

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 controversy; 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 conviction became 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 impalement, 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 Christian 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,

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)

- ²WHO is this that darkeneth counsel
by words without knowledge?
³Gird up now thy loins like a man;
for I will demand of thee, and
declare thou unto me.
⁴Where wast thou when I laid the
foundations of the earth?
declare, if thou hast understand-
ing.
⁵Who determined the measures
thereof, if thou knowest?
or who stretched the line upon it?
⁶Whereupon were the foundations
thereof fastened?
or who laid the corner stone there-
of;
⁷when the morning stars sang to-
gether,
and all the sons of God shouted
for joy?
⁸Or *who* shut up the sea with doors,
when it brake forth,
and issued out of the womb;
⁹when I made the cloud the gar-
ment thereof,
and thick darkness a swaddling
band for it,
¹⁰and prescribed for it my boundary,
and set bars and doors,
¹¹and said, Hitherto shalt thou
come, but no further;
and here shall thy proud waves be
stayed?
¹²Hast thou commanded the morn-
ing since thy days *began*,
and caused the dayspring to know
its place;
¹³that it might take hold of the ends
of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
¹⁴It is changed as clay under the
seal;
and *all things* stand forth as a
garment:
¹⁵and from the wicked their light is
withholden,
and the high arm is broken.
¹⁶Hast thou entered into the springs
of the sea?
or hast thou walked in the recesses
of the deep?
¹⁷Have the gates of death been
revealed unto thee?
or hast thou seen the gates of the
shadow of death?
¹⁸Hast thou comprehended the
breadth of the earth?
declare, if thou knowest it all.
¹⁹Where is the way to the dwelling
of light,
and as for darkness, where is the
place thereof;
²⁰that thou shouldst take it to the
bound thereof,
and that thou shouldst discern
the paths to the house thereof?
²¹*Doubtless*, thou knowest, for thou
was then born,
and the number of thy days is
great!
²²Hast thou entered the treasuries
of the snow,
or hast thou seen the treasuries of
the hail,
²³which I have reserved against the
time of trouble,
against the day of battle and war?
²⁴Which is the way to the *place where*
the light is parted,
or the east wind scattered upon
the earth?
²⁵Who hath cleft a channel for the
waterflood,
or a way for the lightning of the
thunder;

- ²⁶to cause it to rain on a land where
no man is;
on the wilderness, wherein there is
no man;
- ²⁷to satisfy the waste and desolate
ground;
and to cause the tender grass to
spring forth?
- ²⁸Hath the rain a father?
or who hath begotten the drops of
dew?
- ²⁹Out of whose womb came the ice?
and the hoary frost of heaven,
who hath given it?
- ³⁰The waters are hidden as *with* stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.
- ³¹Canst thou bind the cluster of the
Pleiades,
or loose the bands of Orion?
- ³²Canst thou lead forth the signs of
the Zodiac in their season?
or canst thou guide the Bear with
her train?
- ³³Knowest thou the ordinances of
the heavens?
canst thou establish the dominion
thereof in the earth?
- ³⁴Canst thou lift up thy voice to the
clouds,
that abundance of waters may
cover thee?
- ³⁵Canst thou send forth lightnings,
that they may go,
and say unto thee, Here we are?
- ³⁶Who hath put wisdom in the dark
clouds?
or who hath given understanding
to the meteor?
- ³⁷Who can number the clouds by
wisdom?
or who can pour out the bottles of
heaven,
- ³⁸when the dust runneth into a mass,
and the clods cleave fast together?
- ³⁹Wilt thou hunt the prey for the
lioness?
or satisfy the appetite of the young
lions,
- ⁴⁰when they couch in their dens,
and abide in the covert to lie in
wait?
- ⁴¹Who provideth for the raven his
food,
- when his young ones cry unto God,
and wander for lack of meat?
39. Knowest thou the time when
the wild goats of the rock bring
forth?
canst thou mark when the hinds
do calve?
- ²Canst thou number the months
that they fulfil?
or knowest thou the time when
they bring forth?
- ³They bow themselves, they bring
forth their young,
they cast out their sorrows.
- ⁴Their young ones are in good lik-
ing, they grow up in the open
field;
they go forth, and return not
again.
- ⁵Who hath sent out the wild ass
free?
or who hath loosed the bands of
the wild ass?
- ⁶whose house I have made the
wilderness,
and the salt land his dwelling
place.
- ⁷He scorneth the tumult of the city,
neither heareth he the shoutings of
the driver.
- ⁸The range of the mountains is his
pasture,
and he searcheth after every green
thing.
- ⁹Will the wild-ox be content to
serve thee?
or will he abide by thy crib?
- ¹⁰Canst thou bind the wild-ox with
his band in the furrow?
or will he harrow the valleys after
thee?
- ¹¹Wilt thou trust him, because his
strength is great?
or wilt thou leave to him thy
labour?
- ¹²Wilt thou confide in him, that he
will bring home thy seed,
and gather *the corn* of thy thresh-
ingfloor?
- ¹³The wing of the ostrich rejoiceth:
are her pinions and feathers
kindly?

- ¹⁴For she leaveth her eggs on the earth,
 and warmeth them in the dust,
¹⁵and forgetteth that the foot may crush them,
 or that the wild beast may trample them.
¹⁶She dealeth hardly with her young ones,
 as if they were not hers: though her labour be in vain, *she is*
 without fear;
¹⁷because God hath deprived her of wisdom,
 neither hath he imparted to her understanding.
¹⁸What time she lifteth up herself on high,
 she scorneth the horse and his rider.
¹⁹Hast thou given the horse *his* might?
 hast thou clothed his neck with the quivering mane?
²⁰Hast thou made him to leap as a locust?
 the glory of his snorting is terrible.
²¹He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength:
 he goeth out to meet the armed men.
²²He mocketh at fear, and is not dismayed;
 neither turneth he back from the sword.
²³The quiver rattleth upon him,
 the flashing spear and the javelin.
²⁴He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage;
 neither believeth he that it is the voice of the trumpet.
²⁵As oft as the trumpet *soundeth* he saith, Aha!
 and he smelleth the battle afar off,
 the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.
²⁶Doth the hawk soar by thy wisdom,
 and stretch her wings toward the south?
²⁷Doth 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.
²⁸From thence she spieth out the prey;
 her eyes behold it afar off.
²⁹Her young ones also suck up blood:
 and where the slain are, *thereis* she.
40. Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said,
²Shall he that cavilleth contend with the Almighty?
 he that argueth with God, let him answer it.
³Then Job answered the LORD, and said,
⁴Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?
 I lay mine hand upon my mouth.
⁵Once have I spoken, and I will not answer;
 yea twice, but I will proceed no further.
⁶Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
⁷Gird up thy lions now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
⁸Wilt thou even disannul my judgement?
 wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be justified?
⁹Or hast thou an arm like God?
 and canst thou thunder with a voice like him?
¹⁰Deck thyself now with excellency and dignity;
 and array thyself with honour and majesty.
¹¹Pour forth the overflowings of thine anger:
 and look upon every one that is proud, and abase him.
¹²Look on every one that is proud,
 and bring him low;
 and tread down the wicked where they stand.
¹³Hide them in the dust together;
 bind their faces in the hidden *place*.
¹⁴Then will I also confess of thee

- that thine own right hand can save thee.
- ¹⁶Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox.
- ¹⁷Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the muscles of his belly.
- ¹⁸He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his thighs are knit together.
- ¹⁹His bones are as tubes of brass; his limbs are like bars of iron.
- ²⁰He is the chief of the ways of God: he *only* that made him can make his sword to approach *unto him*.
- ²¹Surely the mountains bring him forth food; where all the beasts of the field do play.
- ²²He lieth under the lotus trees, in the covert of the reed, and the fen.
- ²³The lotus trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about.
- ²⁴Behold, if a river overflow, he trembleth not: he is confident, though Jordan swell even to his mouth.
- ²⁵Shall 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?
- ²Canst thou put a rope of rushes into his nose? or pierce his jaw through with a spike?
- ³Will he make many supplications unto thee? or will he speak soft words unto thee?
- ⁴Will he make a covenant with thee, that thou shouldest take him for a servant for ever?
- ⁵Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?
- ⁶Shall the bands of *fishermen* make traffic of him? shall they part him among the merchants?
- ⁷Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears?
- ⁸Lay thine hand upon him; remember the battle, and do so no more.
- ⁹Behold, the hope of him is in vain: shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?
- ¹⁰None is so fierce that he dare stir him up: who then is he that can stand before me?
- ¹¹Who hath first given unto me, that I should repay him? *whatsoever* is under the whole heaven is mine.
- ¹²I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, nor his mighty strength, nor his comely proportion.
- ¹³Who can strip off his outer garment? who shall come within his double bridle?
- ¹⁴Who 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.
- ¹⁶One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.
- ¹⁷They are joined one to another; they stick together, that they cannot be sundered.
- ¹⁸His needings flash forth light, and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.
- ¹⁹Out of his mouth go burning torches, and sparks of fire leap forth.
- ²⁰Out of his nostrils a smoke goeth, as of a seething pot and *burning* rushes.
- ²¹His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth forth from his mouth.

- ²³In his neck abideth strength,
and terror danceth before him.
- ²³The flakes of his flesh are joined
together:
they are firm upon him; they cannot be moved.
- ²⁴His heart is as firm as a stone;
yea, firm as the nether millstone.
- ²⁵When he raiseth himself up, the
mighty are afraid:
by reason of consternation they
are beside themselves.
- ²⁶If one lay at him with the sword,
it cannot avail;
nor the spear, the dart, nor the
pointed shaft.
- ²⁷He counteth iron as straw,
and brass as rotten wood.
- ²⁸The arrow cannot make him
flee:
- slingstones are turned with him
into stubble.
- ²⁹Clubs are counted as stubble:
he laugheth at the rushing of the
javelin.
- ³⁰His underparts are *like* sharp
potsherds:
he spreadeth *as it were* a threshing
wain upon the mire.
- ³¹He maketh the deep to boil like a
pot:
he maketh the sea like ointment.
- ³²He maketh a path to shine after
him;
one would think the deep to be
hoary.
- ³³Upon earth there is not his like,
that is made without fear.
- ³⁴He beholdeth everything that is
high:
he is king over all the sons of pride.

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).