

other than a disgrace. And every visible badge of such abandonment, be it ever so brilliant, is in the sight of the inhabitants of heaven a mark of shame.

Again, by accepting cheerfully our subordinate lot we are really lifting up for the admiration of men the authority to which we bow, an authority which is a source of life and infinite blessing to all who submit to it. The marks of our submission are the insignia of the King whom we serve. And upon the throne of God our Divine King wears as royal jewels the marks of his own obedience to the Father, an obedience even unto death.

Lastly. We belong to a family not confined to earth. We have brothers in the skies. Holy spirits who never sinned look upon us with affection and delight. They watch our conflict and help us in our need. And side by side with us they bow in absolute submission, although robed in the glory of heaven, to the common Father of them and of us. To think of them will repress all vain ambition to put ourselves in a position for which God never designed us.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE BOOK OF JOB.

VII.—THE INTERVENTION OF ELIHU.

THIRD DISCOURSE (CHAPTER XXXV.)

JOB had sustained his charge of injustice against the Almighty Lord and Ruler of men by contending that, under his rule, the righteous were none the better for their righteousness (See Chapter xxxiv. 9, with Note on it). It is to this subsidiary charge that Elihu here

addresses himself in an argument as wide in its sweep, as cogent, as philosophical in its tone, as any we have already heard from him, though it is more faintly accentuated and more curtly expressed. He argues (1) that since, when men sin against the law of God, the disastrous effects of their transgression do not reach up to Him, and, when they do his will their righteousness confers nothing on Him, since "the service and the loyalty they owe in doing it pays itself," their righteousness gives them no claim on God, or no claim on which they can insist: while, on the other hand, since He gains nothing by their obedience, and loses nothing by their disobedience, He has no conceivable motive for treating them unjustly, for interposing between them and the due reward of their deeds (Verses 5-8). He argues (2) that if, when they call upon God to succour them in their afflictions, God does not at once respond to their appeal, it is much more reasonable to infer that they ask amiss than to conclude that He is wilfully and obstinately deaf to their cry; the fault is far more likely to be with them than with Him (Verses 9-13). And (3) he argues that, so far from being deaf or indifferent to the cries of the wronged and the suffering, God's eyes are ever on their ways, his ear open to their supplications. Their cause is before Him; sentence is only delayed, not refused; and delayed purely in compassion to suppliants whom the Divine Judge must condemn for many faults were He to pronounce an immediate verdict upon them (Verses 14-16).

In fine, men *are* the better for their righteousness in many ways; but their righteousness is as yet imperfect, as their very afflictions prove, since these are sent to

redeem them from their bondage to imperfection : their righteousness is impaired by so many faults and sins that, were God to enter into instant judgment with them, not even the best of men could stand before Him.

Much that Elihu says here we have heard before. Eliphaz had argued that, as God was no gainer by the good deeds of men, they could not claim instant audience and immediate interposition of Him (Chap. xxii. 2-4, 12, 13); and Job had himself explained that the wicked could not "invoke the Most High" when he would, or expect that God would "hear his cry when trouble came upon him" (Chap. xxvii. 9, 10). But Elihu sets these truths in a new and more genial light when he contends that, as God gains nothing from the righteousness of man, and loses nothing by their transgressions, He can have no motive for afflicting men, no motive for afflicting Job, unjustly; reminds the Sufferer that, righteous as he may be, nevertheless, being a man, he must have faults and sins which need to be chastened out of him before the Eternal Judge can wholly acquit and approve him : and urges him to suspect himself of iniquity rather than impute inequity to God.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Then Elihu took up his discourse and said :

2. *Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou shouldst say,
 " My righteousness is greater than God's ? "*
3. *Yet thou saidst, " What profit shall it be to me,
 And what shall I gain from it more than from sinning ? "*
4. *I will answer thee,
 And thy friends with thee.*
5. *Look up to the heavens and see,
 And behold the clouds, how high they be !*

6. *What canst thou do against Him, if thou sinnest ?
Though thine offences be many, yet what canst thou do against Him ?*
7. *If thou art righteous, what dost thou confer on Him,
And what will He take at thy hand ?*
8. *Thy wickedness can but affect a man like thyself,
And thy righteousness a son of man.*
9. *If men groan at the multitude of oppressions,
And cry out under the arm of the mighty,*
10. *Yet none saith, " Where is God my Maker,
Giver of songs in the night,*
11. *Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth,
And maketh us wiser than the fowl of the air ? "*
12. *They cry out indeed—but He answereth not—
Because of the tyranny of the wicked,*
13. *For God will not hear vain outcries,
Neither will the Almighty regard them.*
14. *Even when thou sayest thou shalt never see Him,
Thy cause is before Him : wait therefore for Him.*
15. *But now, because his anger hath visited thee lightly,
And He ignoreth many of thy faults,*
16. *Job openeth his mouth with vanity ;
He multiplieth words without sense.*

With his customary fairness Elihu states (*Verses 2, 3*) the conclusion he is about to attack. So far from wilfully misunderstanding or maliciously misinterpreting the contention of Job, or drawing a harsh and unfair inference from it, in order to score an easy logical victory against him, as some critics affirm, Elihu, as we have seen (*Chap. xxxiv. 9*), positively softens down Job's charge against the Divine equity, and puts it in a *less* crude and offensive form. Again and again Job had asserted his own righteousness; again and again he had accused God of unrighteously refusing to recognize his righteousness, with treating guilty and guiltless alike, with even laughing at the trials and temptations of the innocent: and what was all this but to claim a "greater" righteousness than God's, and to

declare that, great as was his own righteousness, he was none the better for it? Let the critics who are so hard on Elihu look to themselves, and say whether it is he who handles Job, or they who handle *him* unfairly.

It is possible that the "friends" whom, in *Verse 4*, Elihu undertakes to answer in answering Job were, as some Commentators believe, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; for in their very defence of God they had, however unconsciously, attributed unrighteousness to Him: but, as they were far from attributing to Him the special form of unrighteousness which Elihu now had in his mind, that of failing to punish the wicked and to reward the good, it is surely more rational to see in these friends the evil-doers with whom Job had associated himself by adopting their misconceptions of the Divine character and rule (Chap. xxxiv. 8, 9, 36, 37), and by multiplying words against God. In fine, Elihu is prepared to maintain the absolute righteousness of the Most High against all comers, whether they be wise or foolish, pious or impious.

His first argument is of a somewhat abstract and scholastic tone. Here indeed, as elsewhere, Elihu reminds one of the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, who, with reverence be it said, were not the absolute idiots they are often assumed to have been. Like an eager and eloquent young scholar, with his little bundle of theses to be nailed on any Church or University door, he is prepared to contend for his conclusions, against all opposers, with arguments of the most approved quality. In the disinterestedness of God, for example, he finds a proof of his righteousness. God has no conceivable motive for injustice; *ergo*, He must be just. He is none the richer for the obedience

of men, none the poorer for their disobedience. They can neither give anything to Him, nor filch anything from Him. And if He can neither gain by being unjust, nor lose by being just, why should He pervert justice? With no personal interests at stake, such as might warp the judgment of a human, and especially an Oriental, magistrate, there can be no ground for suspecting his equity.

The argument is not by any means so reverent or so conclusive as Elihu thought it. It would be easy to pick logical holes in it, or even to substitute for it an argument of a more sovereign potency. For it is no compliment to the Lord of all to compare Him with the capricious and corrupt despots of the East, and to imply that, if He *had* private ends to serve, He might prove as unjust as they. And, instead of contending that the Almighty has no conceivable motive for injustice, we might well contend that He has the strongest conceivable motive for being just, inasmuch as He does "gain" what He most desires when men become righteous, and "lose" what He most loves when they become unrighteous. But Elihu, though wise beyond his years, was not wise beyond his time. He could but work with the materials and use the logic of his age, as indeed he does in this very argument.¹ And, however defective his argument may seem to us, it would be very cogent with the men of his own generation, while even to us it can hardly fail to be interesting and instructive to note how he approaches and handles it.

He bids Job look up to heaven and to the clouds of heaven, and mark how high they be (*Verse 5*), in

¹ Compare Chaps. xxii. 2-4, 12, 13; and vii. 20.

order that he may rise to some dim conception of the Majesty of Him who dwells above the heavens, and of the mystery which necessarily encompasses his ways. If God be so high, how can aught that men may do reach up to Him? Neither their goodness nor their wickedness extends to Him; they cannot affect the determinations of the Divine Ruler and Judge; they can but affect their fellows, walking on the same level with themselves, and bound to them by many ties (*Verses 6-8*). Unaware, like his contemporaries, of the sympathy which binds Heaven to earth and makes them one, Elihu claims the very remoteness, the very indifference of the Judge eternal, as a proof, or an assurance, of his equity, a proof that He administers justice indifferently to all. It is not, therefore, to the injustice of God that Job must trace his sufferings, for there is no injustice with Him; but, as has already been shewn (*Chap. xxxiii.*), to the Love which chastens men of their sins, and schools them to a larger wisdom, a more perfect obedience.

But why, if God cannot be unjust, and man must be the worse for his wickedness and the better for his righteousness, does not God listen to men when, chastened and corrected by his rod, they appeal to Him for pity and help? To this natural and reasonable inquiry Elihu replies in his second argument (*Verses 9-13*); and if his first argument was somewhat scholastic in its tone and remote from the common facts of life, the second is concrete enough for the most practical of men. For he now argues that, if God does not hear the afflicted when they call upon Him, it is not because He does not care to hear, or is loth to answer, but because they ask amiss, because

they ask to be released before the moral ends for which they are afflicted have been secured.

One secret of the power of this great Poem is that it gives life, animation, variety, to its single but many-sided argument, which under less noble treatment would soon have become monotonous and wearisome, by conveying its general principles, the thoughts on which the polemic rests and turns, in particular and selected instances ; not by abstract reasoning or logical formulæ, but by drawing pictures of human life which suggest more than they say, by embodying its truths in tales. Elihu is true to the picturesque manner of the Book here. He selects his instance, tells his tale, an ancient tale of wrong. In his day—as to this day, especially in the East—a tyrannical abuse of power was one of the commonest sources of human suffering. Subjects groaned under “the multitude of oppressions,” and cried out under the heavy and cruel “arm” of men dressed in a little brief authority, an authority used the more cruelly because it was brief (*Verse 9*). They cried out ; yet there was none to answer them nor any that regarded : no voice from heaven responded to their cry ; no “bolt from the blue” struck down their oppressors. Why ? Simply, asserts Elihu, because their cry was one of mere pain and fear, not one of trust ; not *prayer* at all, but mere instinctive noise such as they had learned, or might have learned, from “the beasts of the earth” or from “the fowl of heaven” (*Verse 11*). The lions roar for food unto God (Psalm civ. 21) ; the cattle low to Him in their thirst (Joel i. 20) ; the young ravens cry to Him from their deserted nest (Psalm cxlvii. 9) : and God hears them, and feeds them, since they can do

no more than roar and scream. But men are not brutes merely, and should not cry out, like the brutes, simply because they are hungry or hurt. As God "teaches them more than the beasts of the earth," they ought to be "wiser than the birds of the air," although to *these* the ancients ascribed a special and oracular wisdom. It is to raise them out of a merely brutal or animal condition that they are smitten of God and afflicted. *They* should have learned—before they can escape tribulation they *must* learn—to trust in "God their Maker," and even to trust in Him as "Giver of songs in the night" (*Verse 10*). It becomes *men* to look through the shadows of discipline to the light that lies beyond it; to believe in the dawn of a better day even when the day of ease and happy conditions darkens into a night of loss and grief and pain. Men have not risen to their full moral stature till they can make God's statutes their songs in the house of their bondage as well as in "the house of their pilgrimage," and even though they have been brought into bondage by their very obedience to his statutes. *This* is the end God has in view when He chastens and afflicts the sons of men—to raise them to their full moral stature, to train them to their full moral strength: and, till this end be reached, how can He listen to their cries for deliverance?

Too often it is mere tyranny against which they cry out, not wickedness (*Verse 12*): their cries are vain (*Verse 13*)—"vanities," merely muscular contortions of writhing lips, not sacred inward realities, not the sighings of a contrite and chastened spirit. Till these are replaced by prayers, and prayers inspired by a sincere trust in the Goodness which chastens men only for their

good, the Almighty cannot and will not "regard" them.

Let Job ponder this illustration of the Divine ways till he reaches the principle which underlies it, and conclude that if God has not heard *him*, it is simply because the gracious moral ends for which God has afflicted him have not even yet been secured.

But—and this is Elihu's third argument—is Job quite sure that God has *not* heard him, that he has cried to Heaven in vain? *He* was not a mere animal man, pinched by want and pain till he exclaimed at his wrong. Let him be assured, then, that God *had* heard him; that his "cause," or suit, though he deemed it passed by, was being tried and weighed; and that the Divine Judge was ready to pronounce a verdict, was only withheld from pronouncing it indeed by his consideration for the suitor who, if he had cried out to Him, had also cried out against Him (*Verse 14*). It was Job who was unprepared to hear, not God who was unprepared to speak. Obviously God's end in afflicting him had not yet been reached; or how should Job have charged Him so foolishly? Did he want the Almighty to pronounce a final verdict upon him while he was arguing and complaining "like the wicked," while he was multiplying vain and senseless words against a God who, ignoring many of his faults, had refrained from inflicting the heavier and severe strokes of his wrath (*Verses 15, 16*)? Would it not be wise of Job both to rest in God and to wait patiently for Him? Was not the very delay of which he complained a merciful delay? Was it not gracious of God, and not ungracious, to postpone sentence upon him until it could be one of cordial and complete approval?

These I take to be the arguments adduced by Elihu in this Chapter. And, whatever may be their defects, they surely must have been very convincing and welcome to the men to whom he spoke ; while even to us they are hardly less welcome, since they remind us of truths most surely believed among us. It is impossible, I think, to consider them fairly without being afresh impressed with the sagacity of the Son of Barachel, with his penetrating insight and quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. When he argues that our moral actions must have issue on earth if not in heaven, must produce results on men if not on God, and concludes that they tell only on man and extend only to the earth, we may correct his inference, since *we* know that they also reach to heaven and tell on God, bringing Him the one sole "gain" which He desires or can receive. But when Elihu argues that the moral ends of human life are its supreme ends, and that to secure these it is well for us to patiently and hopefully endure any suffering by which they may be secured ; when he argues that, if the Divine Ruler of men delay to interpose on our behalf, and to end the conflict and agony to which we are called, it is only that He may inure us by conflict for service and make us perfect by the things we suffer, then he speaks to our very hearts and reminds us of truths as precious to us and as consolatory as they evidently were to him.

S. COX.
