

*LINES OF DEFENCE OF THE BIBLICAL  
REVELATION.*

III. UNITY AGAINST PLURALITY.

*B. JOB.*

It is an acknowledged principle of criticism that texts should be regarded as sound and entire, unless there is reason for supposing them unsound and imperfect. Real difficulties may be dealt with by trenchant methods, but unless there is an obvious ulcer, the knife should not be applied. Any explanation of a book which requires no secondary hypothesis to shore it up has therefore an advantage over explanations that are based on a number of unproved assumptions. Before what are called critical methods came in vogue the unity of the book of Job was assumed, although different explanations were given of the lesson to be derived from it. The modern process of dissection has scarcely led to any greater agreement on this latter point, and has besides introduced a subjective element which renders the chance of ultimate agreement infinitesimal. For, as Homer says, "the steel possesses an attraction of its own"; if all the critics whom you respect use the knife, you will be unable to resist the temptation to use it on your own account.

As a whole the book of Job is intelligible, and, indeed, easily intelligible; as a piece of patchwork it defies explanation. Supposing that it could be shown to contradict itself seriously, we should have to show that other works on the same subject do not contradict themselves seriously before we could derive from that fact any proof of composite authorship. And the argument to be derived from inconsistency is of the least possible value where the subjects discussed are those whereon scarcely any one has a fixed opinion—indeed, if there be any truth in Kant's antinomies,

on which every man almost of necessity holds contradictory opinions.

The explanation of the book would naturally be sought in the prologue, and it is there given with the utmost precision. Does man do work in order to take wages, or does he take wages in order that he may do work? God's intention is the latter; the view of the accuser of the human race is the former. Job is to be the test case. Job is called God's servant, or rather, slave. A servant is clearly one who has to do work; whether he receives wages or not is a secondary question. In the case of a slave the master scarcely professes to give him more than will enable him to do his work; but if the performance of the work be the important matter, and the wage be defined as the amount of material comfort which will enable the worker to perform it with the greatest efficiency, the takings of the slave and of the free labourer will be identical, supposing the master in both cases to understand his interests. The prospect of wages may have been the inducement which at the commencement caused the labourer to enter the service; but if he be a true worker, it will be the prospect of doing the work which will induce him to continue in it, even though the wages be diminished, or practically cease. Love of God in any practical system has always meant anxiety to carry out God's commands, irrespective of any reward present or future; and the only way of proving whether any man really love God is to subject him to the test to which Job is subjected in the Hebrew book that bears his name, and the just man is submitted in Plato's *Republic*. If any man pass the whole of it, then Satan may be told that God has a servant upon earth; if the best man fail to pass it, then the book may be regarded as a prophecy of ONE who will pass it.

The fact that Satan appears in the prologue and is afterwards not mentioned has given rise to some very superficial

criticism. Clearly there is no difficulty about it. We are not dualists, who believe in a Power of Good and a Power of Evil. But the accusation of the human race has to be put in some one's mouth ; there can be no trial without an accuser. What accuses the human race must be the difficulties before which they recoil, just as what commends them would be the record of difficulties overcome. Now, the difficulties that are to be thrown in Job's way cannot be brought on the stage and made to speak before they exist ; that would violate all dramatic propriety. Satan, whose name is a general term for them all, speaks in their stead. But when his pleading is over, his presence is of no further use. The author does not make Satan himself produce any effect beyond the striking of Job with disease ; and this he does as God's minister. For the other misfortunes he is responsible only so far as it is at his instigation that the experiment is being tried.

We therefore dismiss at the outset all theories that make the book of Job resemble a Platonic dialogue, as exhibiting the process whereby an opinion formed itself in the mind of the author. The author *assumes* that the purpose of evil is probation. In the process whereby chaos is turned into order it has pleased God to give man a share ; as a servant he must do work. Is he to be a beginner who complains because the work set him is too hard, or an expert who grumbles if it is too easy ? Is he to be an infant who fancies that his parents wish him to work in order that he may get a prize, or a scholar who is aware that he is given prizes only because it is desirable that the best worker should possess the best tools ? Now to distinguish between different sorts of obstacles is difficult, if not impossible. For each sort science has either precaution or remedy : in the worst case alleviation. A sudden change of fortune is therefore parallel to a sudden transference from one form of service to another. *Faith* will suggest that such transfer-

ence is designed, and due to the ascertained fact that the victim of the change will discharge the second service well as he has discharged the first well. Since a cheerful demeanour under such changes will certainly be one test of a servant's competence, it will be easy to tell whether Job can stand his trial or not. If he abandons God's service, we shall know that Satan was right.

Meanwhile the author of the book is standing *his* test. He professes to take us behind the scenes, and he has to prove that he has been there himself. The account which he gives of evil is that whereon the best writers are probably agreed. His view is in accordance with experience to a nicety. That good conduct ordinarily produces prosperity follows from the working of economic and physical laws; but to say that it always produces it is to run counter to experience. That morality is suggested by the desire for physical comfort may be true; that it always needs that support is grossly untrue. Hence the writer of the book of Job proves his competence to compose a work in which men are represented as discussing the problem of evil by showing that he has himself solved it so far as its solution is practicable or desirable.

In the second place he shows himself fit to write a drama by representing men acting as they normally act. The author of a martyrology would probably have represented Job's family as employed in religious exercises; our author makes them occupy themselves as the young normally occupy themselves—in sport. Job's own time, we presently learn, is far too valuable to be passed in the same way; but while he countenances his children's gaiety, he takes pains to see that they do no harm. The point, however of verses 4-6 of the first chapter is evidently to provide a probable occasion for the misfortune which happened to Job's children, while showing that it cannot have been earned by any actual offence.

The order in which the misfortunes come is that of magnitude—loss of wealth is the lightest, loss of children next. Job's faith is equal to these two trials, and apparently his wife's faith is equal to them also. To have made Job's wife greatly inferior to Job would have been undramatic—an eccentricity only to be justified by the author's dealing with historical matter which he could not seriously alter. But in making her succumb at the third trial, while Job himself does not succumb till the fourth, the author agrees with the opinion of most ancient writers, who regard the male sex as more patient than the female. That Clytemnestra can hope for ten years that Troy will fall proves, according to Æschylus, that she has the soul of a man. Had Job's wife been produced on an actual stage, she would doubtless have been of smaller stature and physically weaker than her husband; similarly, in her power of endurance, she is made unusually strong, but not so strong as Job. Those who judge her fairly will admire her patience under loss of property and children, instead of finding fault with her for giving advice like that of the "foolish women" at the third trial.

After these three losses, what has Job left that he can lose? *His good name.* Plato and our author are agreed that if we would test the really just man, we must deprive him of this also. Other tests will scarcely be greater than those which the common soldier and sailor have to face, which the fear of losing their good name ordinarily enables them to bear cheerfully. The just man must not only bear losses and afflictions, but must be thought, while doing so, to be worse than his neighbours, and to deserve no sympathy. Here, then, we have a matter for which the dialogue is the appropriate vehicle; for reputation lives on men's mouths. The other afflictions could best be told by a narrator. The loss of Job's good name can be most powerfully portrayed if Job's traducers are themselves brought on

the stage ; and the blow will be heaviest if those traducers are men of note and honour themselves, and Job's familiar friends. It is time, then, for the narrator to withdraw, and for the *dramatis personæ* to appear.

Moreover, since a reputation is not blasted at once, the length of the dialogue will give the hearer time to mark the stages whereby confidence in Job is shaken, and his guilt supposed to be proved. If he stand this last test—if, in spite of loss of fame, he continue to speak reverently of God, then Satan will be answered ; it will be clear that Job will have recognised that reputation, like other goods, is an instrument to help certain forms of work for God, whereas for others it is not required, so that he will no more repine at the loss of it than a drummer who was made captain would repine at the loss of his drum. Whereas if in this last case he prove unfaithful, we shall know that his former conduct was not based on the right principle, but rather on instinct or habit ; and if the best man in the world be so insufficiently armed, what must be the case with the others ?

The persons who are first introduced are representatives of the best wisdom and morality of the time. The LXX. translator, who makes them princes, though his intention is to give what is sometimes called a social lift to the characters, does not seriously violate the author's intention. They are learned, one of them professes himself a prophet, and they are all observers of the order of nature ; only, like the vast majority of mankind, they have no moral courage. They have a certain theory of the ways of God, viz., that moral conduct is a coin wherewith prosperity is purchased from God. Prosperity is the end, and virtue the means ; and God must of course be just in His dealings. Whereas then the right and scientific method is at all times to start from facts and only arrive at principles from them, with the probability that the principles will have to be corrected or modified by fresh experience, Job's friends are unable to

see more than a part of experience. From the fact that Job and his children were certainly innocent, they dare not reconsider their principle; the only course before them is to deny the evidence of their senses and do an injustice, in the idea that God will be pleased thereby. Any one who has ever had to argue with persons who have a strong interest in believing something, can prophesy that the argument will not advance, because the opponent will throw up everything rather than acknowledge that his principle is wrong. And, in Job's case, Job is not more enlightened about principles than his friends; he is personally conscious of his innocence, but is so immeshed in the false principle that it is clear he would have judged as they judged. So far, then, as the three friends argue, the parties become more and more embittered, and the belief in Job's guilt, which was at first faintly whispered, becomes, by the third round, a matter of conviction. But where people meet facts with theories there is no chance of their arriving at the truth, for that can only be got at through the facts.

The question whether Job's friends represent different theories has sometimes been discussed; it is clear that if they did so, such a subject would never have given rise to discussion. Reputation is a thing that requires a number of votes. One man is not sufficient to stand for public opinion; hence the more nearly the friends agree in their notions, the more dramatically will they stand for the world in general. If Job could have got one of the three to see his side of the question, his reputation would not have appeared hopelessly lost; since by defending himself he makes each one of them think worse of him than the last, the reader feels that Job's good name is gone with his other possessions.

By the fact that the third speaker is silent at the third round, the failure of the friends in their capacity of consolers

is indicated; and, in the monologue, Job tells the hearer more calmly than he could do in the dialogue some of his convictions. We learn that he has a very good opinion of himself; he goes through the whole list of offences and is certain of his complete innocence. He tells the hearer how keenly he misses the place of honour and the approval of the crowd, and pities the world for the loss of such a man as himself. He forgets himself in chapter xxvii. sufficiently to deliver a discourse which would have been suitable in the mouth of one of the friends.

The last speaker introduced is quite a different person from the sheikhs. He is young, verbose, and conceited; but, like the young, he has a certain amount of candour and readiness to acknowledge facts which is wanting in his seniors. The difficulty of his language is so great that we cannot as yet interpret him with certainty. What is certain is, that he finds fault with Job, not for imaginary offences, but for actual blasphemy committed since the change in his fortunes, and that he contributes in chapter xxxiii. some very new ideas to the discussion.

Lastly, God Himself is introduced speaking. This is contrary to experience, for the speakers have several times distinctly asserted that it is impossible to arraign the Deity before a human tribunal. The voice of God is doubtless the light thrown on the matter by physical science. That reveals an amount of wisdom and power which makes it absurd for any human being to doubt God's justice; for only he who comprehends the whole plan has a right to criticise any part of it. But it by no means gives the solution of Job's difficulty directly. He only learns that what happens to him must have its place in the gigantic plan. What its place is he does not yet know. The doctrine that the hardest problem is set to the aptest scholar must be discovered by man's own wit; Job, though the most devout of mankind, has no notion of it.



Hence it would seem that there need be little about the *main thought* of Job that is unintelligible. It is a drama in so far as it exhibits men acting as they normally act. If it were the custom for men to draw correct inferences from phenomena, and to abandon their prejudices so soon as they find them inconsistent with experience, then Job's friends would be violating dramatic probability in doing the reverse of this. It is clear that they have the materials for the study of the problem. Why do they come to console him at the start? Certainly not because of the wealth that he has lost nor the power which he is no longer able to exercise, but because of his virtue. That then being in their eyes as well as in Job's the important matter, how could externals stand in any causal connection with virtue, so that absence of fortune could imply absence of virtue? Hence the real relation of virtue to prosperity forms a profitable subject of discussion, but no one thinks of discussing it. That God is just is a self-evident proposition, which Job thinks fit to deny; the friends all assert it loudly; but it does not occur to them to try and define justice. Job himself can only think of what it *denotes*, not of its actual significance. And since the methods of moral science do not differ from those of physical science, but the latter is more easily started, nature recommends men to acquire their method over the former. And indeed it is historically true that the physical philosophy of the Ionians preceded the moral philosophy of Socrates and Plato.

The tame ending to the story is what we should have expected from the experiment having failed. The friends are compelled to atone for having accused the innocent, in the idea that such advocacy was pleasing to the Divine Being; Job has also to make atonement for having meddled with things that are too high for him. The chance that he had was to be God's *argument* against the Accuser of the human race; what he chooses is to be a worthy pater-

familias and a man of wealth and station. The human race has therefore to wait a series of centuries ere ONE arise who shall beat down Satan under His feet. Had Job known that the worth of the human race was being tested by his conduct, probably he would have stood the fourth trial as he stood the first three. But nature does not tell us when we are being tested; and what we are to learn from Job's failure at the fourth trial is that his passing successfully through the earlier trials was in part accidental. Had his conduct been based on the right principle, he would have found the fourth trial no harder than the former three.

But while the general plan and purpose of the book and also its place in the Divine revelation are clear, it must be confessed that in numerous cases whole verses are unintelligible, sometimes indeed owing to our ignorance of the meaning of particular words, but more often in spite of our acquaintance with the signification of all the words employed. Occasionally this difficulty can be dealt with on the supposition that the text is corrupt; but in most cases the amount of correction required in order to produce a satisfactory sense is too great for critical probability. Hence we have to look about for a more likely solution of the problem, and there is one suggested by the local colouring of the book.

The scene is laid in Arabia. The home of Job may be identified with Al-'Iss, of which the valuable geography of Hamdani gives a description. It is, he says, the name of the country between Wadi Al-Kura and Al-Hijr.<sup>1</sup> The name figures several times on Mr. Doughty's excellent map. Job's home in Hamdani's time gave its name to a particular kind of dates; <sup>2</sup> and since we learn that from Al-Hijr to Tayma, the home of Eliphaz, was three days' journey, the length of time spent on the road by Eliphaz can be calcu-

<sup>1</sup> Hamdani, ed. Müller, p. 131, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

lated. Both Hamdani and the author of the *Geographical Lexicon* mention Al-'Iss as being in the neighbourhood of *mines*—a fact which we might have suspected from chapter xxviii. If the name of Nejd include Al-'Iss (as, from Hamdani, seems to be the case), then it is observable that Job in xxix. 1-4 speaks of the sunny days of his life as his *autumn*; for an Arabic meteorologer<sup>1</sup> observes that in Nejd it does not rain in the autumn, whereas in other regions of Arabia rain falls at that season of the year.

The life of the inhabitants of these wadis is known to us from the brilliant descriptions of W. G. Palgrave and others. The people are at times in danger of losing everything through the torrents which pour down the mid hollow in the rainy season, when the houses that are built too low down are ruined.<sup>2</sup> Of the torrents which ravaged Mecca a chronicle was at one time kept.<sup>3</sup> On one occasion the stone called "Abraham's Station" was swept away. Such events are deeply impressed on the minds of the speakers in Job. "A pouring river was their foundation" (xxii. 16); "Why do you not ask the travellers, and make sure of their landmarks? how the wicked is reserved for the day of trouble, the day when the torrents rush down" (xxi. 30).<sup>4</sup> The landmarks of which the speaker is thinking are probably the erections put up in the Dahna by philanthropic travellers to guide their successors.<sup>5</sup>

A remarkable piece of description is contained in vi. 15-20. We are told there that the caravans of Tayma and Saba had often to return owing to the failure of the torrents on which they had counted for replenishing their waterskins. "My brethren," says Job, "have betrayed me like a torrent" (we seem to hear the play on the Arabic words for "pool" and "treachery")<sup>6</sup>—like a channel wherein

<sup>1</sup> *Lisan al-arab*, x. 410.

<sup>2</sup> Palgrave, *Travels*, i. 342.

<sup>3</sup> Azraki, p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. xxii. 11, xxvii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Palgrave, *Travels*, ii. 131.

<sup>6</sup> Letters of Abu 'l-'Ala, p. 5, 11.

torrents pass, such as are turbid with ice, and whereon the snow is conspicuous. At what time they are——, they disappear; when it is hot, they vanish from their bed. Their courses become tortuous; they ‘mount into the desert’ (here again we recognise an Arabic phrase,<sup>1</sup> of which the use in this context is perhaps wanting in felicity) and are lost. The caravans of Tayma were on the look-out, the companies of Saba hoped for them; they are ashamed because they——(have sunk into the ground?); they come up to them and are disappointed.” Compare with this what Palgrave tells us repeatedly. “The pools and torrents which form during the winter on the plateaus or furrow the valleys are soon reabsorbed in the marly or sandy soil.”<sup>2</sup> “Rain fell abundantly and sent torrents down the dry watercourses of the valley, changing its large hollows into temporary tanks. None of the streams, however, showed any disposition to reach the sea, nor indeed could they, for this part of Nejd is entirely hemmed in to the east by the Towaik range.”<sup>3</sup> “None of these winter torrents finds its way unbroken to the sea: some are at once reabsorbed, while a few, so the natives of the country told me, make their way right through Toweik to the Nefud on the west, or to the Dahna on the east and south, and *are there speedily lost in the deep sands*, where a Rhine or a Euphrates could hardly avoid a similar fate.”<sup>4</sup>

Since the Arabic language would seem to have been spoken in Arabia from time immemorial, we should expect the speakers to have Arabic names; and we are not disappointed. *Zofar* is felicitously identified by Al-Baghawi<sup>5</sup> with the name *Zāfir*, “conqueror,” which is probably still in use. An Ibn Zafir figures in the list of Arabic authors;<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Farazdak, first poem, line 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Travels*, ii. 176.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 115.      <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 339.

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on the Koran*, p. 593.

<sup>6</sup> *Matali' al-budūr* (Cairo, 1299, A.H.), i. 123.

but the form Muzaffar is more common. *Elifaz* means "my God has won"—in the arrow game, the classical sport of the pre-Mohammedan Arabs. Winning in that game is typical of the grandest form of success; Paradise itself is spoken of as the *grand prix*, or *gros lot*. *Bildad* cannot be separated from Baldud, "the name of a place near Medinah."<sup>1</sup> Both apparently belong to a dialect in which an M at the beginning of a word turns into B, and they mean respectively "the stubborn antagonist,"<sup>2</sup> and "the place of the stubborn encounter." The name Job or *Iyyob* is easily identified with the Arabic *hayub*, "reverent" or "reverend"; the authorities are doubtful which the word means. A tradition "faith is *hayub*" may mean either that the faithful fear God and avoid transgression, or that they are objects of reverence.<sup>3</sup> The description of Job as fearing God and keeping clear of evil favours the former explanation; whereas Job's description of his life in chapter xxix. might favour the latter. Among Job's daughters, one, Jemimah, has an Arabic name (*yumaimatu*, "little dove," diminutive of *yamamatu*, the name of a lady who played an important part in the legends of the Arabs); while the names of the others might be translations. The last proper name, Elihu, might be either Arabic or Hebrew.

Possibly the most characteristically Arabic notion in the work is the author's idea of a book as a slab of stone. In the well-known verses in the nineteenth chapter, "Would that my words were written, would that they were engraved in a book, with a style of iron and lead (?), dug in the rock for ever," it would seem clear that the book whereof he is thinking is a page of stone. This takes us into Arabia. The Arabic word<sup>4</sup> whence the Hebrew for "book" is derived means properly "a stone," and the verb

<sup>1</sup> Yakut, *Geographical Dictionary*, s.v.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Zamakhshari's *Mufassal*, § 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Nihayah* of Ibn Al-Athir.

<sup>4</sup> *Zubr*.

taken from it means "to stone." An early poet compares the effect of rain on the sand to the process whereby the composition is committed to the stones.<sup>1</sup> In xxxi. 6 Job says that if he could get hold of the affidavit of his opponent ("the book written by mine adversary"), he would carry it on his shoulder! This would seem to imply that it would be a heavy weight, not a light slip of parchment or papyrus. The phrase that follows, "I should bind it on me as a crown," refers to a practice sometimes mentioned by ancient writers of carrying objects of special value on the head.<sup>2</sup> The weight in Job's opinion would be no obstacle in the way of his flaunting an accusation of which he could answer every word. The stone slab of Arabia therefore corresponds to the Assyrian clay tablet, or the scroll of the Canaanites. From a "stone slab," which is the meaning the word still has in Job, *sefer* came to mean "writing" generally, and afterwards "book" in the familiar sense.

The references to "sealing" are not inconsistent with the theory of stone books. Sealing is done with clay (xxxviii. 14) according to the Arab practice. The verb "to seal" is used with the sense of obstructing (xxxvii. 7). The clay employed for this purpose was a sort of mortar, which permeated interstices like light (xxxviii. 14). The process of instruction is pictured as boring a hole in the ear, and *sealing* it, *i.e.* filling it up, with knowledge (xxxiii. 16). When the sealing clay dries, it becomes abnormally hard (xli. 8).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lebid, *Muallakah*, at the beginning.

<sup>2</sup> Cobet, *Novæ Lectiones*, p. 394.

<sup>3</sup> The word in xxiv. 16 seems to mean "destined," and is from a different root.