

JOB.

IN one of his most suggestive *Thoughts*, Pascal connects man's greatness with his sense of misery. "Man is great," he says, "in his knowledge of his misery." And certainly the evidence of literature would bear this out. For the greatest works of literary art, which reflect the deepest thoughts of the noblest minds, are those which turn upon the pains and sorrows of life. Among these the Book of Job occupies a unique place. It is not only, as Luther says, "magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture"; it is even (to quote Tennyson's words as typical) "the greatest poem whether of ancient or of modern times."

With this general judgment perhaps all would concur. But when we pass to closer study of the book, we are bewildered by the endless diversity of opinion that meets us. Even on the question of the literary character of the book it is almost *quot homines, tot opiniones*. According to some authorities, the book is an *epic*; according to others, a *drama*, or more specifically a *tragedy*; and according to still others, a *didactic poem*. As if to comprehend all possible varieties of opinion, Dillmann calls it an "epic-dramatic didactic poem" (*ein episch-dramatisch Lehrgedicht*¹). On the other hand, there are those who refuse to class the book in any of the recognized literary forms. "We cannot," it is said, "force this splendid piece of Hebrew wisdom into a Greek schema, and it is really futile to discuss whether it is a drama or an epic. It is itself."² If possible, still more diverse are the judgments pronounced on the theme and purpose of the book, the "problem of Job." Here, again, all possible rubrics and formulae have been adopted. The sufferings of Job are described as the trial of his piety,

¹ *Hioð*, p. xxiii.

² Peake, *Job* (Century Bible), p. 41.

the test by which God brought to light the sterling reality of his faith; or again, as the discipline through which God purified him from his uncleanness and impiety, and thus worked out the perfecting of his character.¹ Other scholars have found the tendency of the poem to be purely negative—to clear the ground of outworn theories of sin and suffering, or even sceptical and pessimistic. And others read it simply as the drama of a heroic soul's sufferings. Amid such diversity, it may appear bold even to seek for a solution, far more to hazard any personal opinion. But if we cannot hope to solve the problem, we may at least (to use the word which Goethe applies to this very book) “fence it round.”

In its opening scene, the prologue introduces us to Job, a man that was “perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil,” surrounded with all the prosperity that (according to the religious axiom of the day) belonged of right to the good: a wealth of substance that made him “the greatest of all the children of the East,” and a family of sons and daughters virtuous and prosperous as himself. Even in those days of simple faith increase of this world's goods often turned men's hearts from God. But Job's prosperity made him the more scrupulous in his regard of God. He not only eschewed open sins in himself, but he sought to guard against even the suspicion of unconscious sin in his children's hearts. He was no morose Puritan. He rejoiced in their innocent enjoyments. But he knew how easily pleasure leads to forgetfulness of God. And therefore, week by week, when the cycle of their feasting was gone round, he “sent and sanctified them, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, ‘It may be that my sons have sinned in renouncing

¹ German scholars have drawn up quite a table of categories, under which Job's sufferings may be classed: *Prüfungs-*, *Bewährungs-*, *Zeugniss-*, *Züchtigungs-* und *Läuterungs-*, and *Förderungs-leiden*.

God in their hearts.'” Job is thus set before us as the perfect pattern of a great and good man.

The scene now shifts from earth to heaven. Jahveh is revealed seated on His throne, receiving the reports of His ministers of state, the heavenly beings who do His royal business. Among them appears the Satan, a sort of Prosecutor-General, whose function is to search men's character and works, to detect their sins and failings, and so oppose their claims to a righteous standing before God. He has been scouring through the earth, gathering up his tale of ill report, and he comes with a certain malicious glee to pour it into the ears of the king. But the God who has no delight in evil meets him with at least one clear case of goodness. “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil ? ” The Satan's knowledge of frail man has given him so cynical a contempt for human virtue that he will make no exception even of Job. He admits the fact of his exemplary piety, indeed. But he raises the fiendish suggestion : “Doth Job serve God for nought ? ” Is not self-interest the real root of all his fine piety ? For “ hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about all that he hath on every side ? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” And then he throws down the gauntlet, and challenges God to a test of His servant's piety : “ But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath ; and see whether he will not renounce Thee to Thy face.” Jahveh immediately accepts the challenge. He knows His servant Job is a “ perfect and upright man,” who will hold fast his faith through every turn of fortune. But suspicion has been cast upon the sincerity of his piety ; and the servant of God must be above suspicion. Therefore, for his honour's sake,

as well as His own good name, He hands him over to the Satan's power ; and " he goes forth from the presence of the Lord."

In the next scene we have the terrible sequel. It is the day when Job's children are eating and drinking in their elder brother's house. That very morning their father has sanctified them, atoning for all possible guilt they may have incurred by thoughtless sin, and he now rests securely, trusting his lot and theirs to the Almighty care, when suddenly, with tragic swiftness, messenger after messenger arrives with tidings of disaster, utter and irreparable. His oxen, sheep, camels and servants, and—last crushing blow—his sons and daughters have been swept away. Job has lost all but his piety. The Satan had confidently expected that he would cast that too away, and renounce God to His face. But loss and sorrow only brought out the full splendour of Job's faith. In the midst of his desolation, in spite of his belief that God had afflicted him thus, " he imputed no wrong to God," but rather worshipped. " The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Again the heavenly Court is convened. The heart of Jahveh is filled with a quiet exultation because of His servant's victorious faith. But the Satan is as cynically suspicious as ever. Talk not to him of human goodness ! It is all mercenary, a matter of profit and interest, " skin for skin," measure for measure. Yes ! Job can bear easily enough the loss of goods and children. But touch himself, " his own bone and flesh," and he will then renounce Thee to Thy face ! " And now we see Job seated on the village ash-heap, smitten with a slow and fatal disease, the most loathsome and painful of all, a disease whose very name marked it out as the special "stroke of God"¹ for sin. And to add to his misery, his wife assumes the rôle of the

¹ צָרַח, leprosy, *lit.* stroke.

Satan's advocate. "If this be all the reward of piety, have done with it! Renounce God, that He may slay thee outright, and release thee from thy sufferings!" But Job's faith can stand the very extremity of trial. His terrible sufferings but bring to light the hidden depths of his piety; and his answer is the classical expression even of Christian resignation. "What? When we receive so much good at the hands of God, shall we not also accept evil when He sends it?"

So far then as the prologue is concerned, the motive is clear and consistent. The question round which all turns is the sincerity of man's faith. Is there really such a thing as disinterested piety? Or do men serve God for their own selfish ends? In answer to this question, the prologue sets before us the spectacle of Job the righteous, suffering the loss of all things, and even the extreme of personal agony, yet holding fast his faith in God, and even blessing the hand that smote. And the light which is thus cast on the mystery of suffering is this: the pains and sorrows which befall the righteous are the test by which God reveals to men and angels the reality of godliness.

If the prologue be the introduction proper, then we have here the key to the poem as well. As Dr. Davidson puts it with his own incisiveness: "This question—Doth Job serve God for nought?—is the problem of the book."¹ But the difficulty is just to bring the poem under this schema. And the learning and insight which Davidson and his great *confrères*, Delitzsch and Dillmann, have applied to the problem but throw the difficulty into clearer relief. It is not merely that the bearing of Job is different. But the whole centre of interest changes. In the poem, the Satan and his challengings of disinterested goodness vanish. It is no longer Job's piety, but God's justice, that is in question. As even Godet (a strong supporter of the unity of the book,

¹ *Comm. on Job*, p. xvi.

and a scholar who finds the key to the poem in the prologue) admits : " The Being who is brought to the bar of judgment is in reality not Job, it is Jehovah. The point in debate is not only the virtue of Job ; it is, at the same time, and in a still higher degree, the justice of God." ¹ And Job is now the Prometheus who boldly challenges the justice of God's ways. The problem of the poem is to reconcile faith with God's mysterious providence ; and it ends in God's appearing, not to reveal to His stedfast servant the meaning of his sufferings, but to vindicate His own character as worthy of trust.²

It is in the epilogue, rather, that we find the real sequel to the prologue. The two, indeed, form an almost completely connected narrative. The weary sufferer has triumphantly withstood the " impious " ³ suggestions of his wife and friends, and emerged from his trial true as gold. The Satan's assault on his piety has thus turned to the glory of God and the honour of pure religion. And now God puts forth His hand to reward His faithful servant. His wrath is kindled against the friends for their " impious " words ; but Job's bearing throughout his trial He approves as per-

¹ *O. T. Studies*, p. 186.

² The latest and most elaborate attempt to prove the integral unity of prologue and poem, Dr. Karl Kautzsch, *Das sogenannte Volksbuch von Hiob* (1900), escapes the real difficulty only by evading it. According to this scholar, the prologue merely sets forth the general facts of the case, the appearance of Satan and his challenge of Job's piety being but picturesque staging. This, of course, is to cut the heart out of the prologue.

³ The word *נִבְלָה* (42, 8) is too strong to characterize the friends' speeches in our present poem. The same word is used by Job to denounce his wife's suggestion to " curse God and die " ; to him she is like *אִתּוֹת הַיְבָלֹת* (" one of the impious, godless women "). The friends' speeches are anything but godless. And Job's speeches in the poem are as far from being " correct " or orthodox. Jahveh Himself describes them as " words without knowledge " which " darken counsel " (xxxviii. 2) and " cavil " against the Almighty and His ways (xl. 2). We are to suppose that, in the original prose tale, the wife's suggestion was followed by similar counsel on the part of the friends, which Job rejects with the same horror, and which Jahveh then denounces as " impiety." These speeches would probably be quite short.

fectly correct. And in token of His approval, He changes Job's fortune, restoring him twice as much as he had before, and blessing his latter end more than his beginning.

On these grounds we have been led irresistibly to the conclusion—first suggested by Wellhausen in a review of Dillmann's *Hiōb* in 1871, and worked out most elaborately by Budde and Duhm—that the prologue and epilogue originally formed the main part of an older prose tale of Job's sufferings, which the poet has adopted as the framework of his book. We cannot, indeed, follow these critics in their idea that this prose tale is a pre-exilic *Volksbuch*. The materials were no doubt drawn from the old tradition of Job known to Ezekiel (xiv. 14, 20), who classes Job with Noah and Daniel as the patterns of piety in the hoary days of old. But the advanced idea of the Satan¹ stamps the book, as we have it, as post-exilic, while the *tendency* of the story seems too strongly marked for a mere *Volkssage*. We regard it, rather, as a pious prose tale—or prose *epic*, as this part of the book may fittingly be termed—written to cheer the hearts of the people of God in the troublous days which followed the Exile, when the righteous suffered, and the wicked saw long and happy years, and when so many forsook the fear of the Lord because, as they said, “it was vain to serve Him, and there was no profit in keeping His charge and walking mournfully before Him,”² for “every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them.”³ By the picture of Job the righteous suffering, and through his stedfast endurance bearing witness to the reality of godliness, the writer encourages the righteous sufferers of his day to endure their afflictions

¹ It is in Zech. iii. (B.C. 520) that we first meet with this advanced idea of the Satan.

² Mal. iii. 14. ³ Mal. ii. 17. The prophecy of Malachi (probably just before the times of Ezra) faces the same problem as the prologue of Job. This is an additional reason for our assigning the prologue to the same general period. It was, indeed, only after the exile that the problem of individual suffering became an acute one.

bravely ; for these are not (as they imagine in their heaviness of heart) the outpouring of the Divine wrath because of their sins, but the test by which God means to bring to light the purity of their faith and piety. If they hold fast their faith as Job did, they too will be witnesses for God to their generation, and soon He will appear to champion their cause, and will bless their latter end more than their beginning.

The poem sounds far profounder depths. Job is still the hero. And the prose tale is retained as the general introduction to the piece. But the poet can no longer rest content with its cheering view of suffering as the trial of faith, to be made good by double prosperity. Nor does he present Job any more as the type of the patient sufferer. Instead he brings him to the lowest abyss of despair, and makes him even break out into blasphemous invectives against God and His ways. We cannot doubt that in this he gives expression to his own personal feelings. The poet is one who has felt the iron of suffering pass deeply into his own soul, and has been driven by the cold consolations of unsympathetic friends and their hard *doctrinaire* ideas of Divine providence into open revolt against the God of popular imagination, but has fought his way through despair and doubt, if not to clear light, yet to a freer and nobler faith in God. And in the poem he has opened his heart, and spoken out all the feelings that passed through his soul in his agony of sorrow, till he found rest again in God.

And thus perhaps we may call the poem (reversing Browning's title) a *lyrical drama*. Its component parts are distinctively lyrical. They are the immediate outflow of the feelings of the heart. And the movement of the poem as a whole is dramatic, through darkness to light, through struggle and doubt to new faith and peace.

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(To be concluded.)