

THE BOOK OF JOB.

II.—THE CURSE. (*Chapter iii.*)

THIS Chapter divides itself into three sections, three strophes, in which human life is execrated through its whole course. (1) Job asks (verses 3-10), since life is so heavy a burden, Why was I born at all? (2) Then he demands (verses 11-19), if I must be born, why was I not suffered to die as soon as I was born, and sink into the rest and quietness of death? (3) And, finally, if that were too great a boon, why may I not die *now*—now that I am sick of life and long for the tomb? (Verses 20-26.)

CHAPTER III.—*At length Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day.* 2. *And Job answered and said:*

3. *Perish the day wherein I was born,
 And the night that said, A man is conceived!*
4. *That day! Let it be darkness!
 Let not God ask after it from above,
 Neither let the sun shine upon it!*
5. *Let darkness and the blackness of death reclaim it!
 Let clouds dwell upon it!
 Let the terrors of the day affright it!*
6. *That night! May thick darkness seize it!
 Let it not rejoice among the days of the year,
 Nor come into the number of the months!*
7. *Lo, that night! Let it be barren,
 And let no cry of joy enter it!*
8. *Let those who ban days ban it,
 Who are of skill to rouse the Dragon!*

9. *May the stars of its twilight gather darkness !
Let it long for light and see none,
Nor let it behold the eyelids of the dawn,*
10. *Because it shut not up the doors of the womb that bore it,
And hid not trouble from mine eyes !*
11. *Why did I not die from the womb—
Come forth from the belly to expire ?*
12. *Why did knees welcome me,
And why breasts that I might suck ?*
13. *For then should I have been lying still and quiet ;
I had slumbered, and been at rest*
14. *With kings and councillors of the earth
Who built for themselves desolate sepulchres,*
15. *And with princes, possessed of gold,
Who filled their palaces with silver :*
16. *Or, like a hidden abortion, I had not been,
Like babes who never see the light.*
17. *There the troublers cease from troubling,
And there the strong, worn out, find rest :*
18. *There the prisoners repose together in peace,
They hear no taskmaster's voice :*
19. *The small and the great are equal there,
And the slave is free from his lord.*
20. *Wherefore is light given to the afflicted,
And life to the bitter in spirit,*
21. *Who long for death, but it cometh not,
And search for it more than for hid treasure,*
22. *Who would rejoice with gladness
And be blithe to find a grave,—*
23. *To a man whose path is hidden,
And whom God hath fenced in ?*
24. *For my groaning cometh like my food,
And my sighs gush out like the waters.*
25. *If I fear a fear, it cometh upon me,
And whatsoever I dread befalleth me.*
26. *I have no quiet, no repose, no rest,
But trouble cometh on trouble.*

The three sections of this Chapter are introduced by a few historical or descriptive words (verses 1

and 2). Job "*opened his mouth*"—a phrase only used on solemn occasions, and denoting the momentous character of the utterances which followed it ; as, for example, when the Lord Jesus "*opened his mouth*" to deliver the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matt. v. 2). —"*And cursed his day.*" The word here used is not the dubious *bârêk* employed in Chapters i. and ii. which, besides intermediate shades of intention, might mean either to bless or to curse ; but another verb, which signifies to *execrate* that which is base and worthless. His "*day*" is, of course, the day of his birth. "*And Job answered and said,*"—answered whom, or what ? If the three Friends had as yet spoken no word to him, their manner and gestures had, nevertheless, said so much that he is sure they

"Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own."

They had wept, rent their mantles, cast dust on their heads, sat down with him seven days and nights, thus mutely intimating their grief and compassion. Job's words are his response, his answer, to this unspoken sympathy. Beholding their sorrow and amazement at the mere spectacle of his misery, the sense of his misery comes closer home to him ; it gathers new force as he sees it reflected from their eyes : and he breaks out into passionate imprecations on his day.

The First Strophe, like that which follows it, touches points on which it is difficult, almost impossible, to dilate without some offence against modesty. And, therefore, I will only give a brief summary of its contents, and a few explanatory notes.

First of all Job execrates, in general terms, the

night of his conception and the day of his birth (verse 3). Then, more particularly (verses 4 and 5), he prays that the *day* of his birth may be ever dark as night, forgotten by God, unilluminated by the sun, reclaimed by death as its proper possession, lost in clouds, exposed to all the terrors incident and possible to day. Then, with equal ingenuity and precision, he curses the *night* of his conception (verses 6-9). May the primal darkness seize upon it and swallow it up, so that it shall be blotted from the calendar and cease to find a place in the glad procession of the year! may it be barren, giving life to nothing, hearing no cry of joy because a child is born in it! may it be accursed, so that, "ever trembling on the verge of dawn," the dawn may never break upon it! And, finally, in verse 10, he gives us the sole reason for this tremendous imprecation on it, that it was the night on which *he* entered on this life of misery and shame.

Verse 4.—"Let not God *ask after it*,"—*i.e.* not so much as miss it when it is gone; let it be *forgotten*, and not only extinct.

Verse 5.—Darkness and black Death are the nearest of kin to that most dark and miserable day. Let them *reclaim* it, then, as, according to Arab and Hebrew law, kinsmen might redeem the inheritance which had fallen into the hands of a stranger. It was a portion of the kingdom of death which had gone astray into the light; let it be recovered, recaptured, and compelled to submit once more to the sway of "chaos and old night." (Professor Davidson, *in loco*.) "Let the *terrors of the day* affright it;" literally, the terrors of *a* day, of *any* day, all the terrors incident or possible to day-time. Probably

the main reference is to eclipses, which were supremely terrible to the ancient world.

Verse 6.—The robber Darkness—for here the figure changes—is to *seize* “that night” as its booty, that it may no longer rejoice amid the days of the year. In the Poet’s imagination the night does not so much *rejoice* “on account of its own beauty, as to form one of the joyous and triumphant choral troop of nights that come in in harmonious and glittering procession.” (Professor Davidson, *in loco.*) From that happy company this night is to be expelled.

Verse 8.—“Those who *ban* days” are those who were held to make days unlucky, *dies infausti*. There is a quaint legend which says that at daybreak the Ethiopians curse the sun, because it has burned them so black. And some commentators, misled by this impossible legend, have suggested that the Ethiopians are the banners of days here adjured. Obviously, as the second line of the verse shews, the allusion is to the ancient Oriental superstition which attached a supra-natural power to the incantations of the sorcerer. It was *he* who was able, in the popular belief, both to ban days and to “*rouse the Dragon*,” *i.e.* the heavenly but hostile constellation known to antiquity by that name.

The ancient poets feigned the constellations to have life and personality, and to be variously related to each other. The fantasy of the poet became the superstition of the vulgar, and drew many legends round it. It was thought, for example, that there was a special art, a magical art, of exciting the Dragon, then held to be the enemy of light, to devour the sun and moon, and so for a time at least

to pour darkness over the earth. Eclipses were his work, or the work of the magicians who controlled him by their enchantments. The Chinese still hold the superstition of the antique world, and, as an eclipse approaches, seek by wild outcries and the noise of gongs to scare away the Dragon—not with much effect, for all that I could ever hear. Similar superstitions obtain throughout the East to this day, as they did, indeed, throughout the West till a few years ago. Some traces of the belief in good and ill luck, and of the influence of the stars in their courses on the events of the earth, may even yet be detected in our language and habits, and that not only among the rustic and ignorant, but even among men of culture and refinement.

Nor is the almost universal spread of such superstitions to be attributed solely to the vivid imagination of the poets, or to the mere influence of habit and tradition. They have their origin in some of the commonest facts of experience and in some of the profoundest emotions of the heart. Every man is aware, for instance, that on certain days he rises with a temperament wholly in tune with itself and his outward conditions; “his bosom’s lord sits lightly on its throne;” he is vigorous, bold, sanguine, he knows not why; and on such days as these all seems to go well with him: while on other days, and from causes equally reconдите, he rises “deject and wretched,” feels beforehand that nothing will prosper with him, and often finds his foreboding miserably fulfilled. Is it any wonder that on these common facts of experience some men, most men even, have built up a superstition of lucky days and unlucky days?

Then, too, we are constantly compelled to feel that both in the human and in the natural worlds great forces are at work which we are powerless to withstand ; and that if, at times, we are carried by them where we would be, at other times we are carried whither we would not. These forces, which the ancient world impersonated and clothed in divine forms, enter into and control our life in a thousand ways which we can neither foresee nor regulate. Is it wonderful, then, that men, feeling their dependence on them, have sought to master and control them, and have even persuaded themselves that they *had* acquired a secret and mysterious power over them, so that they could not only read oracles, but affect the course of Nature and give men good fortune or ill ?

Science, moreover, has discovered that the same great forces and laws "run" throughout the physical universe, that the heavenly bodies do therefore exert a vast and manifold influence on the earth. Is it not natural, then, that those who are not content with materialistic theories of the universe, should assume that as force implies will, or spirit, so forces may imply spirits ; that they should people the whole universe with invisible agents and ministers of God, and infer that the powers and principalities of the unseen universe may be touched by the cries of human infirmity and need, and, like the physical forces of Nature, may be rendered adverse or propitious by the attitude we take up toward them ?

It is to such facts and arguments as these that we must attribute the power of astrological superstition in the modern as in the ancient world ; and when we take them into the reckoning, no wise man will confi-

dently or hastily pronounce that there is absolutely no truth in, or behind, them. In the forms they have commonly assumed they are doubtless untrue and injurious: for, after all, and whatever the powers or forces at work upon him, a man's fate depends on himself and on the attitude he takes towards God, and any belief which lessens the sense of his personal responsibility, or emasculates his will, injures and degrades him. Shakespeare, whose works teem with allusions to the astrological dogmas and mysteries current in his day, saw and rebuked their immorality. In "King Lear" he writes: "This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune—*often the surfeit of our own behaviour*—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and traitors by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in by a divine thrusting on." In the form these superstitions assumed in the age of Job, they were assuredly very questionable, to say the least of them. That by his incantations a man can affect the course of Nature and Providence, and bring good or evil fortune to his neighbours, is an incredible and degrading superstition; but that a man may modify the action of natural forces by a scientific knowledge and use of them, every man will admit; while that by prayer and obedience we may influence the God who holds the universe in the hollow of his hand, and the ministers of God who execute his will, no Christian can well deny.

That Job heartily believed in the superstition of his day, and thought that men could ban and unban days, rouse and allay the Dragon, is probable enough. That men like Balaam, and the magicians of Egypt, had a real power over the forces of nature and the minds of men, is not altogether improbable. But it does not follow because the Poet who has delineated Job used astrological terms and figures that he necessarily accredited the astrological superstition, any more than it follows that Shakespeare believed in it because he is for ever making one or other of his *dramatis personæ* exclaim,—

“ It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions,”

any more than it follows that we ourselves accept it when we speak of lucky or unlucky days, adverse or propitious influences : or, indeed, any more than, in verse 9, he meant to affirm that the dawn had eyes of flesh, covered with lids of flesh, when he penned the beautiful phrase “ eyelids of the dawn.”

This phrase is as natural as it is beautiful. “ The long streaming rays of morning light that come from the opening clouds which reveal the sun,” have seemed to many imaginative minds like the light of the eyes of day pouring through its opening lids and lashes when it rouses itself from slumber. Thus Sophocles (*Antiq.* 103) speaks of “ the eyelid of the golden day,” and from him probably Milton derived the exquisite phrase in his “ *Lycidas*,”—“ Under the opening eyelids of the morn.” The figure is so familiar to the Arabs that their poets use the word “ eye ” as a synonym of “ sun,” and describe the flashing of the sun’s rays as “ the twinkling of the eye.”

Verse 10.—"The womb that bore me" is literally "my womb," *i.e.* the womb in which I was conceived. Similarly Juvenal (Sat. vi. 124), "*Ostenditque tuum, generose Brittanice ventrem.*"

In the Second Strophe (verses 11-19) Job bewails his misery in not having died as soon as he was born:—demanding, first, why he was cared for and saved from the merciful hands of death (verses 11, 12), running over all the chances he had had of escaping the burden of life, and lamenting the mistaken kindness which closed them all against him: and, then (verses 13-19), permitting himself the relief of dwelling on the happy quiet and repose he would have enjoyed had death been granted him. As he pictures to himself the tranquil repose of the dead, his words grow more calm, and subdued and tender; we feel that the man is in love with death, and craves it as the sole good left to him. What, above all, attracts him in it is its restfulness: "There the troublers cease from troubling, the weary find rest; even the prisoner no longer hears the taskmaster's voice, and the slave is at last free from his lord." Exhausted by the excitements of loss, and grief, and never-ending speculations on an inscrutable mystery, he yearns for repose; and, moreover, *he* has a lord, a taskmaster, though he will not name Him, who holds him in hard bondage.

Verse 12.—The "knees" are those of the father, on whose knees the new-born infant was laid, that he might acknowledge it for his own.

Verse 14.—"Desolate sepulchres," literally, "desolations," are in all probability rock-tombs, mausoleums,

or even pyramids, which, no doubt, Job had seen in his travels. The Poet shews, and assumes in his hero, an intimate acquaintance with Egypt, such as, indeed, many both of the patriarchs and of the "men of Solomon" must have possessed.

Of *Verse 15* the sense is dubious. Two interpretations have found acceptance. (1) Some understand by the "houses" which the princes, possessed of gold, filled with silver, the graves, or "sepulchres," of the previous verse; and these quote the innumerable instances in which treasures—coins, jewels, ancient works of art wrought in the nobler metals—have been discovered in ancient tombs. (2) Others, and with these I hold, maintain that there is no need of such a forced interpretation of the words; that what Job intends to convey is simply the enormous luxury in which these princes lived before they saw corruption, and his conviction that in the rest of the grave even they were better off than when they revelled in their sumptuous palaces.

Verse 17.—The word I have rendered "the troublers" means "the wicked," no doubt, but it is the wicked viewed as *unquiet*, restless, troubled and troubling. "There lies in the word," says Professor Davidson, "the signature of eternal unrest, like the sea,—a divine comparison (Isa. lvii. 20),—with a continual wild moan and toss about it, in a fever even when asleep, not always openly destructive, but possessing infinite capacities for tumult and destruction."

In the Third Strophe all his former excitement rushes back on Job, and he breaks out once more

into passionate and wild reproach as he feels that even the rest of death is denied him, that the burden of life must still be borne. "Why may I not die now?" is the cry of his heart:

"Is wretchedness denied that benefit,
To end itself by death?"

He will not name God even yet, but, none the less, it is God whom he reproaches. Here, as often elsewhere in the Poem, he substitutes the "euphemistic *He*" for the Divine Name; but, nevertheless, it is God whom he accuses of surfeiting him with a life of which he is sick, of thrusting it upon him when all he longs for is to be rid of it. At first, his tone is more general (verse 20): "Why does *He* give light to the afflicted, and life to the bitter in spirit?" But it soon grows more personal; for he himself is "the man whose way is hidden" (verse 23), who is so bewildered and shut in on every side that he can but take a step or two in any direction before he is brought to a pause. And, at last (verses 24-26), his tone becomes wholly personal, and he describes his misery in the plainest, simplest, most pathetic words.

Verse 22.—The afflicted, who long for death, would be "blithe to find *a grave*,"—*any* grave: "these men are not particular; any grave will fit, provided they can but get into it." (Professor Davidson, *in loco*.)

Verse 23.—In the words "whose path is hidden" Job touches the very æme of his misery. That which most appals him is that, to his tear-filled eyes, human life, his own life, is "all a muddle;" that he can see no design in it, no aim, no clear and noble

intention; that he has for ever to pace the same weary round of speculation, and can find no exit from it: that, whatever the path of inquiry or action on which he sets out, before he has taken more than a few steps he finds a fence across it which he can neither climb nor pass. What is his life worth to him when he can no longer see any worthy end toward which, oppressed with miseries, he may strive, when God has so shut him in on every side that he can find no loophole of escape?

With *Verse 24* we may compare Psalm xlii. 3,—“My tears have been my meat day and night.” The two features of Job’s grief indicated in this verse appear to be—(1) its constancy; it is regular as daily bread: and (2) its extent; it is like water, like a broad deep stream. The Vulgate, however, has some authority for its reading or rendering,—“*antequam comedam suspiro.*”

Verse 25.—Gloomy and terrifying apprehensions are one of the most painful symptoms of *elephantiasis*. And Job here asserts that whatever presentiment of evil it bred in him was straightway realized.

Looking back on the Chapter as a whole, we can hardly fail to be struck with the ingenuity with which the changes are rung on its main theme. So ingenious, indeed, does Job shew himself in enumerating the details of his misery and in imprecating curses upon them, that, at first, we are tempted to think his strain unnatural, artificial. But even a little thought and reading, if we cannot fall back on experience, will convince us that the picture is true to life. Every

loving heart is thus ingenious in setting forth the grief occasioned by sorrows which touch it home. It takes a strange, and sometimes a fierce, delight in calling up all circumstances that deepen its sense of loss and swell the current of passionate emotion, in refusing all alleviations, in repelling all hope of relief, in converting any consolations which may be offered it into food for new regrets and a deeper despair. All literature is full, and notably the Greek tragedies, not only of sentiments akin to those of Job, but of equally ingenious and elaborate iterations of them and variations upon them. Sophocles, for example, states in the briefest sharpest form the ruling thoughts of the two first strophes in Job's "curse," and in stating them he does but express a very general sentiment of the ancient Heathen world: "*Not to be born is best in every way; once born, by far the better lot is then at once to go back whence we came.*" (Æd. Col. 1225.) For similar expansions and elaborations in the expression of grief, for this long harping on one sad string, we need not go beyond Shakespeare, who, indeed, in more than one of his finest passages, seems to have had this Chapter in his eye. Thus, for instance, in "King John," when Philip announces his pact of peace with England, and declares,—

"The yearly course that brings this day about
Shall never see it but a holiday,"

Constance replies :

"A wicked day, and not a holy day !
What hath this day deserved ? what hath it done
That it in golden letters should be set
Among the high tides in the calendar ?

Nay, rather *turn this day out of the week,*
 This day of shame, oppression, perjury.
 Or, if it must stand still, *let wives with child*
Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,
 Lest that their hopes prodigiously be crossed :
 But ¹ on this day let seamen fear no wreck ;
 No bargains break that are not this day made,
This day, all things come to an ill end,
 Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change !”

The passage is full of echoes from the Curse of Job ; and the line, “Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,” is but a paraphrase of the verse, “Let it not rejoice among the days of the year, nor come into the number of the months.”

So, again, when bereft of Arthur, “her fair son,” and urged to patience by the King, who had betrayed her, Constance breaks out into an invocation of death no less elaborate, though it is much more gross than that of Job, and plays with the images suggested by her excited fancy in the same lingering detail ;—an invocation, moreover, which can hardly fail to remind us of Job’s description of himself as longing for death, and searching for it more than for hid treasure, as one who would be blithe and exceeding glad to find a grave,—

“ O amiable lovely death !
 Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
 Thou hate and terror of prosperity,
 And I will kiss thy detestable bones,
 And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows,
 And ring these fingers with thy household worms,
 And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,
 And be a carrion monster like thyself :
 Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smilest,
 And buss thee as thy wife. Misery’s love,
 O come to me !”

1 “*But*,” i.e. “save,” or “except.”

Of the moral attitude assumed by Job when, at last, he gives his sorrow words, we need only observe that, though he neither lets go his integrity nor renounces God, he is not quite the man who said, "Shall we accept the good from God, and shall we not accept the evil?" He does not as yet charge God foolishly, indeed; he still retains so much reverence that he will not even name God, except once, and that passingly. But he indulges in more than one impatient fling at the God whom he will not openly accuse. He feels that it is God who has condemned him to live when he longs to die, that it is He who has so fenced him in that he cannot stir, cannot even see a path out of his miseries and perplexities. Already, and before the provocations of his Friends drive him so to assert his own righteousness as to impugn the justice of God, we can see that his patience is beginning to give way, that his woe is heavier than he can bear.

S. COX.

 A GREAT PROMISE.

ST. MATTHEW xix. 27-29, AND ST. MARK x. 30.

I.—THE HUNDRED-FOLD.

ST. PETER'S question was a vulgar and a selfish question, yet it received a very generous reply. Mere pity for the young Ruler who was sorrowfully leaving Christ ought to have kept him from asking it, or mere sympathy with his Master, who was at least as sorry to see the Ruler go as the Ruler was to leave Him, and to leave Him *so*. But for the moment Peter was occupied with himself and his few intimate companions; he had no thought, no