; but that he had "stripped the naked," and starved the famishing, and broken the arms of the orphan, in short, that he had been the tyrant instead of the friend of his clan, would have been as incredible to his accuser as it is to us, if he had not been blinded by the heat of controversy and the mortifications of public defeat.

But, let Eliphaz say what he will, Job is no longer to be moved either to his former indignation or to his former despair. The time is past in which he can be much disturbed by anything that men can say against him. What he is in himself their thoughts of him cannot transpose.

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell ;
Though all fair things should wear the brows of grace,
Yet grace must still look so.

And, however "foul" he may look to them, he is content so that God recognize his innocence. Now, moreover, that, instead of flinging out ambiguous hints and dubious reproaches, Eliphaz formulates distinct charges against him, he can afford to treat them with disdain. His inward feeling as he listens to these monstrous and incredible slanders is,—

I would I could
Quit *all* offences with as clear excuse
As well as I am doubtless I can purge
Myself of those which I am charged withal.

But he is not eager or anxious to purge himself of them. In the next section, "the Soliloquy," he does indirectly refute them, indeed, but for the present he disdains even to deny them. He calmly pursues his

own course, and is no longer blown about by any wind the Friends can raise. Once more, and now more earnestly than ever, he longs to meet God face to face, for he is no longer afraid of God (Chap. xxiii. 6); nor does his assured conviction that God will vindicate him in the life to come at all abate his desire for an immediate vindication. "Job is no more pacified under present wrong by the vision of future rectification of it than Paul was satisfied under present sin by the vision of future redemption from it." Just as under the pressure of sin the Apostle cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" so, under the pressure of injustice, Job cried out, "O that I knew where I might find him! I would press up to his very seat" (Chap. xxiii. 3, 4). And though he cannot "find" God, he is sure that God has found him; that He will hereafter acquit him (Chap. xxiii. 7); and that, when God has fully assayed him, he shall come forth from the trial as gold from the fire (Chap. xxiii. 10).

What really occupies and dominates his thoughts throughout this Colloquy is not his personal fate, but "the common problem—yours, mine, every one's." As in Chapter xxi. he had been startled by the fact that, under the rule of a righteous God, whole classes of lawless and godless men were suffered to spend their lives in ease and mirth to the very end, so now he is startled and perplexed by the facts that, under the same severe yet gracious rule, there are large classes of men who, for no sins of their own, are condemned to lives of the most sordid and unrelieved misery (Chap. xxiv. 1-12); and still other classes who addict themselves to vice and crime despite the detection and shame and ruin which dog their footsteps (Chap. xxiv.

13-24). That very problem, or, rather, that terrible series of problems, suggested to us by the existence of the oppressed and of the criminal classes, so seizes on the mind of Job, now that he too is miserable and oppressed, as to divert him from the sense of his own affliction. With the magnanimity we have seen to be habitual to him, he passes out beyond the limits of his personal interests and experiences into the wants, conditions, wrongs of the toiling and oppressed myriads, and by this philosophic breadth of contemplation abates and dulls the edge of his proper misery.

I.—ELIPHAZ TO JOB (CHAPTER xxii.).

Even the prophetic spirit of Eliphaz was, as I have just said, so perverted by his dogmatic prepossessions, as not only to convince him that Job had fallen into some heinous sin, but also to prompt him to charge his friend with wanton and public crimes which it was impossible that he should have committed. And yet, when we come to look at his speech more closely, we find that the main lines of thought which he pursues in it are true and valuable in themselves, and become false only in the application he makes of them. In nothing, indeed, is the amazing power of the consummate artist to whom we owe this poem more apparent than in the fact that, even when he makes the speakers in his drama wholly wrong in intention and in the moral they point, he nevertheless puts into their lips the purest truths couched in the most appropriate and beautiful forms. However false the conclusions at which they arrive, they reach them in the noblest way, so that we never altogether lose our respect for them.

In the men depicted, if not created, by his genius, we find that very blending of truth with error, of moral goodness with moral weakness, which we see in the men whom God Himself has created and made. It is this which makes them so real to us, and which breathes into them the very breath of life.

In this Chapter, for example, in which Eliphaz falls so far below himself, he states very finely at least three great truths, although every one of them is stated in support of a false conclusion.

1. How true, for instance, and how finely put, is the thought of Verses 2-4, — that the judgments of God must be just because they are disinterested! The wisdom and piety of man are profitable to the man himself, not to God, just as his wickedness and folly are injurious not to God, but only to himself and his fellows. Why, then, since He receives no advantage from the righteousness of men, and takes no loss from their unrighteousness, should God judge men unfairly? There is no scope for selfish or personal motives such as might unconsciously bias even the most upright human judge if his private interests were touched, — now moving him to favour his own cause, and now, by the recoil of virtue, rendering him unjust to it. *That* surely is a noble and consolatory thought. And yet even this fine thought is instantly perverted to a sinister purpose. For Eliphaz proceeds to infer that, as God has no private ends to serve, as therefore all his punishments must be just, it follows that all punishment implies sin on the part of those who suffer it; that Job must have sinned heinously, or he would not have suffered so terribly: and that, as he was the opulent and powerful chief of a clan, his sins must have been those

to which such a chieftain was most exposed—the sins of a grasping and merciless tyranny (Verses 5–11). Just as

Men judge by the complexion of the sky
The state and inclination of the day,

so Eliphaz infers the moral bent, the crimes of Job, from the opportunities and temptations of his rank and condition. And thus the truth with which he started is changed into a lie.

2. So, again, in Verses 12–20, how finely does he rebuke the practical atheism which, while it is not at the pains of denying the existence of God, shuts Him up in his own heaven—conceiving, or affecting to conceive, of Him as one of “the careless forces, sitting far withdrawn upon the heights of space,” taking no interest in the affairs of men, and exerting no influence upon them! Atheists of this stamp, such loungers along that “ancient way trodden by men of sin,” are only to be arrested, says Eliphaz, by earthquake and tempest; they cannot see the light until it becomes lightning. They are like that foolish generation which ate and drank, married and was given in marriage, “until the flood came and swept them all away” It is a solemn thought, an impressive warning; his statement of it is finely conceived, and glows with a generous indignation. But when he proceeds to represent Job, whose whole soul is saturated and suffused with the consciousness of a living and present God, as one of these indolent and insolent atheists, he is once more guilty of a gross and hardy perversion of the truth.

3. It is curious and significant that, while in the Second Colloquy Eliphaz had uttered no invitation to

repentance, no word of promise and hope, he closes *this* harangue, otherwise so hard and cruel, with an urgent entreaty that Job would "return to the Almighty," and is profuse in promises of good. If Job will but put away iniquity and take his law from God's mouth, all will yet be well with him; he shall find a new and brighter light gleaming on his path, and have

all the ruins of distressful times
Repair'd with double riches of content.

It is curious that *these* should be the last words we hear from the lips of Eliphaz; for, as we have seen, the Poet has throughout portrayed him as one of the prophetic order of men, and here he is unconsciously predicting the final issue of this great drama. For, in the end, Job did return and humble himself under the hand of the Almighty; he did receive at the hands of the Lord "twice as much as he had before." And this reversion to a kindlier and more gracious mood on the part of Eliphaz (comp. Chap. xxii. 21-30 with Chap. v. 17-27) may, I hope, be taken as a sign that, though in the heat of controversy he had brought the most terrible charges against Job, yet in his heart he did not himself believe them to be true, or would at least be very gladly convinced that they were not true. But, in any case, in his concluding invitation to contrition and amendment, and his picture of the happy consequences of repentance, he puts a momentous truth very happily. His last words are really very finely said. The one thing that renders them utterly untrue, and which must have wholly spoiled and vitiated them to the ear of Job, is the unfounded assumption on which they proceed. To *him* they are a mere insult, since

they assume that he is guilty of sins the most open, palpable, and shameful. And so, once more, the truth—even truth in its most gracious and winning aspects—is turned into a lie.

In fine, we could hardly have more impressive illustrations than we may find in this Chapter of the fact that dogmas, however true in themselves, lose all their power for good unless they are informed and illumined by “charity.”

CHAPTER XXII.

1. *Then answered Eliphaz the Temanite and said :*
2. *Can a man profit God ?*
Surely even a wise man can but profit himself !
3. *If thou art righteous, is that any gain to the Almighty,*
Or is it any advantage to Him that thou makest thy ways perfect ?
4. *Will He plead with thee out of reverence for thee ;*
Will He go with thee into judgment ?
5. *Is not thy wickedness great,*
And are not thine iniquities without end ?
6. *For thou hast bound thy brother by a pledge without cause,*
And stripped the naked of their raiment ;
7. *Not a drink of water hast thou given to the faint,*
And from the famishing thou hast withholden bread :
8. *And the strong of arm—the land was his !*
And the lofty of brow—he was its inhabitant !
9. *Thou didst send widows away empty,*
And let the arms of the orphan be broken :
10. *Therefore are snares around thee,*
And on a sudden fear confoundeth thee ;
11. *And a darkness, so that thou canst not see,*
Or a flood of waters, covereth thee.
12. *Is not God in the heights of heaven ?*
Behold, then, the topmost stars, how high they be !
13. *Yet thou sayest, “ How doth God know ?*
Can He judge through the darkness ?
14. *Clouds veil Him, so that He cannot see,*
And He walketh [only] in the vault of heaven !

15. *Wilt thou keep that ancient way*
Trodden by men of sin
16. *Who were cut off before their time,*
Whose firm foundation became a flowing stream,
17. *Who said unto God, "Depart from us,"*
And, "What can the Almighty do for us!"
18. *Though He had filled their houses with good things?*
Far from me be the counsel of the wicked.
19. *The righteous shall see it and rejoice,*
And the innocent shall laugh them to scorn,
20. *And say, "Are not our adversaries destroyed?*
Hath not a fire devoured their substance?"
21. *Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace;*
Thereby shall good come to thee:
22. *Take, I pray thee, a law from his mouth,*
And lay up his words in thine heart.
23. *If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up,*
If thou put iniquity far from thy tent.
24. *Yea, scatter thy gold upon the ground*
And Ophir among the stones of the torrent,
25. *And the Almighty shall be thy gold,*
And as silver purchased with toil:
26. *Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Almighty,*
And shalt lift up thy face unto God;
27. *Thou shalt pray to Him, and He will hear thee,*
And thou shalt pay thy vows;
28. *Thou shalt frame a purpose, and it shall be established for thee,*
And light shall gleam on thy paths:
29. *Thou shalt say to them that are cast down, "Arise!*
For He will succour the meek;"
30. *Even him that is not guiltless shalt thou deliver,*
And he shall be saved by the pureness of thy hands.

The Chapter divides itself into three sections. (1) In *Verses 2-11* Eliphaz describes the sins of which Job must have been guilty in order to provoke the calamities which had fallen upon him; (2) in *Verses 12-20* he traces these sins of inhumanity to Job's impiety, his false and profane conception of the Almighty

Ruler of the universe; and in *Verses 21-30* he entreats him to repent of those sins by rising to a true conception of God, and by returning to a true relation to Him. Throughout he makes no attempt to deny the facts which Job had adduced in the last Colloquy, although, if those facts were true, they utterly shattered the hypothesis maintained by the Friends, or to refute the inference which Job had drawn from them. Nor does he once so much as glance at that great hope of a future life, in which the inequalities of this life should be rectified, which had dawned on the mind of Job. He is content to repeat what he had said before, what his friends had echoed with wearisome iteration, as though no new facts had been adduced which their old formula could not be stretched to cover.

He opens the first section with an argument of some philosophic reach, attempting to shew by rigid logical proof what sins Job *must* have committed, and why he is sure that Job has committed them (*Verses 2-4*). His argument, briefly put, is this. No gain accrues to God from the piety of men, no loss from their impiety. Because He has nothing to fear and nothing to hope for at their hands, his decisions must be unaffected by personal considerations; they must be strictly level and square with the facts; and, his decisions being just, He is by no means likely to be moved by the foolish outcries with which men may greet them. When He punishes men, it must be simply because their sins call for punishment. As He has punished Job, it must be for his sins that He has punished him. And as Job has again and again demanded that his sins should be openly alleged against him, Eliphaz will meet that demand.

He proceeds to meet it in *Verses 5-11*. It was easy enough to meet it. Nothing but delicacy, nothing but friendly consideration, had kept him silent so long, or induced him to veil in ambiguous innuendoes the crimes with which Job had stained the purity of his soul. For, of course, his sins were those of his time and class. Every Oriental "lord" was apt to play the tyrant. Irresponsible power rendered them inhumane. This was "the great wickedness" of Job. He had been heartless to the poor and needy, inhospitable to the stranger. "The man of the arm," *i.e.*, of the strong arm, the man of power—in other words, he himself—to him the whole land belonged of right; and the man with the lofty brow, the proud look—again, he himself—was alone entitled to dwell in it. All others held their possessions in it by his favour, and might be stripped of them at his caprice. He had not scrupled to strip them. Widows and orphans, of all mortals the least protected in the Orient, that they might not perish of want, had besought succour or grace of him; and he, who had first violently despoiled them of their inheritance, drove them with violence from his seat, the widow with empty hands, the orphan with broken arms.

"Supposed sincere and holy in his thoughts," wearing a mask of piety, these were the crimes of which he had been guilty in secret. And it is for these crimes, and for such crimes as these, that his way now stands thick with snares (comp. Chap. xviii. 8-10), that detection and destruction hem him in on every side, leaving no loophole of escape. His approaching ruin made itself felt even before it came upon him. He was shaken by sudden tremours and forebodings, all warning him that his end was at hand. It was not

God, as he had complained (Chap. xix. 6, 8), who had "flung his net" about him and "set darkness in his paths:" the net was woven by his own fingers, the darkness was but the shadow cast by his own guilt.

Verse 11 is difficult only because there is so much in it. Job did not see the true cause of his sufferings, and therefore could not recognize their justice. And so Eliphaz points out to him that the darkness of which he complained, and the flood of misery in which he is being swept away, are but the natural and deserved punishment of his transgressions. But, besides this, there is in these words an allusion to the Deluge. Indirectly, and by an allusion expanded in *Verses 15-18*, Eliphaz compares Job to that evil generation which, by crimes like his, had provoked the just resentment of Heaven, and perished miserably in the Flood. Let Job beware, lest he too should be drowned in the depths of his own transgressions. Weighed down by iniquities so many and so heinous, how can he hope to escape?

With what wing shall his affections fly
Toward fronting peril and opposed decay?

Eliphaz, leading Job toward the brink from which he may see his non-existing sins, cuts but a sorry figure for so great a man, and would be a strange picture of the blind man leading the man with eyes, if there were not so many modern repetitions of it.

In the second section (*Verses 12-20*) he traces the inhumanity and tyranny of Job to his impiety, to his false conception of God and of God's relation to man. Because Job has denied retribution to be the only law of the Divine Providence, Eliphaz assumes him to deny that Providence altogether. According to him, Job

conceives of God as strolling along the vault of heaven, careless of mankind and "their ancient tale of wrong," not descending to earth in order to administer justice, nor leaving the easy Paradise which He has planted for Himself; too far off to see, too self-absorbed to care for, the wrongs and miseries of men (*Verses 12-14*). In the previous Colloquy (Chap. xxi. 7-17) Job had, indeed, expressed his astonishment that many of the wicked wax old and become mighty, wearing away their days in mirth and affluence, smitten by no judgment, although they say unto God, "Depart from us!" and, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" But he had also expressly affirmed that their prosperity did not spring from their own hand, and disavowed all part and lot with them, in the formula of deprecation and abhorrence: "Far from me be the counsel of the wicked!" And now, with the artifice and insincerity of a mere controversialist bent on victory, Eliphaz puts into the mouth of Job himself the very words which Job had put into the mouth of the wicked, and even renounces all part in his detestable sentiments in the very formula in which he had himself renounced all participation in them! "Wilt thou," he demands, with an explicit reference to the generation swept away by the Deluge (*Verses 15, 16*), "keep that ancient path, trodden by men of sin, who were cut off before their time, *whose firm foundation became a flowing stream?*" Wilt thou say to God, and of God, what they said? And he instantly and evidently assumes that Job *will*, that he has fallen into their base Epicurean conception of the Almighty. For he not only hastily deprecates that conception for himself; he also proceeds, in *Verses 19, 20*, to shew how the truly

righteous regard the rise and fall of the wicked; how *they* look cheerfully on the phenomena which fill Job with sadness and with sad and obstinate questionings, sure that the higher the wicked rise the lower they will fall; and how they, the truly pious, will mock at them when they topple over to destruction, and will exult in their fall. As one listens to him, indeed, one is tempted to exclaim, "Far from us be the counsel of *the righteous!*"

In the third section (*Verses 21-30*) Eliphaz exhorts Job to return to right thoughts of Jehovah, to enter into the right relation to Him, urging especially upon him how much, in many ways, he will gain thereby. It is a strange mixture of earthly and heavenly good that he offers him. But the fact that Eliphaz dwells mainly on the delights of communion with God and on the power to succour the downcast and to intercede for the guilty—dwelling most on these spiritual advantages because he thinks them most likely to allure and persuade Job—shews, I think, that he had formed a much truer and higher conception of the man than he has allowed to appear.

He urges Job to "make friends" with God, to take the law of his life from God's mouth, that so good may come to him, and peace,—meaning by "good," not goodness, but good fortune, and by "peace," rest from the obstinate questionings and restless doubts with which he was wearying himself in vain (*Verses 21 and 22*). If he return to the Almighty—from whom, however, he has never wandered—he shall be "built up," another synonym for good fortune, for outward prosperity (*Verse 23*). But, in order that he may return, he must put away "iniquity"—*i.e.*, the secret spoils,

the iniquitous gains, the treasures acquired by violence and extortion—which he has hidden in his tent (comp. Chap. xi. 14). Nay, more, he must renounce the treasures in which hitherto he has put his trust, even though he have acquired them honestly, flinging his gold upon the ground and among the stones of the torrent; for, in *Verse 24*, “Ophir” is but a synonym for gold.¹ If he will put from him the fine gold in which he has trusted and delighted, then the Almighty will Himself become his treasure and his delight. He whose face, like that of Cain, is now cast down with a burdening sense of guilt, will lift up his head with fearless joy. When he prays, instead of, as now, remaining deaf and mute, God will answer him. He will “pay his vows,” because the favour or deliverance he asks will be vouchsafed him, so that his vow will always fall due. Success will wait on his schemes and enterprises; light will shine on all his ways, so that he will neither stumble nor miss his aim. And, best of all for a man of his generous and compassionate temper, his words will shed new strength into fainting hearts; power will be given him to succour the weak and distressed; and, he himself being righteous, his supplications will become so effectual, that they will avail even for the unrighteous. His prayer shall be that

Which piercer so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees *all* faults.

This glowing description of the peace, the happiness, and the power to serve, which result from friend-

¹ Just as the fabric woven from the filaments of the nettle is called “muslin,” from Mossul, and cloth with figures in it, “damask,” from Damascus, so gold is named from Ophir, on the north coast of the Runn and east of the mouth of the Indus, the place where it was then most copiously produced.—*Delitzsch*.

ship with God, is not unworthy to be the last utterance of Eliphaz, if only we drop out of it the sinister lines in which he depicts Job as needing to put away his iniquity and to return to the Almighty. It is characteristic of the man. For, as I have said, in these closing words the prophetic Eliphaz foreshadows the true and final close of this great drama. And it is really very remarkable, and must, I think, be taken as a stroke of unstudied and unconscious art, that in the very last Verse put into his mouth, the Poet makes him utter a prediction which was afterwards most happily fulfilled in his own experience and in that of the Friends for whom he speaks. As he finally retires from an argument too high for him, he tells Job that his prayers will avail, and the pureness of his hands, even for "him that is not guiltless." And in the last Chapter of the Poem we read that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Eliphaz and against his two friends, and that He sent them to Job, that he might intercede for them; "*for,*" said Jehovah, "*him will I surely accept, and not deal out to you according to your impiety.*" The prophecy of Eliphaz was thus literally fulfilled; the fervent effectual prayer of Job *did* avail to deliver even those who were not guiltless.

And so, with a prediction on his lips, afterwards fulfilled with so strange and so just an irony, Eliphaz goes on his way, and we hear him no more.

S. COX.