CHAPTER X

GOD REPLIES TO JOB

THE THUNDERSTORM (38: 1)

THEN the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said . . .

ELIHU’s many and brave words tailed out feebly with a final thrust both at Job and his friends: The Almighty . . . regardeth not any that are wise of heart (37: 24), which the R.S.V. interprets correctly as “wise in their own conceit.” This is essentially a repetition of his challenge to the Wise in 32: 7-10.

While he had been speaking, the storm clouds had covered the sky and blotted out the sun. It is quite possible that the distant thunder had coloured Elihu’s third answer, cf. 36: 29 – 37: 5. Now the full thunder-roll was heard overhead, and the gloom was lit up by the lightning’s flash. For the men crouching in fear on the dunghill it seemed as though God had at last bestirred Himself to punish Job’s blasphemies. They edged still further away from him, lest they be consumed with him. But as they glanced fearfully at him, instead of a look of fear and despair on Job’s face they saw a joyous, humble awe. The Almighty had come to him, clothed in all the dread majesty of nature, but He had come and was speaking to Him!

The how of God’s direct speaking should little concern us. Too many have heard the voice of God in thunder or in a still small voice for us to doubt that He speaks even in our days to men. But he who hears that voice has little time or wish to think of how it may be coming to him. In Job’s case his friends almost certainly found themselves in the same position as Paul’s travelling companions, “hearing the sound, but beholding no man” (Acts 9: 7, R.V. mg.), while for Job the storm became the voice of God speaking clearly to him.

God passes over the words of Elihu in silence (for it is merely a curiosity of interpretation to apply, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge to him) and this is seen by
many as proof positive that Elihu's words are a later addition, but He equally passes over the words of Job's friends in silence, even though there is an almost parenthetical mention of them later (42:7). God does not intervene to sum up and decide the debate; He speaks because behind all the multitude of words Job has been trying to storm the gates of heaven, and at last He has pity on His sorely tried servant and answers him.

**The All-Might of God**

If we look away from some special passage like 19: 25ff., God's answer to Job is the best known portion of the book. Our familiarity with it helps to hide from us how entirely unexpected it is—but then we so seldom read through the book. It would seem as though God wishes by sledge-hammer blow after sledge-hammer blow to break down His already broken servant to nothing. In blazing poetry all the gamut of nature's wonders is passed before Job's eyes, but nothing is said about his agonized Why? But is all this as irrelevant as it seems?

To understand God aright we must remember that chs. 38–41 are ultimately only a repetition, more detailed and on a poetically much higher level, of what has already been said by Elihu (36: 22 – 37: 24) and by Job himself (9: 4–14, 12: 13–25 and perhaps 26: 4–14), and their thought underlies much that his friends have declared, e.g. Bildad in 25: 2–6. If we could accept Stevenson's view and completely separate the prose introduction and conclusion from the verse drama, then we could see in these chapters God's condemnation of Job's foolish words and an affirmation on a higher level of the views of his friends. But we are not entitled to do this, and in their setting, cf. 42:7, God's words are ultimately a vindication of Job and a condemnation of his friends.

In Rom. 1: 18–23 Paul described the reaction of man when faced by the all-might of God as seen in His creation. We in our spiritual superiority are apt to say,

"The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone,"

and fail to realize that we too find means of coming to terms with God's all-might, which save us from taking it too seriously. There is a reverent freedom with God which is one of the noblest
fruits of sonship, but there is also an irreverent freedom which is one of the worst weeds in the Christian's garden.

The Rabbinic Jew never for a moment doubted that the giving of the Law at Sinai was an even greater act of grace than the bringing up of Israel out of Egypt, of which it was a logical sequel. But he was profoundly convinced that once God had given it, the consensus of religious men's opinions about the Law established God's will for the individual and people. God had in measure abdicated His freedom of action by His giving of the Law.

In the Church the theologian has tended to take the place of the casuist. We have always recognized that in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God we have the supreme evidence of God's grace, but we have all too often believed that we have the right, and even the duty, to make our understanding of these events the measure by which we judge the acceptability of other men to God. It matters not how much of the fruit of the Spirit may be seen in them, if they will not or cannot say Shibboleth, we lay the command of silence upon them, or even thrust them from our midst as unclean.

This is only one of the ways in which we claim to be able to control God. The attitude of the various characters in Job may well suggest other ways in which we too are guilty.

For Job's friends the contemplation of God's all-might produced merely a comforting conviction that it provided that immutability which served as a firm foundation for their theories about life. They remind me of the many modern scientists—I am thinking of men who claim to believe in God—who base their denial of all miracle precisely on the wonder of God's creating. They wish to limit Him by that portion of His power and work that they are able to grasp.

For Elihu the all-might of God was a handy weapon to smite Job's presumption with. As we read 36: 22 - 37: 24, we never get the impression that the wonders of nature which he describes so eloquently have ever created humility in him. He may say, At this also my heart trembleth, and is moved out of its place (37: 1), but if there was any outward sign of it, it was the conventional one of the actor.

Even Job did not take God's power really seriously. Paul explains that it is revealed in nature, that men might glorify Him as God and give thanks (Rom. 1: 21). With Job we feel, as with
his friends, that it is little more than a handy weapon in contro­
versy; it was an intellectual concept to be appealed to in case of
need, not the foundation of all his living. As a result, when
Job faces it more seriously from time to time, in his discussion, it
drives him to distraction rather than leading him on to confidence.

When God spoke out of the thunderstorm, intellectual convic­
tion become a vital reality. It broke Job down, but it also
brought him peace. A God, greater than Job had ever pictured
Him, was deigning to speak to His sorely tried servant, and that
sufficed.

THE CASTING OUT OF FEAR

I am convinced, though, that we can go further. All the
motives given hitherto for Job's anguish are doubtless valid,
but behind them all lay a deeper cause we must now consider.
We have already said of Job, "He finds that the firm moorings of
his life have vanished, that the ship of his life is adrift on the
dark ocean, without chart, without light, being carried he knows
not where." God is now speaking to deeper need, to the hidden
fear, hardly realized by Job and certainly unconfessed, that there
might be somewhere where the writ of God did not run, where
God was not all-sovereign.

Are we not all like Job in this respect? In his Nineteen Eighty­
Four George Orwell makes his inquisitor, O'Brien, say to the hero,
"You asked me once what was in Room 101. I told you that you
knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that
is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world . . . The worst
thing in the world varies from individual to individual. It may
be burial alive, or death by fire, or by drowning, or by impale­
ment, or fifty other deaths. There are cases where it is some
quite trivial thing, not even fatal."

How true this is! Deep down in each one of us, unconfessed,
and perhaps not even realized, there lies a fear, a fear that just
here God's power is inadequate to triumph. Strangely enough it
is all too often "some quite trivial thing." It is these deep, hidden
fears that are the cause of so much disappointment in the Chris­
tian life, that give the lie to so much talk on sanctification and
victory. It is only when we grasp the unique combination of love
and power in the manger, the cross and the empty tomb that we
can say with life as well as with lip, "We know that in everything
God works for good with those who love Him" (Rom. 8: 28,
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R.S.V.), and we experience the truth of the word, "Perfect love casteth out fear" (I John 4:18).

This probably explains why God's answer to Job is such a fascinating combination of the great and the small. God's power is not affected by the scale it has to work on; the infinitely great and the microscopically small are equally under His control.

GOD'S ANSWER (CHS. 38-41)

5Who is this that darkeneth counsel
by words without knowledge?
6Gird up now thy loins like a man;
for I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
7Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
declare, if thou hast understanding.
8Who determined the measures thereof, if thou knowest?
or who stretched the line upon it?
9Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened?
or who laid the corner stone thereof;
10when the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
11Or who shut up the sea with doors,
when it brake forth, and issued out of the womb;
12when I made the cloud the garment thereof,
and thick darkness a swaddling band for it,
13and prescribed for it my boundary,
and set bars and doors,
14and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further;
and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?
15Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days began,
and caused the dayspring to know its place;
16that it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
17It is changed as clay under the seal;
and all things stand forth as a garment:
18and from the wicked their light is withheld,
and the high arm is broken.
19Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?
or hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?
20Have the gates of death been revealed unto thee?
or hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of death?
21Hast thou comprehended the breadth of the earth?
declare, if thou knowest it all.
22Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and as for darkness, where is the place thereof;
23that thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof,
and that thou shouldest discern the paths to the house thereof?
24Doubtless, thou knowest, for thou was then born,
and the number of thy days is great!
25Hast thou entered the treasuries of the snow,
or hast thou seen the treasuries of the hail,
26which I have reserved against the time of trouble,
against the day of battle and war?
27Which is the way to the place where the light is parted,
or the east wind scattered upon the earth?
28Who hath cleft a channel for the waterflood,
or a way for the lightning of the thunder;
to cause it to rain on a land where
no man is;
on the wilderness, wherein there is
no man;
to satisfy the waste and desolate
ground;
and to cause the tender grass to
spring forth?
Hath the rain a father?
or who hath begotten the drops of
dew?
Out of whose womb came the ice?
and the hoary frost of heaven,
who hath given it?
The waters are hidden as with stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.
Canst thou bind the cluster of the
Pleiades,
or loose the bands of Orion?
Canst thou lead forth the signs of
the Zodiac in their season?
or canst thou guide the Bear with
her train?
Knowest thou the ordinances of
the heavens?
canst thou establish the dominion
thereof in the earth?
Canst thou lift up thy voice to the
clouds,
that abundance of waters may
cover thee?
Canst thou send forth lightnings,
that they may go,
and say unto thee, Here we are?
Who hath put wisdom in the dark
clouds?
or who hath given understanding
to the meteor?
Who can number the clouds by
wisdom?
or who can pour out the bottles of
heaven,
when the dust runneth into a mass,
and the clods cleave fast together?
Wilt thou hunt the prey for the
lioness?
or satisfy the appetite of the young
lions,
when they couch in their dens,
and abide in the covert to lie in
wait?
Who provideth for the raven his
food,
when his young ones cry unto God,
and wander for lack of meat?
Knowest thou the time when
the wild goats of the rock bring
forth?
canst thou mark when the hinds
do calve?
Canst thou number the months
that they fulfil?
or knowest thou the time when
they bring forth?
They bow themselves, they bring
forth their young,
they cast out their sorrows.
Their young ones are in good lik­ing,
they grow up in the open
field;
they go forth, and return not
again.
Who hath sent out the wild ass
free?
or who hath loosed the bands of
the wild ass?
whose house I have made the
wilderness,
and the salt land his dwelling
place.
He scorneth the tumult of the city,
neither heareth he the shoutings of
the driver.
The range of the mountains is his
pasture,
and he searcheth after every green
thing.
Will the wild-ox be content to
serve thee?
or will he abide by thy crib?
Canst thou bind the wild-ox with
his band in the furrow?
or will he harrow the valleys after
thee?
Wilt thou trust him, because his
strength is great?
or wilt thou leave to him thy
labour?
Wilt thou confide in him, that he
will bring home thy seed,
and gather the corn of thy thresh­
ingfloor?
The wing of the ostrich rejoiceth:
are her pinions and feathers
kindly?
For she leaveth her eggs on the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may trample them. She dealeth hardly with her young ones, as if they were not hers: though her labour be in vain, she is without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.

Hast thou given the horse his might? hast thou clothed his neck with the quivering mane? Hast thou made him to leap as a locust? the glory of his snorting is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth out to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not dismayed; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth upon him, the flashing spear and the javelin. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the voice of the trumpet. As oft as the trumpet soundeth he saith, Aha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.

Doth the hawk soar by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth on the rock, and hath her lodging there, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong hold. From thence she spieth out the prey; her eyes behold it afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.

Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said, Shall he that cavillett contend with the Almighty? he that argueth with God, let him answer it. Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, and I will not answer; yea twice, but I will proceed no further.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Gird up thy lions now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou even disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be justified? Or hast thou an arm like God? and canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with excellency and dignity; and array thyself with honour and majesty. Pour forth the overflowings of thine anger: and look upon every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them in the dust together; bind their faces in the hidden place.

Then will I also confess of thee.
that thine own right hand can save thee.

15 Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox.

16 Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the muscles of his belly.

17 He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his thighs are knit together.

18 His bones are as tubes of brass; his limbs are like bars of iron.

19 He is the chief of the ways of God: he only that made him can make his sword to approach unto him.

20 Surely the mountains bring him forth food; where all the beasts of the field do play.

21 He lieth under the lotus trees, in the covert of the reed, and the fen.

22 The lotus trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about.

23 Behold, if a river overflow, he trembleth not: he is confident, though Jordan swell even to his mouth.

24 Shall any take him when he is on the watch, or pierce through his nose with a snare?

41. Canst thou draw out leviathan with a fish hook? or press down his tongue with a cord?

2 Canst thou put a rope of rushes into his nose? or pierce his jaw through with a spike?

3 Will he make many supplications unto thee? or will he speak soft words unto thee?

4 Will he make a covenant with thee, that thou shouldst take him for a servant for ever?

5 Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?

6 Shall the bands of fishermen make traffic of him? shall they part him among the merchants?

7 Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears?

8 Lay thine hand upon him; remember the battle, and do so no more.

9 Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?

10 None is so fierce that he dare stir him up: who then is he that can stand before me?

11 Who hath first given unto me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.

12 I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, nor his mighty strength, nor his comely proportion.

13 Who can strip off his outer garment? who shall come within his double bridle?

14 Who can open the doors of his face? round about his teeth is terror.

15 His strong scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal.

16 One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.

17 They are joined one to another; they stick together, that they cannot be sundered.

18 His noesings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.

19 Out of his mouth go burning torches, and sparks of fire leap forth.

20 Out of his nostrils a smoke goeth, as of a seething pot and burning rushes.

21 His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth forth from his mouth.
In his neck abideth strength, and terror danceth before him.

The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm upon him; they cannot be moved.

His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, firm as the nether millstone.

When he raiseth himself up, the mighty are afraid: by reason of consternation they are beside themselves.

If one lay at him with the sword, it cannot avail; nor the spear, the dart, nor the pointed shaft.

He counteth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.

The arrow cannot make him flee: slingstones are turned with him into stubble.

Clubs are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the rushing of the javelin.

His underparts are like sharp potsherds: he spreadeth as it were a threshing wain upon the mire.

He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like ointment.

He maketh a path to shine after him; one would think the deep to be hoary.

Upon earth there is not his like, that is made without fear.

He beholdeth everything that is high: he is king over all the sons of pride.

G

God's answer to Job has by some been grievously misinterpreted as a catalogue of scientific marvels beyond man's understanding, and as a revelation of scientific truth that would be discovered only in the nineteenth or twentieth century of our era. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is here speaking to Job in terms of Job's knowledge and ignorance. It is quite secondary whether modern man has or has not found the answers to God's questions. As for the foreshadowings of modern scientific knowledge, they are, at least in part, due more to "eisegesis," i.e. reading in, than to exegesis.

Today God will speak to the thinking man in terms of his knowledge and ignorance. God's creation challenges the modern biologist or atomic physicist with other questions than those Job could not answer, but the challenge is as real.

It is typical of the attitude of the Bible that God's questions virtually restrict themselves to this world, in which man was placed as God's vice-regent (Gen. 1: 28, Psa. 8: 6). God scarcely asks Job about the mysteries of the stars on their silent way, but He faces him with everyday things of this world, in which man is ever tempted to speak Himself free of his Creator.

God's questions range from the earth's mysterious uniqueness in the universe (38: 4–7) and the power that maintains the nightly star pattern, as typified in the Pleiades, Orion and the signs of the Zodiac, constant in its risings and settings (38: 31f) to
the forces that maintain animal life in all its manifestations (38: 39 - 39: 4). He is questioned as to his control of the sea, of light and darkness, of snow, hail and ice (38: 8–30). These last refer especially to those sudden and incalculable phenomena of nature which overthrow all the power and forethought of man. Though man has been set to rule the animal creation, there are those he cannot control: the wild ass (39: 5–8), the wild ox (39: 9–12)—the A.V. "unicorn" is as imaginary as the beast itself—the ostrich (39: 13–18), the hawk and the eagle (39: 26–30), or if he does control, it may be at his peril as with the horse (39: 19–25).

When Job confesses himself overwhelmed and convinced (40: 3ff), God points out the futility and negative character of his criticism of the moral rule of the world (40: 11ff), for he cannot do anything about it himself. Then God turns to the apparently irrational in His creation. This has already been indicated in passing in 38: 25ff—why should it rain, where it does no one any good? Now Job is asked to consider a couple of God's "jokes." However much our cold northern minds may resent the fact, the Bible is an oriental book and from time to time bursts out into the glorious, unrestrained hyperbole of the east. Though they may not appear so to our minds—are we perhaps the losers thereby?—behemoth (40: 15–24) is the hippopotamus and leviathan (41: 1–34) the crocodile. Quite candidly I prefer this hyperbole to the perverted ingenuity that can see a prophecy of the modern battleship in the description of leviathan.

Why did God make the hippopotamus and the crocodile? If you have never asked yourself this question, you may find a couple of hours spent in the nearest zoo a worth-while investment. Some of us have a private list to which we have added a few more names. The Wise prided themselves that they were basing their views on the fundamental rationality of God's acts. So God faces Job with a couple of His "jokes," and Job repents in dust and ashes (42: 6).