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

THE BOOK OF JOB :

WITH REFERENCE TO CHAP. XIX. 23-27.¹

LET me explain what is meant by the above title, and what is attempted in the following pages.

It is not anything so unlimited as a paper on the Book of Job in general, neither is it anything so limited as simply an exegesis of the passage referred to by itself. It may rather be said to be the former restricted by having the latter as its aim. All who have studied this passage and the conflicting opinions of its interpreters must have felt how closely one's interpretation of it is bound up with, and influenced by, one's idea of the Book of Job as a whole.

It is in view of this fact that I have sought to bring together some of the leading ideas running through the book, and to show their connection with this special passage, so as to see how it fits in, and how it stands related to the general plan in which it is embodied. Thus one may not unreasonably hope to get important help to the understanding of what, exactly, it is intended to mean.

The passage belongs to that part of the book which contains the Controversy between Job and his Friends; and it is in this connection that it must first be regarded.

Rightly to understand and appreciate this controversy we must think ourselves back through the centuries that have intervened between Job's day and ours, and place ourselves, as far as possible, in the position in which he stood. For we must remember that, while the problem of this "most splendid creation of the Hebrew poetry" is a problem of world-wide and world-lasting interest, yet the

¹ I am authorized to say, that this paper has the approval and general concurrence of Professor A. B. Davidson.—Ed. *Expositor*.

discussion of it in this particular book is, necessarily, a discussion from the standpoint of the age which gave it birth, and that that is a standpoint considerably different from ours. In the Book of Job we see a drama based upon certain current beliefs of the age, and a splendid struggle to make these beliefs consist with the facts of life; and, when this is seen to be vain, a still more splendid struggle to get free from these beliefs, in the freedom not of scepticism but of higher truth. Obviously, then, it is of importance for an intelligent study of the book that we should set out with a clear perception of those general principles of belief on which it is founded.

I think the enumeration of three such beliefs will suffice to put us in a position in which we may intelligently follow the discussion between Job and his Friends, and understand the significance and value of the passage specially before us.

There was, first, the belief that God is the great cause at work everywhere; that everything must be traced to Him; that all the phenomena of the world, all the events of life, are but a manifestation of Him. In the words of Professor Davidson, "The philosophy of the wise did not go beyond the origin of sin, or referred it to the freedom of man; but, sin existing, and God being in immediate personal contact with the world, every event was a direct expression of His moral will and energy." This was the first position in the minds of the men of Job's day. To them prosperity and adversity came, not through what we might vaguely call the force of circumstances, but from the hand of God. The afflicted were afflicted of God: it was His hand that lay heavy upon them.

Next, there was the belief that God is just, and that His dealings with men are the outcome of His justice. One phase of this belief, as then held, was that suffering is sent by God because of sin; that it is the direct consequence

of sin and is proportional to it, so that special suffering must be accounted for by special sinfulness.

In the Book of Job this is the centre of the position occupied by the Friends. This belief they have lived in all their days. It has descended to them from the generations of their fathers, and the proverbs in which it is embodied have become part of themselves. And it has a stronger hold upon them than is got merely from the imprimatur of past ages. It is, so far, confirmed by their own conscience; they feel that there is a real and close connection between sin and suffering. This conviction is part of their nature as men, and is and has been part of human nature in all ages. We see it in our own feeling that, however easily, in the light of the truths revealed by Jesus Christ, we may accept the sufferings of good men in this life, yet it would be impossible so to accept them if we knew that they would not at some future time cease and give place to happiness. All this follows from the belief in a just God;—and, of course, it followed in the case of Job as well as his Friends. He too had the same belief; for therein lies the point of the whole book. It is the fact that the Friends are only driving home to him a dogma whose force he feels but too well in his own soul that gives the sting to what they say. Otherwise their speeches would affect him little. He might be grieved at their unsympathetic tone, and vexed that they were led to form a false opinion of his character from his sufferings. But what is that compared with the thought that their dogma not only leads them to this position, but has truth in it, and that, after all, his trials come from God and tell of His anger? It is the strength to overcome this very conviction that gives interest to the story. If Job could have flung the doctrine of the Friends aside as a mere superstition of bygone ages, then it would have lost its power to harass him. But he could not. In his own soul he felt something that responded to it; and this re-

sponse within himself, weightier far than any dogma or opinion of the multitude, pointed to something stronger than mere superstition in it.

There is, then, the conviction, common to Job, his Friends, and us, that God is just, and that, because God is just, the sufferings of the righteous—if the righteous have sufferings at all—must at some time cease and give place to happiness in the manifestation of His favour.

But, third, there is the further position with which it is beyond reasonable doubt that Job and his Friends set out, that the feelings of God towards a man must be made manifest during this life, so that ere death the favour of God must shine out over the righteous man, however tossed about by the waves of misfortune he may have been for a time. To them the state of existence beyond the grave brought no thought of retribution, as a state in which to the righteous the calamities of a life-time would seem as nothing in the everlasting favour of God, while the short-lived pleasures and seeming good fortune of the wicked would be swallowed up in the misery of an existence apart from Him whose lovingkindness is better than life.

These three positions,—(1) That adversity and prosperity, as all things else, come from God; (2) That God is just, and, as just, sends prosperity to the righteous and adversity to the wicked; and, (3) That His relations to men come out in this present life;—these positions, applied to the particular case of Job, are the basis of the controversy between him and his friends.

The problem is, either, how to make these fundamental positions consist rationally with the facts of the case,—the undoubted fact of Job's calamities, and the seeming fact of his uprightness; or, to decide which of the positions can be abandoned or modified so as to arrive at something like a satisfactory explanation of the facts.

It is evident at a glance that the former of the alter-

natives is hopeless; to hold all the positions, the dogmas and the facts together, is impossible. Some one must be given up; and the question for each of the parties engaged is which he will abandon or modify.

The Friends choose the course which, at first sight at least, presents least difficulty. They question the fact of Job's integrity. Their position is, broadly, that Job's sufferings have been inflicted because of sinfulness. In this way they find what is *to them* a sufficient explanation so far as this particular case is concerned; and no other explanation do they offer. In the skilful hands of the author of the Book of Job, indeed, their position is presented in not unvarying form, and is supported by very much that, however false or irrelevant when applied to the case of Job, is, in itself, beautiful and noble and true; but still throughout it remains essentially the same.

I have already said that, to begin with, Job held the same creed as his Friends; one can scarcely doubt that, had he been in their position, their arguments would have been his. But it is just from the fact that he is not in their position that the discussion arises. To them the idea of hypocrisy on his part presents at least no impossibility, and thus offers a conceivable, and a more or less satisfactory, explanation. But it is not so with him. Conscious he may be of his sinfulness as a fallen man; but no less conscious is he of his innocence of any special sinfulness that may account for his unparalleled sufferings. For him to accept the solution of his Friends is a pure impossibility. His uprightness is as much beyond doubt as his misfortune. Yet the combination of these two is utterly inconsistent with the holding of the three primary positions of his creed. Some one must give way. A new element has been forced into his beliefs; a new factor has come into his life; and, to make room for it, the old fabric must be made to yield on one side or other. And the spectacle presented to us

in the speeches of Job is that of this afflicted saint wandering backwards and forwards between the different sides of his creed, frantically at first, more calmly afterwards, in a desperate struggle to expand it in some direction; at one time dashing himself, madly and fruitlessly, against a position which is immutably firm; at another showing, by splendid effort and far-seeing faith, that some other position, formerly deemed impregnable, might be made to yield, if only he knew how.

I have said that there is forced upon Job the conviction that, to make room for the new fact of his calamity, some one of his old beliefs must give way. But the choice which he has is small. Part of the old creed is, to him, as firm and unyielding as the new element itself. It cannot give way; and the only alternative left him is, either, to despair altogether of finding a solution; to give up hope of making things fit into each other,—at least to give up the attempt to make them fit in so; or, to abandon one or other of these two positions: (1) That God is just; and (2) That His relations to a man—relations of favour or the opposite—must inevitably appear in this present life.

Happily it was no easier for Job than it is for us to give way to despair till every means of escape has been tried. With wonderful skill and power is depicted the majestic struggling to regain a sure footing on some firmer foundation than the old one that has been so rudely shaken.

Job has, first of all, recourse to what is perhaps the most natural, and seemingly the simplest, plan to one who, in the first shock of overwhelming misfortune, loses for the time being all self-control. He questions—he denies—the justice of God. With something of the recklessness of despair he accuses God of merciless injustice.

“It is all one; therefore I say,
He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked.

If the scourge slay suddenly,
He will mock at the trial of the innocent.
The earth is given into the hand of the wicked." (x. 22-24, R.V.)

As for Job himself, his former prosperity was but a cruel blind; it is scarcely too much to characterize it from his language as a horrible—nay, almost fiendish—plot to make his succeeding calamities all the more terrible. This was the very purpose for which God had made him. All his life long God had been dogging his steps, eagerly watching for sin that He might overwhelm him with punishment, even when He seemed to be favouring him most of all. "Thou hast granted me life and favour," he exclaims: "and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. Yet these things Thou didst hide in Thine heart: I know that this is with Thee" (x. 12, 13). And then he sinks down in hopeless despair, and wishes he had never been born; wishes he were in the grave, which, although it be "a land of darkness and the shadow of death," yet promises relief in that state where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest";—ay, where God would cease from troubling, and where, at any rate, he would be no worse off than the wicked.

But, although such reasoning (if reasoning it can be called) and such language may serve to give relief to his feelings while in the first frenzy of despair, they cannot afford any permanent comfort. Belief in the justice of God is too deeply rooted in Job's heart to be torn up even by his present calamities; and, although for a time his eye may be bewildered so that the old belief seems to him to totter, still that can be only for a time. His other and better nature must assert itself when, after the first frenzy, his perturbed heart begins to grow a little calmer, and to look the problem more clearly in the face. No: he can not rest in a denial of God's justice; that is not, after all, a satisfactory explanation.

But more and more strongly is the conviction forced upon Job that, if God be just—as just He must be—He cannot be the God of the old theology,—the God, that is, who is supposed to mete out to men in this life according to their deserts, and whose relations to men cease with this life. In the light of his own sufferings and the sufferings of others such a God cannot but stand convicted of injustice. And so he begins gradually to drift away from the old conceptions; he feels that, in view of the facts of life, the conception of God which they imply is really that of an unjust and capricious tyrant. But he also feels that if that is the God whom they present it is not the God of the universe—the old God of his former happy life—the God. He must be just; and to Him, almost as if He were quite a different God from the God who has his life in hand now, he passionately appeals.

But still, even although he can retain his faith in a God who must be just, the difficulty remains; in fact the stronger his faith in the Divine justice the greater must be his perplexity as he considers the Divine dealings. It is bad enough that in his present misfortunes he can see nothing that does not tell him of God's displeasure. But that is only a small part of his trial. Besides the actual present suffering—that is, the actual present manifestation of God's displeasure—there is the conviction that it is never to be removed. For, properly to understand his problem, we must bear in mind that Job has no hope of restoration to health; that, all through, he regards himself as struck down by a disease which is incurable and can end only with death. When with this we combine the belief with which he starts, that this life ends all, at least in so far as God's relations to men are concerned, we have the factors which gave to his agonizings the almost superhuman energy of despair.

Had Job been able to cherish a hope of restoration to

health and prosperity in this life, he might have reasoned thus: "My present sufferings are indeed inexplicable. But God is just, and He must have a reason for them. There is, doubtless, some end worthy of Himself which He means to accomplish by them, and when that end has been attained then He will remove the suffering, and show Himself once more a gracious and loving God." But by the fact of his hopelessness of restoration here, such reasoning and such a solution of his problem are made impossible; and he feels bitterly how inexplicable it is. The fact of God's use of suffering for some gracious and God-worthy purpose is, in a sense, rational enough, and can easily be accepted; but not if the trial is to have no end: not if the faith which has successfully endured it is at no time to be acknowledged by God and made glad with new tokens of His favour. As a means, Job, or any one else, might accept it; not as an end.

Thus, then, by the conviction that he cannot recover from his illness, Job is shut out from the possibility of having recourse to any such explanation as that just indicated. But what can he do? If he cannot make room for the new element by altering his views as to the justice of God, or by falling back upon some possible, though unknown, explanation of his sufferings in reference to some gracious end which God contemplates in them, he must look in some other direction for a means of expanding his creed. And now there seems but one other way left. The only belief which remains untried is, that God's relations to men must appear in this life. Can this be modified? Can his beliefs expand in this direction so as to leave room for the element of his suffering? It seems all too daring. Such a thing has scarce been thought of? Has not Sheol been in all ages but the dull shadowy life, or rather existence, where all are alike, in which God is not, and when all opportunity of being acknowledged by Him is

irrevocably gone? And yet the possibility is forced upon him. He sees it, but recoils from it as a baseless illusion—as, in fact, an impossibility. But it cannot be lightly thrown aside, for it is the only way left in which there seems the least chance of a solution of the difficulties which are pressing upon him. He tries to quiet the flutter which the very thought has raised in his heart by giving expression to his old belief:—

“Man dieth, and wasteth away :

Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?”

* * * * *

“Man lieth down and riseth not :

Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake,

Nor be roused out of their sleep.” (xiv. 10, 12, R.V.)

But it is in vain that he asks, “If a man die, shall he live again?” The old words have lost their certainty. He begins to feel that he may live again if God is just. The idea becomes stronger and stronger, coming back to him more vividly after each repulse; till, at last, seeing how completely every other way of escape is shut up, he feels that it *must* be so, and bursts out into a confession of faith in God that pierces beyond the grave:—

“I know that my redeemer liveth,

And that he shall stand up at the last upon the earth :

And after my skin hath been thus destroyed,

Yet from [without] my flesh shall I see God :

Whom I shall see for myself,

And mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

My reins are consumed within me [with longing].”

(xix. 25-27, R.V.)

The belief that such is the meaning of these words,—the belief, that is, that they point to a time after death, to a state of existence beyond the grave which is infinitely more than men had been accustomed to suppose,—a state involving the idea of retribution, when the seeming wrongs

of this life will all be righted, and the righteous will be recognised as such by God, however much He may have seemed to try or to ignore them here;—this belief is not much affected by the fact which is urged in opposition, that Job's subsequent speeches show little sign of any such faith as we have attributed to him. That the gleam of faith is only for a moment does not prove that it has not been at all. When we think of the circumstances in which Job was placed, not only does it not seem strange that he should not have remained at the height to which he had risen, but we feel that it would have been strange if he had. The idea was new, and there was nothing to support it but the cogency of such facts as those whose power he was now experiencing, and which had, in truth, almost forced him to this position. It was contrary to the belief of God's people in all ages; and it is little wonder that, although forced to it for a moment, he should again turn from it as a means of escape only too good to be true, and should anew try to make some other of his old beliefs give way. Those who cannot believe in any such idea as that of the fitfulness of faith,—to whom faith is always on an ascending, or, at any rate, never on a descending, plane, must know either more of it, or less of it, than most men; and the author of the Book of Job, in allowing his hero to rise for a moment above the mists and shadows and clouds into the clear sunlight, *and to fall again*, only shows his knowledge of human nature.

It may serve, so far, to elucidate and simplify the subsequent and more detailed treatment of this passage if we glance, to begin with, at the immediate connection in which it occurs.

In the opening verses of the chapter (which, as a whole, consists of his answer to the speech of Bildad in chap. xviii.) Job expresses his unfeigned disgust at the heartless and insulting language of his friends:—

“How long will ye vex my soul,
 And break me in pieces with words?
 These ten times have ye reproached me.”

Then, as if to show how useless all their talking has been, and how little effect all their arguments to prove that God is dealing justly with him have had, he defiantly hurls at them a point-blank denial of the Divine justice :—

“If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me,
 And plead against me my reproach :
 Know now that God hath subverted me in my cause,
 And hath compassed me with His net.”

Then he gives a mournful narration of the effects of this unjust treatment by God, and turns for pity from the God who is thus wronging him to those who are still so far his friends as to stand by him when others have fled. “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends ; for the hand of God hath touched me.” But, although he is thus forced by the anguish of his soul to give way so far as to appeal to them thus, he has long since learned by experience, and likely now once more reads the lesson in their faces, that no help is to be looked for there. His protestations of innocence have but served to estrange them still more ; and so he turns wearily from them. It may be that he recalls Bildad’s declaration (xviii. 17, 20), that the remembrance of the wicked perisheth from the land, that he hath no name, neither offspring nor descendant ; and as he thinks of his relation to those who are yet to come, and of the fact that posterity has yet to judge his case, he directs his appeal to future ages. There is a gleam of hope in his breast as he cries :—

“Oh that my words were now written !
 Oh that they were inscribed in a book !
 That with an iron pen and lead
 They were graven in the rock for ever !”

Feeling that he is doomed to die, and knowing that he will not himself be present to proclaim his innocence to those who shall come after, he expresses a wish that his words should be recorded in a book; then, remembering the perishable nature of any such testimony, he, as it were, corrects himself, and wishes them to be cut deep into a rock, the letters to be filled in with lead.

For our present purpose it is unnecessary to defend the interpretation of *millay* ("my words") assumed above, as referring to Job's protestations of innocence, and not, as some have thought, to the declaration which immediately follows.

The manner in which the thought of the Divine justice, with what it implies, suddenly breaks in, as reflected in the abrupt—and on some interpretations unaccountable—*vav* ("but") with which verse 25 opens, and the whole train of thought which seems to be naturally suggested by the passage may best be shown by paraphrasing it thus:—"I must soon die, and shall not myself be able to proclaim my innocence to posterity. Therefore I would that my declaration should be handed down in writing—yea, in the writing of the rocks.—*But*—no: why should I worry myself about that? I will rest myself in the justice of God. He knows my innocence; and, although I die, He lives, and lives as my Redeemer. Yes, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall yet vindicate me."

Thus, naturally and with striking antithetic force, does Job pass from the (implied) thought of his own death to that of the life—or, rather, the undyingness—of the God whom he claims as his Redeemer,—his *Goel*.

The context and the general sense of the passage in which it occurs will, as a rule, sufficiently indicate whether the term *Goel* is best translated, in accordance with its original signification, as "redeemer," or, as in accordance with the secondary signification to which it easily passed,

“blood-avenger,” or in its still further, though closely allied, signification of “near-kinsman.” In the present instance the most natural translation seems to be “Redeemer,” in the general sense of one who frees another from calamity. It is by no means impossible that it may be intended to include the further idea of “blood-avenger”; and some probability is given to this view by such a passage as chap. xvi. 18, where Job cries, “O earth, cover not thou my blood.” Indeed, the whole of that passage (xvi. 18–21) is of much interest and not a little importance as throwing light upon the words used here. It runs thus:—

“O earth, cover not thou my blood,
 And let my cry have no resting place.
 Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
 And He that voucheth for me is on high.
 My friends scorn me:
 But mine eye poureth out tears unto God;
 That He would maintain the right of a man with God,
 And of a son of man with his neighbour!”

In it we see Job at one of the periods when the fluctuations of his mind have brought round to him the thought of the justice of God, so that it seems for the moment to be the thing he is most sure of. He feels that God cannot, as a just God, refuse to listen to the cry of his blood; that He cannot refuse to acknowledge his innocence; yea, that even now, although He may seem to be displeased with him, yet, if he could only pierce through those clouds of earth, he would see that very God who seems to be angry with him proclaiming his innocence in heaven. And, in the strength of this faith, he appeals from God as he and others see Him in his sufferings to God as he knows He is, the Witness of his innocence.

And now again (xix. 25) he recurs to the same idea, as if his thoughts had completed another revolution and brought him back to the old point; and once more the justice of

God is to him the fact which is beyond doubt. And so again in the strength of this faith, stronger even than before, and keener and more piercing in its glance, he cries: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall yet see God, even though I should die before I see Him."

The following verse (26) contains the crux of the passage. It is in connection with it that controversy has been waged most keenly, and that the different modes of interpretation of this and kindred passages in the Book of Job may be most conveniently brought together and considered.

Interpreters may be divided into two great classes, according as they interpret the passage as referring to this present life or to a life beyond the grave. These two main classes are subdivided according to the interpretation put upon *mibb'sari*, which may legitimately be translated "from my flesh" in the sense of "out from,"—"looking out of,"—which, of course, is exactly equivalent to "in my flesh"; or, "from my flesh" in the sense of "away from" or "without." Adopting these principles of division we get the following classes of interpreters:—

A. Those who take the passage as referring to the present life; subdivided into—

(a) Those who translate *mibb'sari* "in my flesh."

(b) " " " " "without my flesh."

B. Those who take the passage as referring to a future life; also subdivided into—

(a') Those who translate *mibb'sari* "in my flesh."

(b') " " " " "without my flesh."

I shall look at these interpretations in detail and try to select that one which has most probability in its favour.

First, then, of those who refer it to this life, there are some who take *mibb'sari* to mean "in my flesh." Unfortunately we have not yet reached the acme of simplicity, as there is a possibility of a further distinction being made here; and, as a matter of course, that possibility has been

made an actuality. There are those, then, who interpret the passage as meaning that, although Job's skin should have been destroyed by disease, he will yet be restored to health, and out of new flesh and a sound body will see God; and there are others who, while referring it to the present life, regard it as meaning that, although Job's skin should be destroyed, yet his faith in the justice of God is so strong that he feels sure that he will yet see God, even though he should be a mere mass of flesh. I shall meanwhile leave the former of these views, and shall at this stage give what notice it merits to the latter of the two, and to the view (b) of those who make the passage mean that, although his disease should have reduced him to a skeleton, yet, even though it should be without flesh, he will yet see God.

The discussion of these interpretations need not detain us long. One question is sufficient to show the untenableness of either. What does Job mean by "*seeing God*"? The natural interpretation of this phrase, in its connection, implies that now he cannot see God. Formerly, in his prosperity, the candle of the Lord shined upon him; but now He is hid from him by his trials. These very trials speak to him of the withdrawal of God's favour; and what he now means by saying that he knows he will yet "see God" is that God will yet acknowledge him as innocent, and that, as the indispensable condition of that acknowledgment, he will yet see a return of God's favour. Now would this be possible in a condition in which he was either a skeleton or a mere mass of flesh? Such a condition would in itself speak to him of the absence of that very favour for which he longed and in which alone he could "see God."

Passing from these interpretations we have now to consider that of those who make the sentence refer to Job's expectation that God will yet appear as his *Goel*, and will acknowledge his innocence by restoring him to health and prosperity, so that he will yet see the tokens of God's

favour in a body restored to soundness. In reply to this it is almost enough to point out that such an interpretation is contrary to the whole spirit of the book,—at least to the whole spirit of Job's speeches. Again and again he has, implicitly and explicitly, stated that he has no hope of recovery. His friends have held out such a prospect to him, but he has flung it aside as mere mockery. As for him, his breath is corrupt, his days are extinct, and the grave is waiting for him. Such is his own conviction (xvii. 1, 2). His days are past, his purposes cut off (xvii. 11). The point of a large part of the book is just this, that he feels that he is struck down with an incurable disease, and that so, although innocent, he will die unacknowledged by God. It may be that this very thought is meant to be included in the use here of the term "*Goel*"—the avenger of blood—just as Job has already cried to the earth not to cover his blood, but to let it cry out for avenging. And the whole tone of his subsequent speeches is similar, and shows no hope.

The argument against this from the actual restoration of Job, as recorded at the close of the book, has absolutely no weight. It belongs to the author, and not to Job. It might perhaps also be asked with some force, why Job should have shown anxiety regarding the verdict of posterity, if he knew that, in what must needs be a comparatively short time, he would be restored, and so acknowledged by God before heaven and earth?

It has also been attempted to support this rendering, or, at least, to remove one of the difficulties which stand in its way, by making *nıqqphu* to be, in form, a Chaldaism for *nıqqphuth*, and translating it "a surrounding" or "covering" ("my skin, this covering"). Such a necessity does not add to the probability of the rendering.

Others, however, (*a*), of those who translate *mıbb'sari* "out of"—in the sense of "*in*—my flesh," acknowledge

the force of the arguments in proof of Job's utter hopelessness in so far as restoration to health is concerned, and make *basar* here refer to his resurrection body.

If the former interpretation was alien to the spirit of the book, this one is as surely alien, not only to the spirit of the book, but to the whole spirit of the time to which the book belongs. It is practically certain that such an idea as that of a resurrection was unknown to the mind of Job. It was only by a momentary gleam of faith, such as we have here, that he could grasp the idea of any possible recognition by God in a life beyond the grave at all; and that, in such circumstances, he should express a conviction that he would then be clothed upon with a new body would surely be strikingly unnatural. Besides, even if such an hypothesis had any degree of probability, is it likely that Job would have spoken of this new body simply as *b'sari*—"my flesh"?

There remains the last class of interpreters (*b'*), those who, regarding the passage as referring to another life, translate *mibb'sari* "without my flesh. The arguments in favour of this rendering are various; the statement of them, unfortunately, involves more or less of going back upon what has already been said.—In the first place, this interpretation is perfectly tenable grammatically. Simply as an interpretation of the passage taken by itself, apart altogether from the question as to whether it is tenable on other and wider grounds, it is at least as little open to objection as any of the other renderings. But on these more general grounds its superiority to the alternatives already discussed is, I think, apparent. If we regard it, to begin with, in reference to its immediate surroundings, we find that it accords well with them, so that by means of it, as has been seen, an easy and natural translation and interpretation can be given to the passage as a whole.

But the question of interpretation is, in a sense, still more

closely connected with the relation which the passage bears to the book as a whole, regarded as the product of a bygone age; and on this side also this last rendering has a manifest advantage over the others. This point has already been dwelt upon at considerable length, and I can refer to it here only at the risk of repetition.

As I have already tried to show, the conviction to which, on this theory, Job is represented as giving expression, is just such as we might suppose would be forced upon him by the facts of the case. At those periods when he felt for the moment the certainty of the justice of God along with the certainty that his days were numbered and that he would die by his disease, the only conceivable solution left was that there should be the possibility of something more after death than men had been wont to believe. And this view is supported by the fact that this is not the only occasion on which we see such a gleam of faith. In chap. xiv. (verses 13-15), we find this same thought of a possible future life in God's favour, flash before the mind of Job,—not, indeed, as a well-defined or firmly grasped belief,—not, indeed, we may say, as a belief at all, but as a longing, a “craving of the heart” only too good to be believed, but which, if he could believe it, would give him strength and patience to wait “all the days of his warfare.”

Again in chap. xvi. (vers. 18-21), we find the idea recurring a second time, when Job, thinking of his approaching death, thinks also of his blood as calling to God for avenging, and of God as listening to it and witnessing to his innocence. But still it is little more than an idea, a thought, an imagination, suggested by the circumstances of his trial and quickly pushed aside again. And now (xix. 25-27) for a moment Job's faith in God shines out, brighter than before. The thought of a future life and a future recognition by God is presented, no longer as a mere imaginary supposition which, if it were real, would give strength

and peace; nor merely as a possible solution of the riddle of Job's life, and of life in general; but as a certainty, founded on and standing with the certainty of the Divine justice. It is clouded over again; but only naturally. The very greatness of the hope is, if we may so say, its weakness; for it is so great that Job cannot live up to it, but reaches it only at moments when his fitful faith lifts him higher than usual. True, also, it is widely different in the solution which it suggests from the epilogue, which, with a certain (but only a certain) amount of truth, is so often pointed to as solving the problem of the suffering of the righteous in quite another way. But, as already stated, the fact of this variance is really no argument against our interpretation. If only we remember what the plan of the book as a whole is, we shall at once see that it was absolutely necessary that any solution reached—struggled to—by Job should be different from that given by the author. For, at the very outset, the author shows us in his hand a key to the problem, which not only is not in the possession of Job, but is beyond his reach. In the prologue he takes us, for the moment, behind the scenes, and tells us, in so many words, that Job's trials were sent to prove his faith,—to prove that his uprightness was not mere selfishness. But Job does not know this; else his suffering would not have been to him the problem that it was, and so would not have fulfilled its purpose. His calamity comes upon him just as it would upon one on whom it has been inflicted as a punishment for sin. It speaks to him, not of any goodness on God's part as seeking to strengthen and stablish his faith, or as honouring, by using, him in the conflict with evil; but simply of the withdrawal of God's favour for some reason utterly beyond his comprehension, or, as seems to him, from mere caprice. This is the very trial which his faith has to overcome; and, although he is at times almost overwhelmed, yet he never altogether loses his faith in God.

He may sometimes use language which is unwarranted and sinful as questioning the justice of God in thus dealing with him ; but under it all we see his earnest longing to get access to God's presence, assured that He is just in spite of all appearances. Nay, the undercurrent of faith in the justice of God is so strong that it raises him to paradoxical heights, so that we hear him appealing from God to God. And here is just another of the heights to which the struggling of his faith carries him. Although he feels sure that his disease carries death with it, yet he knows as surely that God is just, and that as just, He must acknowledge him as innocent some time, even although such a conclusion should force him to the unheard-of conviction that He will reveal Himself to him in a life beyond the grave. The plan of the book demands that thus Job should be left to struggle for himself towards a solution of his problem, quite apart from any offered by the book as a whole,—that is, by the author ; and that, after such a splendid exhibition of faith, Job should be restored to prosperity is, *in the light of the book as a whole, though not necessarily in the light of Job's speeches*, not only not unnatural, but eminently natural.

There is not then, so far as I can see, any reason for refusing to accept an interpretation of this passage which regards it as referring to a future life. It has already been pointed out that to read a still further meaning into the words, so as to include the idea of a resurrection, by interpreting *mibb'sari* as "in my resurrection—body," is unwarranted.

But we must beware of erring on the other side. Whilst *mibb'sari* almost certainly means "without my flesh" in the sense of "when I am dead," it is by no means necessary to regard it as meant to describe Job's actual condition *after death*, as if it implied that the state in which he would be then would be a bodiless or purely spiritual one. That

question, we may feel pretty sure, was not before his mind at all; and to interpret the passage in such a way as to make Job express an opinion regarding it is to take his words out of the sphere to which alone they refer and interpret them as true of another and totally different sphere. This distinction is well expressed by Professor Davidson, thus:—
“The words do not express *in* what condition precisely but *after* what events Job shall see God.”

“*I shall see God.*” This is the central thought of the passage, around which the others cluster as accessories; it is the essential element of Job’s hope. Other things may be indefinite—the how, the when, the where; but about the fact itself, the seeing of God, there is no indefiniteness and no uncertainty. Resting on the Divine justice, it must come true whatever happen. If, as now seems to be certain, it cannot be before Job’s death, well, then, it must be after; but be it must. What is implied in this seeing of God has already been explained. Generally, it may be considered simply as the re-enjoyment of God’s favour, at present lost; more specially, it is that regarded, perhaps not so much in itself, as in the witness which it will bear to Job’s innocence and uprightness. With desire or longing for this his “reins pine away within him.” So vivid is his realization of this vision of God as once more reconciled to him, and so intense is his longing for it, that at the thought he faints with very desire.

In all that I have yet said I have regarded this passage as one of those in which we see the religious feelings of godly men, pressed by the facts of life, rebelling against, and, by a splendid effort, rising above the then common belief regarding the future life. We might say that it marks one of those crises at which we see religion awaking to the realization of what itself implies, as that which brings men into relation to *the living God*. Then religion had to struggle to such a belief in its own strength; now it has but

to lay hold of Him who is the resurrection and the life, and who, by the revelation of fact and teaching, has brought life and immortality to light.

But, while this doctrine of the future life is what is most prominent and most directly taught in this passage, we cannot but see that it has also an important bearing on the doctrine of the present life. In fact, its teaching regarding the future is based upon the supposition that God's relations to man during his earthly life need not necessarily be such as men had formerly supposed. It was just because Job had the conviction driven in upon him with resistless force that, contrary to his former belief, God does not always manifest His true relations to men in this life, that he was forced to find a place for this manifestation in a life to come.

In the early part of this paper I tried to make clear the place which this important passage holds in relation to the controversy between Job and his Friends. It may give greater value—it will, at any rate, give greater completeness—to my survey if, in a few closing sentences, I point out its place in relation to the Book of Job as a whole, and to the problem of that book. This I shall do by summing up what I believe to be the actual contribution to that problem—the problem of the sufferings of the righteous,—which we have in this sublime “master-piece of Semitic genius.”

In the Book of Job there are discernible, I think, three distinct lines of advance on the old idea of suffering as retribution in time,—on the old theory of temporal rewards and punishments,—the theory that in this life prosperity and adversity are awarded by God according to merit, and are to be regarded as expressing His feelings of favour or the opposite.

(1) There is the distinction, hinted at by Eliphaz, and more clearly expressed and emphasized in the speeches of

Elihu,¹ between disciplinary chastisement and judicial retribution. Now this is an actual contribution to the philosophy of suffering, although it was not the solution in the case of Job. It still, indeed, leaves a link of connection between sin and suffering in the individual, and so is not the highest stage attained in the book; but, as an advance upon the former theory, and as bearing upon the actual problems of life which surround us, it is by no means to be despised.

(2) There is the contribution—the splendid contribution—of Job himself, in the thought expressed in this and other passages, that beyond death there may be life fuller and truer than had been dreamt of,—a life in which man's Godward relations will be intensified, and not attenuated or even cut off. This may not exactly be of the nature of a solution of the problem of suffering; but its bearing upon it is obvious. The sufferings of the righteous made Job feel that "if man be mortal, no true idea of the Divine righteousness is possible," and drove him to the conviction that there must be an after-life;² a conviction which, if not itself a solution of the problem, at least serves the important purpose of removing a difficulty which, unremoved, would make any solution impossible.

(3) There is the contribution of the author himself, given chiefly in the prologue. If the contribution of Job does not, this one certainly does go straight to the heart of the problem. It removes the idea of necessary connection, not indeed between sin and suffering altogether, but between sin *in the sufferer* and suffering. The individual is regarded not so much in relation to himself merely as in relation to the whole of which he is a part. One aspect of this is put

¹ It does not fall within the scope of this paper to discuss the question of the genuineness of these speeches.

² It will, of course, be understood that, in this and similar passages, "life" is used to express something more, something richer, than mere *existence*. Future existence was not denied.

strikingly by Professor Delitzsch thus: "Job's affliction, expressed in New Testament language, falls under the point of view of the cross (*σταυρός*), which has its ground not so much in the sinfulness of the sufferer, as in the share which is assigned to him in the conflict of good with evil that exists in the world."

W. B. HUTTON.
