

The Original Form of the Legend of Job.

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LIKE everything else, the Book of Job divides into three, a beginning, a middle, and an end. We have the prologue and the epilogue in narrative, and the body of the poem is a string of monologues. But however exact formally may be the threefold division, the book is far from having a beginning, a middle, and an end in the real sense, and the great difficulty of interpretation centres in the relation of the prologue and epilogue to the main stem.

Of this relation there are three possible hypotheses. The writer of the main stem may have written the prologue and the epilogue. Or he may have taken them from some already existing source, written or oral, and used them as a frame for his own work. Or, finally, they may have been added by some later hand.

For the third hypothesis very little can be said. Without the prologue, the poem itself would be as unintelligible as the second part of *Faust* without the first. Some introduction is absolutely necessary, and if this present prologue is a later addition, it must have been put in the place of something else that was cut away to make room for it. But of this there cannot be a fragment of proof, and it does not help in any way towards a solution of the problem of the poem. It does not enable us to see how our present Job, as we now have it, came into existence. Only an hypothesis which will help us to trace the historic development can be worth anything.

Again, in the way of the first view, that the whole poem, prologue, epilogue, and monologues, all proceeded from the one hand, there are great difficulties. In the prologue and epilogue the position is assumed that it is perfectly within the right of God, for His own purposes, to cause His creatures (in this case Job and his children) to suffer any degree of misery. In order to demonstrate to the Satan that Job serves Him for His own sake, Job's children are swept away and he himself is struck down with the extremest

bodily and mental torture. There is not a shadow of a feeling that this is hard upon Job. But in the body of the poem the position of Job, and implicitly of the writer, is different. Again and again a bitter cry is wrung from him, a cry of the anguish of the creature protesting against the tyranny of the creator. God had made him, but had no right to make him if only to plunge him into sorrow. Not even in 'Umar Khayyām is there anywhere such bitterness of irony as when Job parodies the words of the Psalmist, "What is man that thou are mindful of him?" (vii. 17), or turns in fierceness, "O, Thou Spy of men!" (vii. 20). The Semitic conception that God has a right to do with His creatures what He wills, which we find in the prologue and epilogue, is torn by Job himself to utter fragments. For any companion figure in loneliness and grandeur we have to turn to Greek thought, and to Prometheus on the crags of Caucasus. Between the two there are many differences, but in this they are at one; the Judge of all the earth is not just.

Who, then, is? To the Satan of the prologue the question must have been inconceivable. The idea of separating God and good could have as little crossed his mind as Mephistophiles could have guessed that after all his long toil and service Faust would escape because he had really wrought for the advancement of man. But the salvation which Goethe worked out, in the course of forty years, for Faust was reached by Job in a flash of intuition. Even though the world break in fragments around him, though God and His law shrivel and pass, within his mind there is the conception of the right, and that remains (xvii. 8, 9). It is the most un-Semitic thought in the whole Old Testament; intelligible when met in Plato's *Euthyphro*, where Socrates discusses whether that is right which the gods do or whether the gods do it because it is right, but in Hebrew words strange to startling. Thus we have a second difference. This conception reached by Job has no recognition in the epilogue, yet it, if anything, marks the high tide of his development.

But there is still another difference. In the prologue Job's children are swept off the board of life. In the epilogue their place is taken by a new family, and Job is supposed to have been happy. We can only explain this as an instance of oriental apathy. The tie of fatherhood and sonship is not the same to the Muslim as it is to us. Yet there is no apathy in Job's own words when he looks back upon the time "when Shaddai was yet with me, when my boys were around me" (xxix. 5). The grief of the man who said that was not to be appeased by a new family growing up around him.

This is the third great difference, and each one of the three deals with no slight accident of expression or turn of thought, but goes down to the roots of things and tinges the whole course of the dialogue. The relation of father to son, the relation of God to right, the relation of creature to Creator—where there is difference in these there can be no unity. But if this means that the prologue and epilogue must have been taken by the author of the poem from some already existing source, oral or written, there at once arise two other questions. What was the form of the story of Job in this source, and why did the writer of the poem use it when it was so antagonistic in many ways to his own views and feelings?

As to the form of the story, it has been commonly assumed that the original legend of Job was practically the same as that which we have in our present poem. Some have thought of it as more developed, others as less; some as existing in a written form as a prose book, others as an orally transmitted legend of greater or slighter firmness of outline. But no one has as yet, so far as I know, suggested that the author of our poem made any change in the story itself, however he may have developed the characters and widened their horizon. The story is supposed to have been of a man, happy in his family, his wealth, and the respect of all, who had been the victim of a series of crushing blows, striking him to the dust. That he had borne all with patience till his friends appeared, and had then broken down. That he had finally been restored by God's special grace to still greater prosperity than before. Some, perhaps, would not accept all of this, but would reject Job's breaking down as a part of the original story. Others, again, doubt whether the scenes in heaven do not belong to the additions of the poet of our book. But the point which all, as I take it, have missed, is the light on this original story which may be found in the epilogue.

Yet, to all, the epilogue has been the great *crux*. With its tacitly accepted doctrine of worldly prosperity as the *summum bonum* and its conception of the government of the world as all very good, it stands in the most glaring contrast to the clear insight and pure aspirations of the body of the book. And still more strangely does it allot the praise and blame of God. Job, through all his speeches, has rejected the doctrine that there is a government of the world that in any sense can be called moral. He has been on the verge of denouncing and rejecting God himself,—we may even say that in some passages he does denounce God,—and he has only just missed doing all that the Satan asserted that he would do. From the final act

of rejection he has only been held back by the memory of their old friendship and communion. Over against the picture of the present God as the tyrant of the universe, there has risen that of the former God as his lover and friend. If he could only come into God's presence, he would plead with Him, and plead in the consciousness of right. He is right, and God is wrong — that he knows.

Yet this Job is said in the epilogue to have spoken of God that which is right, and it is God that says this. Either there is here the most absolute contradiction or there is the most tremendous irony on the part of the author. There is no escape from this dilemma; either we have some structural confusion that annihilates sense, or the indictment of the rule of the universe is crowned by a plea of guilty from its Ruler. And the three friends that have toiled for God and upheld manfully the justice of His cause are told that they have not spoken of Him the thing that is right. The comedy of life, in the Meredithian sense, could hardly go further. It might be that they had not spoken of Job the thing that was right, — as to him they had been utterly at sea, — but how the Lord, with His own speeches hardly off His lips, could accuse them of treason to Himself and condemn them, passes understanding. In these speeches He had practically taken up the same position that had been maintained by the three friends, with the single difference that He had not assigned guilt to Job. He had crushed Job with a vision of the greatness of the world and the multifarious ingenuity of its parts. He had challenged Job to undertake himself the role of ruler and see if he could manage things any better — a somewhat strange confession of weakness. But all this the friends, too, had said, and for that they are now blamed! It is true that exegetes make the most ingenious attempts to smooth out this contradiction, but what will not exegetes attempt? In the present paper I am not concerned to disprove the views of others; I seek only to develop and explain my own. I shall not, therefore, go further into this; there is probably no careful reader who has not felt in greater or less degree the difficulty which I have brought forward.

Accepting, then, the contradiction, and recognizing that it must have arisen through some structural confusion, is it possible to conjecture what that confusion was and from what it originated? The friends are blamed and Job is praised for their respective attitudes. The praise and blame are assigned from the point of view of the prologue and epilogue, according to which, as we have seen, God's will is the highest law. What is, is right. This involves that Job in the original story had taken God's part, while his friends had followed

more or less implicitly the course of Job's wife in our prologue. Thus the whole action is changed and, for the first time, in the words of the Epistle of James, we hear of the 'patience of Job.' In this form of the story he is patient throughout. He endures the trials of the Satan, the querulousness of his wife (*diaboli adiutrix*, as Augustine calls her), the compassion of his friends, how expressed we cannot now know, and we can only conjecture that it must have contained murmurs against God ; he endures all and in the end receives his reward. He has spoken of God that which is right.

The action of the original story, as thus reconstructed, is a unity, in harmony with itself throughout. As optimists or pessimists we may differ on the truth of its view of the world, but it is at least clear that we have here only one view of the world, and that view is absolutely Semitic.

But can we assign to this primitive legend of Job all that we find in our present prologue and epilogue? Especially, do the scenes in heaven belong to it, or were they added by the writer of the poem? Critically I do not see how it is possible to separate them from the context without destroying the whole, and in themselves, rightly regarded, there is nothing to prevent their belonging to such a popular story of religious edification. The Satan, in his quality of accusing angel, is a genuine figure from the theology of the people, and belongs much more to it than to the sarcasm of philosophical speculation. He comes to the court of heaven in the regular round of his duties, and is as much a minister of God as any of the other Sons of the Elohim. It is his business to bring out the secret sins of men, and when Job is presented to him he goes to work at once. He has no intention of saying that no one serves God for nought ; he only says that such is not Job's case. There is no touch of satire towards God Himself, though, without doubt, there is a malevolent liking for the duties of his office. We are apt to read into these chapters Goethe's *Prologue in Heaven* just as we read into the early chapters of Genesis the fancies of *Paradise Lost*. But that is illegitimate, and the only thing in common between the Satan of Job and the Mephistophiles of *Faust* is that they are both servants of God, the one consciously, the other unconsciously and against his own purposes.

Such, then, I take it, was the story as it lay before the writer of the poem. It was a story known probably to all around him, familiar to them from childhood, the product of their ideas and their faith. Whether it came to him in a written form, crystallized by the genius

of some one writer, or in the hazy outlines of generations of story-tellers at the street corners, can hardly be reached by us. Certain it is at least that the man who put it into final shape, whether our poet or some earlier one, was a *raconteur* by right divine and knew how to wield the Hebrew sentence. He has built up a tale that lives and moves for us yet with a brightness and life like that of 'Alā-ad-Din in the *Arabian Nights*, itself, too, the work of some nameless story-teller. This was the material our poet took and used for his own purposes. The middle he left out, with the compassion of Job's friends, his patience, and their murmurs at his fate; the rest he kept.

He was no simple *raconteur*, but a great poet. He saw the possibilities of the story and the situation created, seized it in Shakspeare's royal way and made it his own forever. The monotonous unity of the folk-tale, with its hero patient and consistent to the end, — a masculine Griselda, — he put aside. No man who ever lived could have acted thus, he knew, and so his Job became flesh and blood. The friends, too, were transformed. With a Cervantesque humor the class of Job's comforters was created, and the thing abides to our day.

And as he wrote on, and the puppets which he had created lived their lives and spoke their parts, so his own ideas developed. Strange thoughts came to him, such as come to the poet from No Man's Land, and he, the Semite, touched the skirt of the Greek and joined the brotherhood of Æschylus and Sophocles. The soul which he portrayed, at war with the world and with itself, grew apace, and, following it on its way, we feel that we gain that peculiar *κάθαρσις* of the emotions which Aristotle gave as of the virtue of the tragedy. This is the strangest feature of all in the book. There is not the slightest trace of Greek influence on the writer, but the daring and wild independence of some of his thoughts and words take us for their kinship to the orgies of Aristophanes and the subtleties of Plato. In the Semitic world I know only one other such figure, the blind poet of al-Islām, Abū-l-'Alā al-Ma'arri.

And what end did he reach? Did he solve the riddles that came to him, or did he find peace again in the older faith? That we can never know. We can only trace him on his way and see how he rose in rebellion against the dogma that God could do what He willed with His own, how he found the strength of the man *integer vitæ scelerisque purus* in himself and in his own conscience, and how he learned — was it in his own life? — what father's love and father's

loss might be. We know that he never entirely shook off the feeling of his earlier years towards God, his friend and consoler, and in the later scenes we feel it gaining strength.

But suddenly his soul's progress is cut off; there comes the great break, and the rest of the book, as we have it, is a chaos. Nor, do I think, was it ever anything else. So far he had left all in connected order; the rest consists of fragments dating from different periods in his development. One of these has nothing to do with this book, the poem in praise of the mystery of Wisdom (xxviii.). Yet, perhaps, this, too, is by the same author, and gives one of the drifts of his thought. As a Semite he could not be free from that curious Semitic duality which so confuses us in their skepticism, and had to feel the spell that lies for them in resignation to the unknown and the unknowable Power. Then comes a fragment which we cannot place anywhere and which suggests some different arrangement of the speaking figures from that which we now have, but which certainly also was to have been part of the book (xxvii. 7-23). Then the great speech of the book (xxix.-xxxi.), a solemn *apologia* by Job for his whole life, in which, in sight of the infinite which he is so soon to enter, he declares his innocence, arraigns God and His government, and shows a strangely modern sympathy with the pain and woe of the world. Where this speech would eventually have been placed we cannot know now; it stands in its present position by simple accident. Then the Elihu section (xxxii.-xxxvii.), almost certainly not by the same writer, and finally the speech of the Lord (xxxviii.-xli.).

This speech in itself is in evident disorder, and probably we have in it two alternative forms, one of which only would eventually have been chosen. But, besides this, the tone of the speech gives great difficulty. As I have pointed out above, it is hard to draw any distinction between its position and that of Job's three friends. To all appearance it is by the writer of the rest of the poem, but after he had written the later speeches of Job he could never possibly have regarded this speech as an answer to them. It demands the submission of Job and makes no attempt to reply to his arguments. From its standpoint these arguments are not to be answered; they are to be ignored and their speaker lashed back to obedience. I am driven, therefore, to believe that it must have been written at an earlier point in the poet's own development, before the problem had assumed for him the complexity and difficulty which it did later. This will appear a somewhat daring assumption, but in face of the facts none other is possible. Exegetes may spend their ingenuity on them, but, for me

at least, no solution is reached that could have satisfied the poet of this book. The man who could have been satisfied by this speech of the Lord would never have left standing those of Job; his criticism would have been to blot them out.

Delitzsch recognized that the speech of Elihu was more a criticism of the book than a criticism of Job, for to Elihu the very raising and conducting of the argument must have appeared impious. The same is true in the same degree of the speech which we have here in the mouth of the Lord. But the writer behind Elihu could not attempt to destroy the book, he could only try to limit its evil, while the author of the book itself, if he had come to regard this answer as satisfactory, must have been led to suppress his own work. We seem, therefore, driven to believe that he, to this extent, wrote backwards, and afterwards, in following out the mental development of Job, reached a position to which this speech was no valid reply. Thus when his work was cut short, by what cause we cannot now tell, his book was complete up to xxvii. 7, and for the part beyond that there only lay among his papers these earlier sketches and attempts. Perhaps some overzealous friend tried to put them in order; perhaps accident produced the present result; all that we have no means of settling. Goethe gave forty years to working out the fate of Faust. If he had died in the course of that forty years, leaving the *paralipomena* uncanceled, the scenes unarranged, the catastrophe unwritten, we should be in precisely the same position towards Faust as that in which we now are towards Job. The materials would be more copious, because the poem is longer, but the problem in itself would not be more difficult.

Such is my answer to the question as to the original form of the story.

The second question, how the poet came to take his plot from a story the moral of which was so antagonistic to his own ideas, has practically been dealt with already. I have suggested that he did this, guided simply by an artistic perception of the possibilities of the story as it lay before him. He took it as Shakespere took the story of Ampeus from Saxo the Grammarian or that of Rosalind from Lodge's novel, and, having taken it, he changed and developed it till it ceased to be legend and became art.

But this position transforms our attitude towards the book in another respect. No two exegetes have yet agreed as to what the writer intended to teach. May we not cut the knot and say that he did not intend to teach anything? He followed the instincts of his being and created in language.

Poetry in its truest form knows nothing of the didactic ; it may, even must, teach, but that is not the object of its existence. It is itself, and that is all it need be. We do not say that Shakespeare intended to teach anything in Hamlet nor, at least if we are wise, that Cervantes had a didactic object in Don Quixote. The artist leaves that to the writer of religious novels, orthodox or heretical, and knows that if he is true to his art, his art will be true to truth. It is not his part to tell us that A is B ; he only portrays some scenes of the world's life before us, and then we know with an unshakable conviction not only that A is B, but that C is D, and X is Y, and a great many things besides of which the poet never dreamt. The vision of the world in the mystery of art brings with it the knowledge of the world and of the true things that lie behind it.

Thus the poet of Job created, but that which he created is strangely amorphous to us. We cannot place it in any of our divisions of literature ; it is not drama, nor lyric, nor epic ; it is not novel, nor essay, nor romance. But that it was poetry to him, of that we may be certain, and that its like was written before it, and its like was written after it, of that, too, we may be certain. Our ignorance of Hebrew literature is too colossal for us to dogmatize on possibilities or trace beginnings, but this is sure, that the soil which produced our fragment of Job produced many another fragment and many a completed poem. Before that vanished past we stand as helpless as we should stand before the origin of our own English literature if, of all previous to the age of Elizabeth, only some few scenes of the Canterbury Tales had reached us.

But this whole subject of the literary form of our book, its models and the ideals and ideas of the age in which it rose, is foreign to the present paper. My purpose was to give a suggestion as to the original Job legend and to trace some results that seemed to flow from it.