

THE BOOK OF JOB.

V.—THE THIRD COLLOQUY (CHAPTERS XXII.—XXVI.)

3.—BILDAD TO JOB. (CHAPTER XXV.)

THE sententious and judicious Bildad has no reply to offer to the facts which Job has adduced. He tacitly admits that there *are* classes of men who are neither punished nor rewarded as they deserve; that habitual criminals and cruel despots do escape the stroke of justice; and that the wrongs endured by the serfs, vassals, outcasts of the tribes, often go unredressed: and with this admission his whole theory of Providence falls to the ground. From his point of view he can no longer

see a God employed

In *all* the good and ill that chequer life,

nor prove that

the procession of our fate, howe'er

Sad or disturb'd, is order'd by a Being

Of infinite benevolence and power.

But though he has suffered a logical defeat, he is only "convinced against his will." He is as sure as ever that, though he cannot account for the facts cited by Job, they are to be accounted for; that, though he cannot see God's hand in all the chequered good and ill of life, that Hand is at work in it all. He can argue for his general thesis no longer, nor can he bring any fresh charge against Job, or any fresh proof of the charges already alleged against him. And so he falls back on and repeats a common-place which Eliphaz had twice insisted on (Chap. iv. 17-21 and Chap. xv. 14-16), and which Job himself had twice admitted and confirmed (Chap. ix. 2 and Chap. xiv. 4), viz., the infi-

nite distance and contrast between God and man. God is not only pure in Himself, but the source of all purity; and man is confessedly and universally impure: how, then, can any man reasonably hope, as Job evidently did hope, to justify himself before and against God?

To *this* complexion he has come at last, after all his moralizing, all his citation of ancient authorities, all his heats of passion and rebuke. And, seeing how set and stiff he is in his opinions, seeing that he still clings to them though he can no longer argue for them, one is tempted to ask, What is it that has reduced him to so lame and impotent a conclusion? Was he really perplexed by the facts adduced by Job, and compelled to admit within himself that he knew no answer to them? or was it Job's skilful appeal, in Chapter xxi. 29-34, to the antique sayings of many races as reported by "men of travel," sayings which Bildad loved so well, that beat him from his fence, and made him feel that in this keen encounter of adverse wits he was mastered at his own weapon, "hoist with his own petard"?

It is curious, too, that of all the Friends, Bildad should be left, or should be put forward, to confess their defeat. A man of conservative and rabbinical intellect is not usually more accessible to reason or authority than a man of prophetic temperament such as Eliphaz, or an irascible zealot such as Zophar. But such an one, though not more reasonable, is commonly less eager and fervent, and better able to fall back on well-worn truisms and vain repetitions. And so, it may be that, when defeat was inevitable, while Eliphaz was driven to the most passionate and baseless aspersions of Job's character, and Zophar perhaps was choked with an indignation which rendered ordered speech impos-

sible, Bildad was still cool enough to cover their retreat, as best he could, with a little cloud of irrelevant truisms.

It should also be remarked that though, in this the final speech made on behalf of the Friends, Bildad does venture to repeat truisms which had carried no argumentative force from the lips of Eliphaz, he does not venture to repeat the accusations with which he and his fellows had so often quickened in Job a too arrogant and peremptory sense of his own innocence. More than once I have had to point out that the Friends themselves had evidently but little faith in these accusations; that they charged him with sins which, on their theory, Job *ought* to have committed, rather than with sins of which they had any evidence. And now, in the last words they utter, as they tacitly confess themselves beaten in argument, so also they tacitly withdraw all their aspersions on the character of Job — thus making his victory complete. He is *not* "the sinner" they have so often pictured him, and therefore his sufferings are not the due reward and natural result of his sins.

With fine dramatic art the Poet will not suffer us to part from the Friends of Job while we are incensed against them by their censures of him. For, after all, they *are* his friends, and love him in their unloving way. In their way, too, they are the friends of God, and have been impelled into their sins against *Him*, as well as against Job, by a sincere concern for his honour. Hence Bildad's final words are at least inoffensive. He no longer criminates Job. He simply and briefly states a truth which, however stale and logically impertinent, might well be listened to without irritation, since Job had himself more than once illustrated and

enforced it. So that if, heretofore, we have often been tempted to say, "Job was *afflicted* with friends," or, still more strongly, "Job's *worst* affliction was his friends," we are now compelled to reconsider our verdict, and to modify it.

CHAPTER XXV.

1. *Then answered Bildad the Shuchite and said :*
2. *Dominion and dread are with Him,
Author of Peace in his high places !*
3. *Is there any number to his hosts,
And upon whom doth not his light arise ?*
4. *How then shall man be just with God,
Or how shall the woman-born be pure ?*
5. *Behold, even the moon it doth not shine,
And the stars are not pure in his eyes !*
6. *How much less that worm—a man,
And that creeping thing—the son of man !*

Bildad does not so much as touch Job's argument that the guilty are not, or are not always, punished according to their deserts; and, therefore, as part of this great controversy, his reply is logically impertinent. But though impertinent to the argument, it is pertinent to Job's mood; for Job was once more longing to find his Judge, and counting on being acquitted by Him, if only He could find Him (Chap. xxiii. 3-12). "But *can* you count on that acquittal?" replies Bildad. "Ah, think how great God is, how immaculate! and how weak man, and how impure!" It evaded Job's real complaint, viz., that here at least God did not judge men and render to them according to their deeds; but it met Job's strong feeling of innocence, his passionate assertions of integrity, fairly enough, and honestly warned him, as indeed he had more than

once warned himself, that in the light of the Divine Presence he might find in himself spots and stains which would not "leave their tinct." It was all true, as Job found when Jehovah answered him out of the tempest, and he could only fling himself at the feet of his Judge, and exclaim, "Lo, I am vile!"

Verse 2.—God, argues Bildad, is "Author of Peace in his high places," *i. e.*, in the heights of heaven, among the celestial host. Even they are fallible, if they have not fallen; hostility and rebellion are possible to them, even if they have not broken out. And therefore even the celestial armies—and why are they "armies" if they have nothing with which to contend?—need, and have, a Judge who, sitting high above them, can control, command, and unite them.

Verse 3.—Those bright armies, or hosts, are innumerable; but there is no soldier in their ranks who does not receive his light from God, and reflect it. They shine with borrowed rays. And if even *they* have no light, no glory but from God (*Verse 4*), how can man, who is contaminated *by* his birth, as well as from it, possess any light of his own, any purity which will not grow dim and dark in the dazzling lustre of the Divine holiness, any righteousness which he dare assert against the immeasurable and infinite righteousness of God? If even the angelic armies in the heights of heaven submit to Him, must not any mere man, even the best and therefore the mightiest, contend with Him in vain?

Verse 5.—The very light of the sun is not so purely bright to human sense and thought as that of "the pale chaste moon" and the stars. Yet even this light, so pure to us, is not without stain to the pure and holy

God. And (*Verse 6*) if the purest light of earth, that on which we cannot look without longing that some touch of its white calm radiance should penetrate and cleanse our hearts, is not "clean" before God, how much less can man, that worm creeping through the dust, be pure in his eyes? If the difference and distinction of quality between the awful and almighty Inhabitant of Eternity and the loftiest and greatest of his creatures be so vast, what must be the interval which separates *us* from Him?

This was Bildad's argument. And it was all true—that is, from his point of view. Who has not felt, as he felt, the vastness and purity of the nightly heavens, and, reflecting on the number and order of the great orbs of light which float silently through the darkness, felt also the insignificance and meanness of man (*Psalm viii.*), or at least of *one* man, viz., himself? How vain and ignoble seem all the fret and fever of our life in the face of that divine tranquillity! How sordid and poor and confused are all the motions of our souls as contrasted with the steadfast order and immeasurable grandeur of the vast scene on which we gaze! At such moments, in such moods, it is natural for us to conceive of man as a mere worm creeping through the dust, and with dust for his meat. But we should wrong God our Maker, even more heinously than ourselves, if we mistook that natural and emotional conception for an adequate and scientific conception of man's place in the universe. A being possessed of reason and conscience, and capable of righteousness and love, is more and better, not than many worms only, but than many worlds. And therefore we are guilty of a very gross and heinous sin against God if we habitually use the

words of Bildad, and use them as setting forth the true nature and place of man in the eye of the Almighty. Mere almighty Power, with no Wisdom to guide and no Love to inspire it, looking down from the high vault of heaven, might regard men as mere worms of the dust. But God is Wisdom even more than He is Power, and Love even more than He is Wisdom. And hence we do not please Him, as Bildad thought to do, by depreciating man. It is not religious, but most irreligious, to think and speak of ourselves or our neighbours simply as sordid or impure. There is power in man as well as weakness, grandeur as well as meanness; virtue and piety are known to him as well as sin and impurity. And it is not commonly honest, much less pious, to close our eyes to one, and that the better, series of his qualities, and to fix our eyes solely on the other, or to speak of him as though he were all compact of evil.

4.—JOB TO BILDAD. (CHAPTER XXVI.)

Job has conquered the Friends. Bildad has virtually acknowledged their defeat. Instead of solving the problem they took in hand, they have but confused it by accusing Job of sins of which he was not guilty. Instead of proving, as they had undertaken to prove, that the sufferings of men in general spring from their sins, they have been compelled to admit that many sins provoke no present or adequate recompense, and that many sufferings are not provoked by the sins of those who endure them. To vindicate the justice of God they have aspersed the character of man—inventing sins in Job which had no real or probable existence, ignoring facts in the lives of large classes of men which

were too real to be denied. And now that the argument has come to an end, Job has no difficulty either in admitting the truth of the warning with which Bildad had closed it, or in shewing that it was utterly irrelevant. The universal sinfulness of man may be true, must be true, if the weak fallible nature of man is to be brought into contrast with the awful and immeasurable holiness of God: but what has that to do with a man who has been redeemed from his sins through his faith in God? It is very true that Job has not, consciously and adequately, solved the problem whether of his personal experience or of the general experience of humanity any more than the Friends. He can no more tell than they can tell why he has suffered, why so many suffer; but he has this immense advantage over them, that he has been true to the facts of the case, neither ignoring nor denying them; that he recognizes the problem which the facts suggest, and is trying so to frame it that a solution of it may become possible: and that he is looking to God, rather than to man, for the true and final solution of it. He has listened to all that the Friends can allege against him — to their charges, their insinuations, their urgent appeals to him to confess his sins and to implore the Divine forgiveness; and he can still say,

What I did, I did in honour,
Led by the impartial conduct of my soul;
And never shall you see that I will beg
A ragged and forestall'd remission,
If truth and upright innocency fail me.

He will not palter with himself by confessing sins which he has not committed, nor seek to escape his sufferings by feigning a penitence he cannot honestly feel. He is

true to himself, and to all the facts within his view; and therefore there is hope for him, hope that the facts will at last yield their secret to him.

Nay, the facts *have* already, in some measure, yielded their secret, though he has not been able to grasp it and rest in it. For that great hope of a retributive life beyond the grave, of which he has at least caught a glimpse, is a very sufficient solution of the logical problem which exercised his thoughts, though it is by no means a complete solution of the mystery of suffering. For sufferings have their good and happy results in this life as well as in that which is to come. Some of these results Elihu will hereafter point out to him; others, Jehovah will force home upon his mind when He appears to close and crown the argument. But it was his truth, his loyalty to facts, and to all the facts, which prepared him for these disclosures. They could not have been made, they would have been made in vain, to the Friends who were playing fast and loose with the facts of human experience, "squaring their guess with shows," and deeming it all the worse for the facts if they did not accord with their theories and conjectures.

The veracious and generous spirit of the man is shewn in his treatment of Bildad's irrelevant truism. He does not question it because it comes back to him from the mouth of an opponent, or because that opponent thinks it tells against him. He does not even make light of it. On the contrary, he takes it up, and illustrates it with a freedom and fulness beyond Bildad's reach. When he longs to meet with God, he is not unmindful of the vast interval between God and man (Comp. Chap. xxiii. 6). He is quite sensible of the majesty of

God, although it no longer makes him afraid. That majesty is to be seen, not only in the heavens, not only in and above the stars, but in the dim Hadean world which lies beneath the sea (Verses 5, 6), and in the earth which hangs suspended in space (Verse 7), in the waters of the firmament (Verses 8, 9) and in the waters of the sea (Verse 10), in storm (Verses 11, 12) and in calm (Verse 13). The whole natural universe is pervaded by the Divine Majesty, and yet can render only a faint and distant whisper of a Majesty which transcends the utmost limits of human thought.

CHAPTER XXVI.

1. *Then Job answered and said :*
- 2 *Wherein hast thou helped the weak*
 Or succoured the feeble arm ?
- 3 *In what hast thou counselled the unwise,*
 And frankly imparted knowledge ?
- 4 *To whom hast thou addressed thy speech,*
And whose spirit hath come forth from thee ?
- 5 *The Shades tremble*
 Beneath the waters and their inhabitants !
- 6 *Hades lieth bare before Him,*
 And there is no covering to Abaddon.
7. *He stretcheth out the North over the void,*
 And hangeth the earth on nothing ;
- 8 *He bindeth up the waters in his clouds,*
 And the cloud is not burst beneath them :
9. *He covereth the face of his throne,*
 He spreadeth over it his cloud :
10. *He draweth a circle upon the face of the waters*
 To the bound where light toucheth darkness :
11. *The pillars of heaven tremble*
 And are amazed at his rebuke ;
12. *By his power He agitates the sea,*
 And He is of skill to smite its pride :

13. *By his breath the heavens grow bright,
And He woundeth the fleet Serpent :—*
14. *Lo, these are but the edges of his ways ;
And how slight a whisper hath been heard of Him !
But the thunder of his power, who can understand ?*

Verses 2-4.—Job commences his reply to Bildad in a tone of irony and disdain. He himself, as he afterwards tells us (Chaps. xxix. and xxxi.), has often carried help to the weak, comfort to the afflicted, counsel to the perplexed. His claim to wisdom and benevolence is admitted by all the tribes. Has Bildad any such claim as this ? is it admitted ? can he make it good ?

This is the general purport of these Verses ; but, more particularly, we may note that in *Verses 2* and *3* Job virtually demands of him, “Do your words contain aught to succour me, whom you assume to be so weak ? or to instruct me, whom you assume to be so ignorant ?” while in *Verse 4* he demands both to whom the words are addressed and from whence they were derived, *i.e.*, he denies both their relèvancy and their originality. *To whom ?* Surely not to me, for your words have no bearing on my argument ? *From whence ?* from me or from Eliphaz ? for very certainly you did not get them from God. Both Job (Chaps. ix. 2 and xiv. 4) and Eliphaz (Chaps. iv. 17-21 and xv. 14-16) had twice uttered the thought on which Bildad’s brief declaration is based ; and Job now both charges him with having dressed himself in borrowed robes, and inquires from whose wardrobe they have been stolen ?

But at the close of *Verse 4* this strain of irony comes to an end. Job pauses ; he turns from man to

God, from whom alone *he* will derive his inspiration, and commences a strain of praise and adoration in which he is soon wholly absorbed. Bildad had extolled the majesty of God as the Ruler of the heavenly host, and in *Verse* 5 Job takes up and expands the strain. Gathering his singing-ropes about him, he chants a hymn of praise compared with which Bildad's is poor and tame indeed. God's rule extends, his majesty is to be seen, not in heaven alone, but throughout the universe,—in Hades, in the earth, in the sea, in all the changes and commotions of time. Job's tone is as much more lofty and fervent as his theme is wider than that of Bildad. And even in the Hebrew Psalter itself there are few nobler psalms than that which now breaks from his lips.

In *Verses* 5 and 6 he celebrates the majesty of God as extending even to the dark kingdom of Hades, to the Abyss which lies far below the ocean, to the underworld in which the disembodied spirits of the innumerable dead are gathered together. Even the great and wide sea, with its multitude of inhabitants, cannot hide this subterranean realm from the Almighty. When He glances upon the dead, though the glory of his face must penetrate the depths of the intervening sea to reach them, his majesty makes them afraid; "the Shades tremble," or writhe like a woman in travail.

This allusion to Hades is curious and suggestive. It may be that Job's thoughts were carried straight to the under-world by the mere force of antithesis; that, as Bildad had spoken of the majesty of God as it is revealed in the heights of heaven, Job's mind flew to the opposite pole of being, and dwelt on that majesty as revealed in the depths of the Abyss. But there

may be more in it than this. Hades had been much and often in his thoughts, especially since he had caught a glimpse of the great hope that Hades might be the scene of his trial and acquittal, the court in which he would meet and be vindicated by his Judge. And it may be that it was because he now looked on Hades as the true home of his spirit (Comp. Chap. xvii. 13-16) that he opens his psalm by affirming that God's presence is not confined to heaven, nor to earth, but reaches even to the unknown realm beneath the earth.

It is possible, though not probable, I think, that it was Bildad's mention of *the moon and the stars* (Chap. xxv. 5) which suggested the thought of Hades. For among the earlier Greeks the moon, because it seemed to sink under the earth, was regarded as a Chthonian, or under-world, power, one of the deities that ruled in "hell;" and hence mystical symbols of the moon were placed in the grave, that "perpetual light might shine" on the spirits of the dead. And wherever Nature-worship prevails, it is so natural that men should regard the luminaries which rule the night as also ruling in the dark shades of death, as to render it possible that Job may have been familiar with this wide-spread superstition, as he was unquestionably familiar with many similar superstitions (Comp. Verses 12 and 13), and may have here permitted it to influence the form of his thought,

In *Verse 7* he rises from the under-world to the world itself, and sings the power of God as manifested in having "stretched out *the North* over the void;" *i.e.*, in stretching the northern sky, in which is the pole round which the whole vault of heaven revolves, over

the vast empty spaces of the atmosphere; and in "hanging the earth *upon nothing*," *i.e.*, hanging it self-poised in space. Many commentators are charmed with the truth and accuracy of this description, and triumphantly exclaim: "How Job knew the truth, demonstrated by astronomy, that the earth hangs self-poised in empty space, is a question not easily answered by those who deny the inspiration of holy Scripture."¹ But nothing can be more unreasonable or perilous than to claim the inspiration of God for the physical theories of Hebrew poetry. It proceeds on an entire misconception of the nature and value of Inspiration, and exposes the Bible to irresistible assaults from the side of science. For if Job was inspired because he knew the earth to be hung on nothing, then surely he was not inspired because he believed it to be a vast plain, or because he believed (Verse 13) the eclipses of the sun to be the work of a great dragon who was bent on devouring it. To insist on scientific accuracy as a criterion of Inspiration is really to give up the Inspiration of the Bible, for its physical theories are at least as often inaccurate as they are accurate; and if we may claim them as arguments *for* the Bible when they are confirmed by science, then surely our opponents may fairly claim them as arguments *against* the Bible when science disproves them.

In *Verses 8-10* Job attributes the gathering and spreading of the heavily-laden clouds which precede a storm to the power of God. Heavily-laden though they be, they do not burst beneath their burden and discharge it until He gives the signal (*Verse 8*). They sail through the sky, above which He abides unseen, and through which some rays of his glory shine down

¹ "The Speaker's Commentary," *in loc.*

upon men, veiling his throne from us with their dense vapours (*Verse 9*), that extend in an ever-expanding circle until they reach the farthest horizon of the sea, "which marks the exact limits of light and darkness." For the ancients believed that the earth was surrounded by the ocean, and that on the other side of the ocean the region of eternal darkness commenced. *This* was the bound where, according to Job, "light and darkness touched."

Having described the portents and gathering of the storm, in *Verses 11* and *12*, he describes the breaking of the storm on the agitated earth. "The pillars of heaven," *i. e.*, the high mountains on which the sky seems to rest, "tremble" and writhe; the thunder, which echoes and re-echoes among them in long reverberating peals, is the voice of their astonishment and terror at God's rebuke. Torn by the fierce winds, the sea is agitated to its depths; it tosses up its arms and lifts up its voice on high, thundering back to the thundering mountains, and is wounded in its pride, by the stroke of the tempest, to the very quick.

Verse 13.—The calm succeeds to the storm, and this too is the work of God, a revelation of his power and majesty. The clear bright wind, which disperses the clouds and restores to the azure sky its serenity and beauty, is his breath. It is his hand which smites the fleet serpent or flying dragon. Now "the Dragon" was the name given by the ancients to one of the most sinuous and straggling of the constellations. It winds between the Lesser and the Greater Bear, and stretches well-nigh half across the Polar Circle. And this constellation (*Comp. on Chap. iii. 8*) is another of those popular personifications of the evil principle of which

we have just had an example in Verse 12.¹ According to the ancient mythology, it is the Dragon, or Serpent, which eclipses the sun by winding itself round it, and seeking to devour it. Were not God to wound the monster and compel it to flee, darkness would usurp the place of light. And the Poet here uses this symbol, I suppose, to express the conflict which, like St. Paul (Rom. viii. 19-23), he saw even in the physical universe,—the conflict between light and darkness, between evil and good, in a creation made subject, against its will, to vanity and corruption. He was aware of an evil power at work around him averse to all goodness, the enemy of all light. And it is God's final and conclusive triumph over this fell power which he celebrates, a triumph which brings back order and peace, and the lustre of an ever-renewed brightness, to the agitated heart and the agitated world.

Verse 14.—Even these revelations of the Divine Majesty in heaven and Hades, in earth and sky and sea, in tempest and in calm, render but the faintest outlines, the mere edges of it. The most magnificent utterances of the physical universe, and its sublimest victories, are but the mere whisper of a Power the full thunder of whose voice the ear of man cannot hear nor his heart conceive. As God is dark to us only through excess of light, so also He is silent only through excess of sound, because He speaks with a too mighty voice, and absent only through an excess of presence which

¹ Verse 12.—“And by his skill he smiteth *Rahab*,” is the literal rendering of the last line. The original word is that used in Job ix. 13. In the comment on that Verse I have explained that “*Rahab*” was an ancient personification of the principle of evil. The term might therefore be well applied to the sea by an Arab or a Hebrew, to both of whom the mighty restless sea was an object of fear and abhorrence.

renders Him invisible to creatures such as we are in such a world as this.

In this noble psalm, then, Job shews that his whole soul is possessed by the truth which Bildad affected to teach him, and that this truth awakens in him musical echoes and responses of which Bildad himself was utterly incapable.

Here the controversy with the Friends comes to a close. Bildad has so little to say when he last speaks, that we are prepared to find that Zophar has nothing to say. Job's victory over them in this final Colloquy is complete, conspicuous. While admitting most of the facts on which they rely, he has refuted the inference which they have drawn from them; and in his turn he has adduced facts which, on their hypothesis, they cannot explain, which they do not venture even to touch. He has driven the venerable Eliphaz to mere calumny and detraction, drawn the scholastic Bildad away from his maxims and authorities, and reduced even confident Zophar to a wondering and indignant silence.

And all the while he himself has been less ironical, less severe, less passionate, than before. The great hope which has sprung up in his soul, and which has renewed and established his faith in God, if it finds no direct expression in this Colloquy, at least expresses itself indirectly in his more composed and assured tone.

The fact is we crossed the watershed of this great controversy at the close of the last Colloquy, when Job cut his memorable inscription on the eternal rock, and looked down for a moment with open eyes into the depths of the Abyss, and saw in it, with astonishment

and joy unutterable, a busy scene of moral and retributive life, a world more justly ordered, and glowing with a Divine light. Since then we have been descending from those dizzy heights to the plain in which Job may speak out all his heart, without check, or interruption, and Elihu may speak out his heart, and even Jehovah may speak out his. The polemic forms are still maintained for a while, throughout this Colloquy indeed; but the polemic life and fire have gone out of them. And now we are about to enter on a yet more tranquil scene. The voices we shall hear henceforth are not so shrill with passion nor so quick with agony. Even Job himself only once falls back into his old tone of piercing grief and passionate incrimination; for the most part he maintains a tone of pensive meditation and regret; and even from his single outburst of passion he quickly rises into his finest and most perfect self-delineation, into his firmest and most assured confidence.

The most lovely and winning sections of his Poem, for it grows in beauty, if not in dramatic interest, to the very end, still lie before us; but its more dramatic and tragic sections, as also its more difficult and argumentative, lie behind us. We shall have more to admire, less to puzzle over. We have crossed the troubled sea, and shall now sail up a broad and tranquil stream, not wholly unvexed with rapids and currents of its own indeed, but still rich in fair scenes and quiet havens of repose.

S. COX.
