

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

son to him, and, as he fondled him, would repeat his name, Immanuel, Immanuel—God-with-us, God-with-us—and find in that Name a charm potent to restore his waning trust in the gracious presence and gracious will of Jehovah.

6. And, finally, Isaiah may have felt, as we feel, that God is with a little child in quite another sense, in a more pathetic sense, than He is with grown men. To him, as to us, their innocence, their loveliness, and above all their love, may have been the most exquisite revelation of the purity and love of God. "Heaven lies about their infancy;" and in this heaven the Prophet may often have taken refuge from his cares, despondencies, and fears. Every child born into the world brings this message to us, reminds us that God is with us indeed and of a truth; for whence did this new, pure, tender life come if not from the central Fountain of life and purity and love?

And from this point of view Isaiah's "Immanuel" is but the ancient analogue of our Lord's tender words: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." NIGER.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

VII.—THE INTERVENTION OF ELIHU.

SECOND DISCOURSE (CHAPTER XXXIV.)

ELIHU has already addressed himself directly to the Friends (Chap. xxxii.), and to Job (Chap. xxxiii.); he had accused *them* of condemning a man whom they could not refute, and *him* of charging with silence and indifference the God who speaks to men in many ways. And now he turns and addresses himself to the by-

standers, who had eagerly followed every wind and double of this great inquest and argument. Apt as we are to forget them, he renders it quite impossible for us to forget them throughout this second discourse. He appeals to them again and again (Verses 2, 10, 16, 34), and always with the profoundest respect, as "sages" and "wise men," "men of *heart*" and "men of *experience*." And if in these terms of respect there be some touch of that tone of compliment by which an orator seeks to propitiate his audience, we yet have no reason to suspect Elihu's sincerity. For, doubtless, there were in his audience many aged and experienced men for whom he would feel a natural deference; even compliments may be sincere; a deferential tone is natural and becoming, especially in a young man, in addressing a public audience: and, at the lowest, Elihu, with many another orator, might well plead on behalf of the respectful epithets he lavishes on his hearers, "I do but

bring a trumpet to awake their ears,
To set their sense on the attentive bent,
 And then to speak."

Nor, if we consider his theme, is it without good reason that, at this point, he should turn from Job and the Friends to appeal to a larger audience. For his theme, the equity of the Divine Providence, was the standing problem of the ancient world, as indeed with many it is a standing and unsolved problem, an open and much-debated question, to this day. Every man on the *mezbele* was as profoundly interested in it as Job himself, though less vividly conscious of his interest; and one can almost feel the thrill of quickened and eager attention with which they would listen to

Elihu, as this "wise young man" uttered appeal after appeal, and produced argument after argument to prove that the sorrowful and chequered lot of man is ordered by an unfailing Justice and Love.

Job had impugned that Justice (Verses 5-9). Elihu asserts it (Verses 10, 11), and adduces arguments for it of the most philosophic reach. (a) He argues (Verses 12-15) that God *cannot* be inequitable, since it was of his own will that He made the universe, since it is by his quickening breath that all creatures are sustained in being; the government of the world is not an unwelcome duty, a laborious task, imposed upon Him from without; it is freely assumed, freely borne, freely discharged; so that He has no possible motive for heedlessness or injustice. (β) He argues (Verses 16-19) that He who rules the world age after age *must* be just, since injustice is sooner or later fatal to authority; and, had He been unjust, the King of the Universe would long since have been dethroned. And (γ) he argues (Verses 20-30) that in point of fact God *is* just; that history itself, if only taken on the large scale, proves Him to be the foe of all injustice, proves that, though He may suffer fraud and wrong to sit in high places for a time, yet when the due moment comes He crushes them in a moment, striking them down to ruin with an unseen hand indeed, yet "in the eyes of all beholders." Having stated his theme and adduced his arguments, Elihu draws his conclusion (Verses 31-37): his conclusion is that humility and penitence become the man who, under a rule so just, is afflicted and brought low; that, instead of asserting his own righteousness, or questioning the righteousness of the great Ruler of men, he should confess his sin, steadfastly

purpose amendment, and ask for a clearer insight into the ways of God. And in this conclusion he is sure that all "wise persons" will agree.

Thus Elihu brings his argument home to *Job*, whom he has not forgotten while appealing to the bystanders, whose attention to this argument he had earnestly challenged (Chap. xxxiii. 31-33) before he appealed to them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

And Elihu took up his discourse and said :

2. *Hear my words, O ye sages,*
 And give ear to me, ye men of knowledge,
3. *For the ear testeth words*
 As the palate testeth food !
4. *Let us prove what is right,*
 Let us learn of one another what is good :
5. *For Job hath said, " I am righteous,*
 But God hath taken away my right ;
6. *Though my cause be just, I pass for a liar ;*
 Grievous is my arrow, though I am without sin."
7. *Who is a man like Job,*
 That drinketh down scoffing like water,
8. *And goeth over to the evildoers,*
 And walketh with men of wickedness ?
9. *For he said, " It profiteth a man nothing*
 That he should delight himself in God."
10. *Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding :—*
 Far be iniquity from God,
 And injustice from the Almighty !
11. *He requiteth every man according to his deed,*
 And according to his work he recompenseth him.
12. *Yea, of a truth, God cannot be inequitable,*
 Nor can the Almighty wrest justice.
13. *Who hath given him the earth in charge,*
 Or who hath laid the universe upon Him ?
14. *Were He intent on Himself alone,*
 He would gather to Himself his spirit and his breath ;
15. *All flesh would expire together,*
 And man would return to dust.

16. *Now hear this, if ye have understanding,
Give ear to the voice of my words :*
17. *Can he that hateth justice rule ?
And wilt thou condemn the Just, the Mighty One ?*
18. *Is it to be said to a king, " O worthless man !"
And to princes, " O ye wicked !"*
19. *How much less to Him who accepteth not the person of nobles,
Nor regardeth the rich more than the poor,
Since they are all the work of his hands ?*
20. *In a moment they die ;
Even at midnight the people are overthrown and perish ;
The mighty are taken off by an unseen hand :*
21. *For his eyes are on the ways of man,
And He beholdeth all his steps ;*
22. *There is no darkness nor blackness of death
Wherein they that do evil can hide themselves ;*
23. *For God need not look at a man twice
When He would bring him into judgment.*
24. *He breaketh in pieces mighty men without inquisition,
And setteth up others in their stead,*
25. *For He knoweth well their deeds :
He overthroweth them in the night and they are crushed ;*
26. *Because they are wicked, He striketh them
In the open sight of all,*
27. *Because they turned away from after Him,
And considered none of his ways,*
28. *So that they caused the cry of the poor to go up before Him :
For He heareth the cry of the afflicted.*
29. *When He giveth peace, who can condemn Him ?
But who can behold Him when He hideth his face,
Whether from a nation or only from a man,*
30. *Because the wicked reign
And the people are ensnared ?*
31. *Surely it is meet to say unto God,
" I have borne ; I will not offend again :*
32. *That which I see not, shew Thou me,
That if I have done wrong, I may do it no more."*
33. *Shall He requite thee as thou deemest right,
As you reject, as you choose, but not He ?
Say what thou knowest.*
34. *Men of understanding will say to me,
And wise persons who hear me,*

35. “*Job hath spoken without knowledge,
And his words are devoid of wisdom.*”
36. *Would that Job might be proved to the uttermost
For his answers are like those of the wicked :*
37. *For he addeth mutiny to his sin,
He clappeth his hands among us,
And multiplieth his words against God.*

Elihu commences his address to the wise and experienced men around him by appealing to that moral sense in man which discriminates between word and word, argument and argument, action and action, and pronounces on their ethical value — a sense in which they, no less than he, as entirely believed as in the physical sense which tastes and discriminates between food and food, flavour and flavour. The figure or proverb in which he couches this appeal (*Verse 3*) had been used by Job himself (Chap. xii. 11), and had influenced the form of many Verses in the Poem (*e.g.*, Chap. vi. 6, 7; and Chap. xxxiii. 2). The figure indeed rests on one of those obvious and inevitable analogies which have entered into the literature of every race. Thus, for example, Shakespeare makes the wise Nestor say to the crafty Ulysses :

Now I begin to *relish* thy advice,
And I will give a *taste* of it forthwith
To Agamemnon ;

and more than once the same Poet teaches us that as “by our ears our hearts oft *tainted* be,” so through our ears there often reaches our hearts that salt of wisdom by which the taint is cured. As they listen to him Elihu would have his hearers exercise their moral sense, testing and proving his words that they may admit only those which are true, and unite with him in the quest of that which is good (*Verse 4*).

In *Verses* 5 and 6 he states, or restates (Comp. Chap. xxxiii. 9-11), the assertion of Job to which he is about to reply, and states it with his usual fairness. In so many words Job had affirmed as against God, "I know that *I have right on my side*" (Chap. xiii. 18); he had maintained that he had "kept" the way of righteousness and had not "turned aside" from that way (Chap. xxiii. 11, 12), but that nevertheless God had embittered his soul by denying him the simplest justice and treating him as one of the wicked (Chap. xxvii. 2). By disregarding his asseveration of personal and undeviating righteousness God had caused him to "pass for a liar" even with those who knew him best—and, indeed, the Friends had been only too forward to give him both the lie oblique and the lie direct. The very image of Verse 6—"Grievous is my *arrow*"—is taken from the mouth of Job: "Lo, *the arrows* of the Almighty are in me, and their *venom* drinketh up my spirit" (Chap. vi. 4), and is plainly a milder version of Job's complaint, since it passes by the wild passionate charge that God had dipped his arrows in poison before they left his bow. Throughout his whole Discourse indeed, as here, Elihu shews a conspicuous moderation and good sense, at the farthest remove from the bitter injustice of the Friends—a point which surely must have been overlooked by the critics who are so hard on him: he is the fairest and most just-minded of controversialists; instead of evading the main argument of his antagonist to pounce with delight on his occasional slips and exaggerations, and tearing them to tatters with an air of triumph when no real victory has been won, he declines to press any such accident of debate, deals only with what is essential, and bends his assault

only on those main positions which Job was prepared to defend.

It was natural, therefore, that, with all his reverence for Job, he should be offended by the heat and passion of his words, by the absence of moderation and self-restraint, and tell him that "this strained passion did him wrong." No doubt it is easier for his friend on the bank to maintain his composure than it is for the man who has been swept away by the stream of calamity, and is doing instant battle with its fierce currents and driving waves. Job is not to be overmuch blamed if, under the stress of calamity, and stung by the baseless calumnies of the Friends, he now and then lost composure, and grew immoderate both in his resentments and his retorts. Remembering the keen and protracted agony he had to endure, we may well pardon an offence for which it is so easy to account; we may cheerfully admit, as Jehovah Himself admitted, that in the main he spoke of God aright; we may even admire the constancy and patience with which on the whole he met the provocations and insults of the Friends: and yet we cannot but feel that he often pushed his inferences against the Divine Justice and Providence much too far, as indeed he himself confessed that he had when at last he saw Jehovah face to face, and carried his just resentment against the Friends to excess. There are points in the progress of the story where, as we have seen, he seems to *revel* in his sense of wrong, and to lash out wildly against both God and man. With fine moral tact Elihu had detected this fault in his tone and bearing, and had discovered whither it was leading him. Hence he cries (*Verses 7 and 8*): "Where in the world is there a man

like Job, *who drinks down scorn like water*, and, by meeting scorn with deeper scorn, by nursing his resentment, by fanning it to a white heat, is going over to the ranks of them that do evil, and associating himself with wicked men?"¹

In proof that, in his fierce passionate resentment of his wrongs, Job was taking the tone and adopting the principles characteristic of the ungodly, and even advancing the sceptical arguments against the Divine Government of the world by which they often sought to justify their impiety and immorality, Elihu charges him (*Verse 9*) with having contended that "it profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself in God," that the righteous man has no advantage over the unrighteous. And though Job nowhere uses these very words, he often uses words in which this charge is implied, and even words which state it much more harshly and crudely. What else does he mean by his constant affirmation that, although he is innocent, he is treated as if he were guilty; that, though he is "without transgression," even harder measure is meted out to him than to habitual and notorious transgressors of the Divine law? In Chapter *xxi.* he formally argues that the wicked live on, wax old, and become mighty in power, in houses "free from fear" and abounding in wealth and happiness; that, after "wearing away their days in mirth," they are blessed with a sudden and painless death, although they say:

What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him,
And *what will it profit us* if we make our suit unto Him?

While in Chapter *ix.*, Verses 22 and 23, he brings the

¹ In this paraphrase I have been able, I hope, to give the real sense of Verses 7 and 8 more exactly than it is possible to give it in any mere translation.

express charge against God which Elihu attributes to him in a form much more offensive than that which Elihu puts into his mouth :

It is all one, therefore will I say it ;
The guiltless and the guilty He destroyeth alike ;
 When the scourge slayeth suddenly,
He laughs at the temptation of the innocent.

There is, as we saw in studying these and kindred passages, much to excuse, much to account for, much even, when once we remember that Job is *conducting an argument*, to vindicate his use of such language as this : and yet who does not perceive, with Elihu, that in using it Job was perilously near to “ walking in the counsel of the ungodly, and standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful ” ?

To Elihu such a conclusion as that to which Job seemed at least to have been tending was intolerable, absurd in reason, immoral in its practical influence. And hence, in *Verses 10 and 11*, he meets it point blank, stating as the thesis or proposition he was prepared to maintain against all comers, that God is not indifferent to the moral complexion of human conduct, that He is of an exact and invariable justice ; and that, because He is just, He requites every man according to his deeds—a law the universal incidence of which Job had questioned again and again : and from his thesis, if only he can prove it, Elihu would have us infer that, so far from profiting nothing, a man is and must be the better for his piety, that it must and does profit a man much that he should delight himself in the Almighty.

He opens his statement by a fresh appeal to the sages—the “ *men of understanding* ” and the “ *men of*

heart”—whom he saw around him, *i.e.*, men who had long brooded in their hearts over the mysteries of the Divine Providence, as these had been brought home to them by experience and observation, men who had “a feeling sense” of those sacred and often insoluble mysteries. Then, his whole moral nature revolting from the conclusion of evildoers, which Job had adopted or seemed to adopt, he breaks into a formula of indignant deprecation, as one to whom the bare thought of any stain on the fair and sacred Name of God was altogether intolerable :

Far be iniquity from God,
And injustice from the Almighty !

And, finally, having first stated his theme in the emotional manner of the East, he states it in the more simple and direct form with which we of the West are familiar :

He requiteth every man according to his deed,
And according to his work He recompenseth him.

Now this law of exact and universal retribution—which we have already heard so much from the Friends—has always been held by men of experience and faith to be the ruling law of the Divine Providence ; and even those who do not admit that it *is*, at least admit that it *should* be so. It rests on a natural instinct and craving ; for who is not ready to demand ?—

Let sin, alone committed, light alone
Upon his head that hath transgressed so ;
Let guiltless souls be freed from guilty woe.

The Friends held that this *was* the law, and by their pungent, personal, and mistaken applications of it had well-nigh driven Job to despair. Job held that it

ought to be the law, but questioned and doubted whether it was. Elihu, first giving a wider scope to the law, is about to contend, against Job, that what ought to be *must be* and *is*. And even the most advanced thinkers of modern times, when they too have given the law a still larger interpretation and wider scope than Elihu's, maintain with him that Retribution is the true key to the Providence which shapes men's ends for them, or, if they do not recognize a Divine Providence, that it is the true and scientific key to the life of man upon the earth. To us, therefore, the arguments by which Elihu sustains his proposition can hardly fail to be as interesting as they were to the "men of understanding" to whom they were originally addressed.

In his first argument (Verses 12-15) he takes the high *a priori* road, and contends, philosophically enough, that God *cannot* be inequitable, because He has no reason, no conceivable motive, for inequity. It is not as if the government of the world had been imposed upon Him from without, a task reluctantly undertaken, which, therefore, He might be disposed to neglect; nor is it as if He had been entrusted with it for a time by some superior Power, and might, therefore, be tempted, like some greedy satrap, to "wrest justice," in order to enrich Himself at the expense of his subjects (*Verse 13*). On the contrary, it was of his own will that He made the earth and called men into being. It can only be because He loves them that He either created or sustains them. Were He intent on Himself alone, impelled by any selfish or self-regarding motive, impelled by aught save an unselfish and everlasting love, He would recall the quickening

and sustaining emanations of his Divine energy ; and, withdrawing from us both the breath of our nostrils and that spiritual influence which is to the soul what the breath is to the body, He would suffer all flesh to "expire together," and the whole frame of man to crumble into dust (*Verses 14, 15*). As it is and can be no self-regarding affection, no desire for self-aggrandizement, which induces Him to vivify us by a constant impartation of his "spirit" and to uphold us in being by a constant exertion of his power, what possible motive can He have for perverting justice and for treating us inequitably ?

And, indeed, if we believe in a Creator at all, and especially in a Creator whose power is the servant of his love, I do not see how we are to answer that question, how we are to evade the force of Elihu's first argument ; for surely He who made and sustains us of his own will, at the mere prompting of love, is not likely to act unjustly by us.

But Elihu has another argument to urge in support of his thesis (*Verses 16-19*), and an argument of the same philosophical character as the first. Like St. Paul (*Romans iii. 6*), he contends that He who rules the world cannot be unjust, since injustice undermines authority, and eventually overthrows it. Opening with a new appeal to the wise and experienced men in the circle of bystanders (*Verse 16*), he affirms that there would be a kind of treason in charging even earthly kings and princes with injustice, since that would be to deny them the very quality most essential to their high difficult function ; and to deny them the quality without which they were unfit to reign would be virtually to depose them (*Verse 18*).

But if it be a kind of treason to accuse *them* of injustice, what must it be to launch the self-same accusation against Him by whom alone kings reign and princes decree justice? If no man who "hates justice" has any right to rule, or any ability for rule, how much more incredible and impossible is it that the Omnipotent should be unjust, or that He in whom power and justice must be one should wrest the cause of those who come before Him (*Verse 17*)? And, again (*Verse 19*), what motive can He have for injustice who made both the noble and the beggar, both rich and poor, to whom, therefore, all are equally dear? If all men are "the work of his hands," and all they have be his gift, why should He prefer one before another, and so prefer the one as to wrong the other, thus putting his very throne in jeopardy by bringing a stain upon his justice?

Granting Elihu's premiss, granting that God is omnipotent, it is impossible to disprove his conclusion, that God is and must be just. And hence it is that in our own day those who question the justice of God also question his might, and infer that the action of his pure and benevolent Will is checked and thwarted by some dark Power equal, if not superior, to his own.

But Elihu is not content with mere logic and philosophic inference; he appeals to facts. Having shewn *what must be*, he passes on to *what is*. He appeals to history (*Verses 20-30*) in support of his philosophy, and contends with Milton that

All is best
And ever found best *at the close*.

For a time injustice may thrive, or seem to thrive; the wicked may be in great power and swell like a

green bay tree ; but from the first the axe is laid at the root of every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, and sooner or later the axe is lifted and the tree falls. The Divine Ruler of the world may suffer tyrannic authority to play its "fantastic tricks" unrebuked for a while ; and that base multitude which is ever ready to acclaim high-handed assertions of power that seem to subserve national or "imperial" interests, fooled by impunity, may lose all sense of moral distinctions ; but, when the cup of their iniquity is full, rich and poor, mighty and feeble, despotic princes and their base subservient flatterers and accomplices, are overthrown and perish as in a moment : in the culminating hour of darkness the dawn of a new day strikes upward into the sky ; and the mighty who, by their injustice, have grown intolerable to God and man, are "taken off" the swelling stage "*without hand,*" as it were, that is, by a hand not visible to them, by a force the very existence of which they have not foreboded or have not respected (*Verse 20*). This "unseen hand" may stand for the resentment of the honest and the just who, patient of wrong up to a certain point, suddenly and unexpectedly rise up against it when it passes all bounds of endurance ; or it may point to the dark and sudden conspiracies, the palace intrigues, by which, especially in the East, those who stand round the throne execute a wild justice on the tyrant who has outraged all justice : or, as is more likely from the whole tone of the passage, it may indicate the immediate hand, the instant judgment, of an offended God. What Elihu means is, most probably, that "in the middle of the night," when the darkness is at the deepest and injustice is becoming the law, those

who have darkened the lives of so many of their fellows are removed—like Pharaoh, like Herod—by the invisible and immediate stroke of Divine Justice, “the people” who approved of them, or even tolerated them, often sharing their doom or suffering from their fall.

For from the following Verses it is very evident that at this point he has *God* in his thoughts. Human judges may be unjust even when most intent on justice; they cannot know all the ways of man or trace “*all* his steps;” and if they could acquaint themselves with all his deeds, they could not penetrate to the motives which inspired them and gave them their ethical colour and significance. Impartial verdicts are not likely to proceed from partial knowledge. But the knowledge of the Supreme Ruler of men is not partial; He is omniscient, and his omniscience is a new argument and guarantee of his impartiality. His eyes are ever on the ways of men; He beholds all their steps (*Verse 21*). Nothing can escape his gaze; no dark shadow, no plausible subterfuge, can hide from Him the offender’s guilt (*Verse 22*). Knowing men altogether, familiar with their motives as well as their deeds, with the whole complexion of their nature and life as well as with the separate actions for which they may be called to account, there is no need for Him to hold such a judicial investigation as Job had again and again demanded (*Cf. Chap. xxiv. 1, et seq.*), no need even for Him “*to look at a man twice,*” before pronouncing sentence or executing judgment (*Verse 23*). Without an inquisition, therefore (*Verse 24*), which would add nothing to his knowledge, the Allseeing Judge hurls the unjust, however

mighty, from their pride of place, and sets up "others," *i.e.*, more worthy and equitable rulers, in their stead—all the rebellions, revolutions, and reformations of the various races of the world being ruled and determined by God in so far as they spring from a just resentment of injustice and vice. He who knows these unjust rulers altogether, whatever the darkness in which they strive to hide themselves, if at times He smites them in the guarded seclusion in which they have entrenched themselves against the victims of their despotic humours, snatching them thence or crushing them in it as with an unseen hand (*Verse 25*; comp. *Verse 20*), at other times strikes them "in the open sight of all"—"*in the place of the spectators*," the public haunt where men most congregate; *i.e.*, they are openly punished for their secret sins by Him who seeth in secret, punished by the manifest judgment of Heaven, by the immediate "visitation of God" (*Verse 26*).

That he may still further impress his hearers, the spectators of the tragedy of which the *mezbele* was the open and exposed stage, with a sense of the Divine Justice, and of the Love that lies at the very heart of that Justice, Elihu proceeds to emphasize the fact he has already affirmed, that the judgments of God are based on purely moral distinctions, and are intended to uphold the moral sanctions of a law which must be enforced if the broad realm over which He rules is to be happy and at peace. It is because men, and especially men dressed in a little brief authority, are wicked (*Verse 26*), because they are lawless and godless (*Verse 27*), that He strikes them down in the presence of those whom they have wronged and cor-

rupted and oppressed. Little as they meant to set such a cause in motion, it is their fraud and injustice and cruelty which have compelled God to intervene, since it is these which have "caused the cry" of the poor sufferers by them to go up before One who never turns a deaf or indifferent ear to their cry (*Verse 28*: comp. Exodus ii. 23, 24; and James v. 4). As it is his consideration, his compassion, for the poor and the afflicted which moves Him to give them peace by "crushing" the tyrants who troubled their peace, who can condemn Him as though He were unjust? And if He hide his face from men in displeasure at their crimes and sins, who can "behold" Him? who, that is, can penetrate the veil with which He has covered his face and turn his displeasure into favour? Whether his judgment fall only on the tyrant who has provoked it by his sins against the public welfare, or also embrace in its wide dark folds the guilty nation which by its sympathy or easy toleration has become a partaker in his sins, is it not just that He should bring the triumph of the wicked to an end, and not suffer men to be netted and ensnared, as they are only too apt to be, by the spectacle of wickedness triumphing in high places (*Verses 29, 30*)?

What were the special historical catastrophes that Elihu had in his mind, and on which he based his induction of the justice of the Divine Rule, we do not know; but every age abounds in them, and it is quite obvious that they were as familiar and as impressive to Job himself¹ as they were to Elihu: to both they were the most striking and weighty proofs of the equitable and kindly Providence which shapes men's

¹ See Chap. xxiv. 2-25; and Chap. xxvii. 13-23.

lives and ends for them, mishew them how they will. And we need not pause to quote instances before admiring the firm grasp of ethical principles displayed by this wise Young Man. He saw clearly what all the added history of thirty or forty centuries, so rich in examples of the Justice that rules the world, has not even yet taught some among us that the moral principles by which we acknowledge we are bound to govern our individual lives apply no less to the lives and actions of nations; that the same laws, enforced by the same awful sanctions, hold in both, and ultimately govern both; that lies, however diplomatic, frauds on however large a scale, and a tyrannous use of superior strength, are as contemptible, and in the end as fatal, in a nation as in a man. And he had also learned, what some of us are still slow to see, that the goal and end of all Divine judgments is mercy; that God strikes down the lawless oppressor, whether of the family or of the nation, from love to the oppressed, and brings successful evil to a sudden end out of compassion for the unthinking multitude who might be dazzled and corrupted by it were its triumph to endure.

Having advanced these able and cogent arguments for the justice of the Lord and Governor of the world, Elihu goes on to infer his conclusion from them and to point the moral of them (Verses 31-37). He had already prepared the way for his application by the phrase (*Verse 29*), "Whether he hideth his face from a nation or only *from a man*;" for obviously the "man" he had in his eye was none other than Job. To Job, therefore, he now applies the argument he has conducted to a close. There may be another link of connection between this hortatory conclusion and the

Verses which immediately precede it. Possibly, as some Commentators hold, Elihu meant to imply a hint that even the haughty and lawless tyrants, who had provoked the judgments of God by their egregious and multiplied crimes, would not have sought his face in vain had they sought it in the way of penitence and amendment. But though these subtle and delicate links of connection lend an added charm to the Poem, we do not need to trace them out in order to vindicate the conclusion he draws from his great argument. For if, as he has argued, God's rule of man is characterized by an invariable justice, and even this justice is but a form of his love, what else is there for any sufferer to do but to humble himself under the mighty but tender Hand that has been laid upon him, to infer that at the best he has been guilty of sins of ignorance, to brace himself to bear with patience the inevitable results of his sins, and to seek a wider knowledge of the Law by which his life is governed? This is the only course open to him, and becoming to him; for how can a man reasonably rebel against the decrees of Justice and Love? And this is the course, so Elihu implies, which *Job* ought to have taken, instead of flaming out into impeachments of the Divine equity and kindness.

In the hope that he may still take this course, Elihu offers him (*Verses* 31, 32) a model confession, shews him how the true penitent draws near to the Heavenly Majesty, and leaves him to compare with this "meet" saying his own passionate invectives and self-justifying appeals. Through the heavy pauses and broken constructions of this Confession we are intended, I suppose, to hear the sobs and groans of the Penitent, who, since he cannot and will not impugn the justice of God, can

only infer that, consciously or unconsciously, he has transgressed the Divine order, broken the Divine law. Such an one can appeal to the Great Searcher of hearts, who knows his inward thoughts and motives as well as all his deeds, and say : “ *I have borne ;* ” *i.e.*, though, his breath failing him for sorrow and his voice lost in the sighings of his contrition, he does not tell us what he has endured—“ I both have borne and will bear my chastisement as patiently as I can, since it comes to correct my offence : ” “ *I will not offend ;* ” *i.e.*, though he does not or cannot complete his phrase, “ I will not offend *any more* : ” and, lest he should once more and unwittingly offend, “ *That which I see not, teach Thou me, that, if I have done wrong, I may do it no more.* ” In the main this patient endurance of chastening, this resolve to amend, and this craving for a larger and clearer knowledge of the law that has to be kept under such stern penalties, are the very stuff and substance of all true repentance, and we may very well accept Elihu’s form—as he evidently intended us to accept it—as a model confession. At the same time, the conditional phrase, “ *if I have done wrong,* ” shews clearly enough that Elihu had Job in his mind, and modified his model so as to adapt it to the peculiarities, or supposed peculiarities, of the case before him. Job had contended that he had not wittingly or wilfully transgressed the Divine law. “ Not wittingly, perhaps,” suggests Elihu, “ nor wilfully ; but may you not unconsciously, and without intention, have transgressed a law which must hold on its course and exact its penalties of all who transgress it, however innocent of evil intention they may be ? Nay, *must* you not, if, as I have shewn, God be just ? ” The whole implication of the passage is

that there may be sins of ignorance as well as sins of intention—unintended transgressions which entail suffering even though they do not involve guilt; and that it is for the good of the world at large that even these transgressions should receive their due recompense.

Thus he reconciles the integrity of Job with the justice of God, or at least hints at a possible reconciliation, and shews Job how, even on his own hypothesis, instead of charging the Ruler of the world with injustice, he should draw near to Him in penitence and supplication.

Innocent of any sins, or of any conscious sins, which demanded the special judgments that had fallen on him, Job might be: nevertheless, he was not without sin. For (*Verse 33*) he had dared to judge, and even to condemn, the Judge of all; and who could do that without guilt? He had quarrelled with the Divine order of the world, and preferred to it another order of his own invention and choice. *Was he to impose his law and order on God, or God to impose his on him?*

Such I take to be the meaning of this very difficult Verse; but some critics worthy of all respect take it to mean that, if Job is not content with the Divine order, it is *for him* to decide whether or not he will still adhere to his own conception of what ought to be, *not for Elihu*, since he, Elihu, is quite content with what is, and has no desire to see the existing order changed. This interpretation rests on the fact that the final words of the Verse, which I have rendered, “but not *He*,” mean, literally, “and not *I*.” But I would submit that we have here only that emphatic Hebrew idiom of which many instances are to be found in the Old Testament—*e.g.*, Ecclesiastes ii. 25, and iv. 8—the

speaker projecting himself for a moment into the place of God and speaking thence. Both the logic and tone of the passage, I think, make the rendering I have preferred the more natural one.

But however that may be, and whatever Job may think, whatever decision he may arrive at, Elihu will be glad to hear it; and hence he turns upon Job with the demand, "Say, *speak out*, what thou knowest," not without some hope probably that Job may avail himself of the loophole of escape which he has provided for him in Verse 32, and adopt a Confession which does not necessarily impeach the integrity which he was so resolute to maintain; nor without hope that Job may see the absurdity of demanding that the King of the universe should take a law from the mouth of his subject. Even to this appeal, however, Job remains dumb, much, I suspect, to Elihu's grief and disappointment. But though Job will make no concession, Elihu is quite sure—perhaps he saw assent to his argument and conclusion in their faces and bearing—that the wise and experienced onlookers, to whom he now reverts, will admit that, in charging the Ruler of the world with injustice, Job had sinned against his own better knowledge and had failed to shew his usual wisdom (*Verses 34, 35*). And since even yet Job will not confess and abandon his sin, Elihu has no alternative but to hope that he may still be probed and proved, "proved to the uttermost," until by the severities of his probation he has been purged from the folly which had led him to speak "like the wicked" (*Verse 36*; comp. *Verses 7-9*). His original offence was aggravated by his obstinate adherence to it, by his refusal to take the attitude and utter the confession of the

Penitent (*Verse 37*). By cherishing a self-justifying and impenitent spirit he was adding "mutiny," or rebellion, to his "sin," wilful to unconscious guilt—adding *pesha* to *chattath*. "All sorts of sins, acts of weakness, negligence, or carelessness, are implied in the primary expression *chattath*; but sins of design and violent purpose are specially implied by *pesha*."

There may be some touch of wounded self-love, as well as of disappointment, in the charge with which Elihu concludes his second Discourse. Undoubtedly it was hard on him that an argument so able and cogent, so philosophical in tone, and closing with an induction from historical facts which he may well have thought Job would feel to be irresistible, should have failed to produce conviction or any sign of assent. And yet, though our sympathies go with Job more than with Elihu, who can deny that, at bottom, and bating some unnecessary heat of tone, the charge was true? Not Job himself, we may be sure. For when Jehovah repeats Elihu's charge (Comp. Chap. xxxiv. 35 with Chap. xlii. 3), Job humbly confesses that he *had* "spoken without knowledge," retracts all the accusations against the Divine Justice in which he had associated himself with the wicked; and not only repents with the gentle and hopeful contrition which Elihu had advised,* but "abhors himself" for his guilt, and repents "in dust and ashes"—as impassioned and vehement in his very penitence before God as he had been in "multiplying words against God."

S. COX.