Maclaren on Job

SERMONS ON JOB

Alexander Maclaren

Job 1:21 Sorrow that Worships

‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’— JOB 1:21

This book of Job wrestles with the problem of the meaning of the mystery of sorrow. Whether history or a parable, its worth is the same, as tortured hearts have felt for countless centuries, and will feel to the end. Perhaps no picture that was ever painted is grander and more touching than that of the man of Uz, in the antique wealth and happiness of his brighter days, rich, joyful, with his children round him, living in men’s honour, and walking upright before God. Then come the dramatic completeness and suddenness of his great trials. One day strips him of all, and stripped of all he rises to a loftier dignity, for there is a majesty as well as an isolation in his sorrow.

How many spirits tossed by afflictions have found peace in these words! How many quivering lips have tried to utter their grave, calm accents! To how many of us are they hallowed by memories of times when they stood between us and despair!
They seem to me to say everything that can be said about our trials and losses, to set forth the whole truth of the facts, and to present the whole series of feelings with which good men may and should be exercised.

I. The vindication of sorrow.

He ‘rent his clothes’—the signs and tokens of inward desolation and loss.

It is worth our while to stay for one moment with the thought that we are meant to feel grief. God sends sorrows in order that they may pain. Sorrow has its manifold uses in our lives and on our hearts. It is natural. That is enough. God set the fountain of tears in our souls. We are bidden not to ‘despise the chastening of the Lord.’ It is they who are ‘exercised’ thereby to whom the chastisement is blessed.

It is sanctioned by Christ. He wept. He bade the women of Jerusalem weep for themselves and for their children.

Religion does not destroy the natural emotions—sorrow as little as any other. It guides, controls, curbs, comforts, and brings blessings out of it. So do not aim at an impossible stoicism, but permit nature to have its way, and look at the picture of this manly sorrow of Job’s—calm, silent, unless when stung by the undeserved reproaches of these three ‘orthodox liars for God,’ and going to God and worshipping.

II. The recognition of loss and sorrow as the law of life.

‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb.’

We need not dwell on the figure ‘mother,’ suggesting the grave as the kindly mother’s bosom that gathers us all in, and the thought that perhaps gleams forth that death, too, is a kind of birth.

But the truth picturesquely set forth is just the old and simple one—that all possessions are transient.

The naked self gets clothed and lapped round with possessions, but they are all outside of it, apart from its individuality. It has been without them. It will be without them. Death at the end will rob us of them all.

The inevitable law of loss is fixed and certain. We are losing something every moment—not only possessions, but all our dearest ties are knit but for a time, and sure to be snapped. They go, and then after a while we go.

The independence of each soul of all its possessions and relations is as certain as the loss of them. They may go and we are made naked, but still we exist all the same. We have to learn the hard lesson which sounds so unfeeling, that we can live on in spite of all losses. Nothing, no one, is necessary to us.

All this is very cold and miserable; it is the standing point of law and necessity. An atheist could say it. It is the beginning of the Christian contemplation of life, but only the beginning.

III. The recognition of God in the law.

‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.’ That is a step far beyond the former. To bring in the thought of the Lord makes a world of difference.

The tendency is to look only at the second cause. In Job’s case there were two classes of agencies, men, Chaldeans and Sabeans, and natural causes, fire and wind, but he did not stop with these.

The grand corrective of that tendency lies in the full theistic idea, that God is the sole cause of all. The immanence of Deity in all things and events is our refuge from the soul-crushing tyranny of the reign of law.

That devout recognition of God in law is eminently to be made in regard to death, as Job does in the text: ‘The number of his months is with Thee.’ Death is not any more nor any less under His control than all other human incidents are. It has no special sanctity, nor abnormally close connection with His will, but it no more is exempt from such connection than all the other events of life. The connection is real. He opens the gate of the grave and no man shuts. He shuts, and no man opens.

Job did not forget the Lord’s gifts even while he was writhing under the stroke of His withdrawings. Alas! that it should so often need sorrow to bear into our hearts that we owe all to Him, but even then, if not before, it is well to remember how much good we have received of the Lord, and the remembrance should not be ‘a sorrow’s crown of sorrow,’ but a thankful one.

IV. The thankful resignation to God’s loving administration of the law.

The preceding words might be said with mere submission to an irresistible power, but this last sentence climbs to the highest of the true Christian idea. It recognises in loss and sorrow a reason for praise.

Why?

Because we may be sure that all loss is for our good.

Because we may be sure that all loss is from a loving God. In loss of dear ones, our gain is in drawing nearer to God, in being taught more to long for heaven. In our relation to them, a loftier love, a hallowing of all the past. Their gain is in their entrance to heaven, and all the glory that they have reached.

This blessing of God for loss is not inconsistent with sorrow, but anticipates the future when we shall know all and bless Him for all.

Job 5:17-27 The Peaceable Fruits of Sorrows Rightly Borne

> **‘Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: 18. For He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. 19. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. 20. In famine He shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. 21. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. 22. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. 23. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. 24. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. 25. Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. 26. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. 27. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.’— JOB v. 17-27 .**

The close of the Book of Job shows that his friends’ speeches were defective, and in part erroneous. They all proceeded on the assumption that suffering was the fruit of sin—a principle which, though true in general, is not to be unconditionally applied to specific cases. They all forgot that good men might be exposed to it, not as punishment, nor even as correction, but as trial, to ‘know what was in their hearts.’

Eliphaz is the best of the three friends, and his speeches embody much permanent truth, and rise, as in this passage, to a high level of literary and artistic beauty. There are few lovelier passages in Scripture than this glowing description of the prosperity of the man who accepts God’s chastisements; and, on the whole, the picture is true. But the underlying belief in the uniform coincidence of inward goodness and outward good needs to be modified by the deeper teaching of the New Testament before it can be regarded as covering all the facts of life.

Eliphaz is gathering up, in our passage, the threads of his speech. He bases upon all that he has been saying the exhortation to Job to be thankful for his sorrows. With a grand paradox, he declares the man who is afflicted to be happy. And therein he strikes an eternally true note. It is good to be made to drink a cup of sorrow. Flesh calls pain evil, but spirit knows it to be good. The list of our blessings is not only written in bright inks, but many are inscribed in black. And the reason why the sad heart should be a happy

heart is because, as Eliphaz believed, sadness is God's fatherly correction, intended to better the subject of it. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' says the Epistle to the Hebrews, in full accord with Eliphaz.

But his well-meant and true words flew wide of their mark, for two reasons. They were chillingly didactic, and it is vinegar upon nitre to stand over an agonised soul and preach platitudes in an unsympathetic voice. And they assumed unusual sin in Job as the explanation of his unparalleled pains, while the prologue tells us that his sufferings were not fruits of his sin, but trials of his righteousness. He was horrified at Job's words, which seemed to him full of rebellion and irreverence; and he made no allowance for the wild cries of an agonised heart when he solemnly warned the sufferer against 'despising' God's chastening. A more sympathetic ear would have detected the accent of faith in the groans.

The collocation, in verse 18 , of making sore and binding up, does not merely express sequence, but also purpose. The wounding is in order to healing. The wounds are merciful surgery; and their intention is health, like the cuts that lay open an ulcer, or the scratches for vaccination. The view of suffering in these two verses is not complete, but it goes far toward completeness in tracing it to God, in asserting its disciplinary intention, in pointing to the divine healing which is meant to follow, and in exhorting to submission. We may recall the beautiful expansion of that exhortation in Hebrews, where 'faint not' is added to 'despise not,' so including the two opposite and yet closely connected forms of misuse of sorrow, according as we stiffen our wills against it, and try to make light of it, or yield so utterly to it as to collapse. Either extreme equally misses the corrective purpose of the grief.

On this general statement follows a charming picture of the blessedness which attends the man who has taken his chastisement rightly. After the thunderstorm come sunshine and blue, and the song of birds. But, lovely as it is, and capable of application in many points to the life of every man who trustfully yields to God's will, it must not be taken as a literally and absolutely true statement of God's dealings with His children. If so regarded, it would hopelessly be shattered against facts; for the world is full of instances of saintly men and women who have not experienced in their outward lives such sunny calm and prosperity stretching to old age as are here promised. Eliphaz is not meant to be the interpreter of the mysteries of Providence, and his solution is decisively rejected at the close. But still there is much in this picture which finds fulfilment in all devout lives in a higher sense than his intended meaning.

The first point is that the devout soul is exempt from calamities which assail those around it. These are such as are ordinarily in Scripture recognised as God's judgments upon a people. Famine and war devastate, but the devout soul abides in peace, and is satisfied. Now it is not true that faith and submission make a wall round a man, so that he escapes from such calamities. In the supernatural system of the Old Testament such exemptions were more usual than with us, though this very Book of Job and many a psalm show that devout hearts had even then to wrestle with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the indiscriminate fall of widespread calamities on the good and bad.

But in its deepest sense (which, however, is not Eliphaz's sense) the faithful man is saved from the evils which he, in common with his faithless neighbour, experiences. Two men are smitten down by the same disease, or lie dying on a battlefield, shattered by the same shell, and the one receives the fulfilment of the promise, 'there shall no evil touch thee,' and the other does not. For the evil in the evil is all sucked out of it, and the poison is wiped off the arrow which strikes him who is united to God by faith and submission. Two women are grinding at the same millstone, and the same blow kills them both; but the one is delivered, and the other is not. They who pass through an evil, and are not drawn away from God by it, but brought nearer to Him, are hid from its power. To die may be our deliverance from death.

Eliphaz's promises rise still higher in verses 22 and 23 , in which is set forth a truth that in its deepest meaning is of universal application. The wild beasts of the earth and the stones of the field will be in league with the man who submits to God's will. Of course the beasts come into view as destructive, and the stones as injuring the fertility of the fields. There is, probably, allusion to the story of Paradise and the Fall. Man's relation to nature was disturbed by sin; it will be rectified by his return to God. Such a doctrine of the effects of sin in perverting man's relation to creatures runs all through Scripture, and is not to be put aside as mere symbolism.

But the large truth underlying the words here is that, if we are servants of God, we are masters of everything. 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' All things serve the soul that serves God; as, on the other hand, all are against him that does not, and 'the stars in their courses fight against' those who fight against Him. All things are ours, if we are Christ' s. The many mediaeval legends of saints attended by animals, from St. Jerome and his lion downwards to St. Francis preaching to the birds, echo the thoughts here. A gentle, pure soul, living in amity with dumb creatures, has wonderful power to attract them. They who are at peace with God can scarcely be at war with any of God's creatures. Gentleness is stronger than iron bands. 'Cords of love' draw most surely.

Peace and prosperity in home and possessions are the next blessings promised (ver. 24). 'Thou shalt visit [look over] thy household, and shalt miss nothing.' No cattle have strayed or been devoured by evil beasts, or stolen, as all Job's had been. Alas! Eliphaz knew nothing about commercial crises, and the great system of credit by which one scoundrel's fall may bring down

hundreds of good men and patient widows, who look over their possessions and find nothing but worthless shares. Yet even for those who find all at once that the herd is cut off from the stall, their tabernacle may still be in peace, and though the fold be empty they may miss nothing, if in the empty place they find God. That is what Christians may make out of the words; but it is not what was originally meant by them.

In like manner the next blessing, that of a numerous posterity, does not depend on moral or religious condition, as Eliphaz would make out, and in modern days is not always regarded as a blessing. But note the singular heartlessness betrayed in telling Job, all whose flocks and herds had been carried off, and his children laid dead in their festival chamber, that abundant possessions and offspring were the token of God's favour. The speaker seems serenely unconscious that he was saying anything that could drive a knife into the tortured man. He is so carried along on the waves of his own eloquence, and so absorbed in stringing together the elements of an artistic whole, that he forgets the very sorrows which he came to comfort. There are not a few pious exhorters of bleeding hearts who are chargeable with the same sin. The only hand that will bind up without hurting is a hand that is sympathetic to the finger-tips. No eloquence or poetic beauty or presentation of undeniable truths will do as substitutes for that.

The last blessing promised is that which the Old Testament places so high in the list of good things—long life. The lovely metaphor in which that promise is couched has become familiar to us all. The ripe corn gathered into a sheaf at harvest-time suggests festival rather than sadness. It speaks of growth accomplished, of fruit matured, of the ministries of sun and rain received and used, and of a joyful gathering into the great storehouse. There is no reference in the speech to the uses of the sheaf after it is harvested, but we can scarcely avoid following its history a little farther than the 'grave' which to Eliphaz seems the garner. Are all these matured powers to have no field for action? Were all these miracles of vegetation set in motion only in order to grow a crop which should be reaped, and there an end? What is to be done with the precious fruit which has taken so long time and so much cultivation to grow? Surely it is not the intention of the Lord of the harvest to let it rot when it has been gathered. Surely we are grown here and ripened and carried hence for something.

But that is not in our passage. This, however, may be drawn from it—that maturity does not depend on length of days; and, however Eliphaz meant to promise long life, the reality is that the devout soul may reckon on complete life, whether it be long or short. God will not call His children home till their schooling is done; and, however green and young the corn may seem to our eyes, He knows which heads in the great harvest-field are ready for removal, and gathers only these. The child whose little coffin may be carried under a boy's arm may be ripe for harvesting. Not length of days, but likeness to God, makes maturity; and if we die according to the will of God, it cannot but be that we shall come to our grave in a full age, whatever be the number of years carved on our tombstones.

The speech ends with a somewhat self-complacent exhortation to the poor, tortured man: 'We have searched it, so it is.' We wise men pledge our wisdom and our reputation that this is true. Great is authority. An ounce of sympathy would have done more to commend the doctrine than a ton of dogmatic self-confidence. 'Hear it, and know thou it for thyself.' Take it into thy mind. Take it into thy mind and heart, and take it for thy good. It was a frosty ending, exasperating in its air of patronage, of superior wisdom, and in its lack of any note of feeling. So, of course, it set Job's impatience alight, and his next speech is more desperate than his former. When will well-meaning comforters learn not to rub salt into wounds while they seem to be dressing them?

Job 8:14 Two Kinds of Hope

'Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web.'— JOB 8:14 .

'And hope maketh not ashamed.'— ROMANS 5:5

These two texts take opposite sides. Bildad was not the wisest of Job's friends, and he gives utterance to solemn commonplaces with partial truth in them. In the rough it is true that the hope of the ungodly perishes, and the limits of the truth are concealed by the splendour of the imagery and the perfection of artistic form in which the well-worn platitude is draped. The spider's web stretched glittering in the dewy morning on the plants, shaking its threaded tears in the wind, the flag in the dry bed of a nullah withering while yet green, the wall on which leaning a man will fall, are vivid illustrations of hopes that collapse and fail. But my other text has to do with hopes that do not fail. Paul thinks that he knows of hope that maketh not ashamed, that is, which never disappoints. Bildad was right if he was thinking, as he was, of hopes fixed on earth; the Apostle was right, for he was thinking of hopes set on God. It is a commonplace that 'hope springs immortal in the human breast'; it is equally a commonplace that hopes are disappointed. What is the conclusion from these two universal experiences? Is it the cynical one that it is all illusion, or is it that somewhere there must be an object on which hope may twine its tendrils without fear? God has given the faculty, and we may be sure that it is not given to be for ever balked. We must hope. Our hope may be our worst enemy; it may and should be our purest joy.

Let us then simply consider these two sorts of hope, the earthly and the heavenly, in their working in the three great realms of life, death, and eternity.

I. In life.

The faculty is inseparable from man's consciousness of immortality and of an indefinitely expansible nature which ever makes him discontented with the present. It has great purposes to perform in strengthening him for work, in helping him over sorrows, in making him buoyant and elastic, in painting for him the walls of the dungeon, and hiding for him the weight of the fetters.

But for what did he receive this great gift? Mainly that he might pass beyond the temporal and hold converse with the skies. Its true sphere is the unseen future which is at God's right hand.

We may run a series of antitheses, e.g. —

Earthly hope is so uncertain that its larger part is often fear.

Heavenly hope is fixed and sure. It is as certain as history.

Earthly hope realised is always less blessed than we expected. How universal the experience that there is little to choose between a gratified and a frustrated hope! The wonders inside the caravan are never so wonderful as the canvas pictures outside.

Heavenly hopes ever surpass the most rapturous anticipation. 'The half hath not been told.'

Earthly hopes are necessarily short-winged. They are settled one way or another, and sink hull down below our horizon.

Heavenly hope sets its object far off, and because a lifetime only attains it in part, it blesses a lifetime and outlasts it.

II. Hope in death.

That last hour ends for us all alike our earthly joys and relations. The slow years slip away, and each bears with it hopes that have been outlived, whether fulfilled or disappointed. One by one the lights that we kindle in our hall flicker out, and death quenches the last of them. But there is one light that burns on clear through the article of death, like the lamp in the magician's tomb. 'The righteous hath hope in his death.' We can each settle for ourselves whether we shall carry that radiant angel with her white wings into the great darkness, or shall sadly part with her before we part with life. To the earthly soul that last earthly hour is a black wall beyond which it cannot look. To the God-trusting soul the darkness is peopled with bright-faced hopes.

III. Hope in eternity.

It is not for our tongues to speak of what must, in the natural working out of consequences, be the ultimate condition of a soul which has not set its hopes on the God who alone is the right Object of the blessed but yet awful capacity of hoping, when all the fleeting objects which it sought as solace and mask of its own true poverty are clean gone from its grasp. Dante's tremendous words are more than enough to move wholesome horror in any thinking soul: 'Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here.' They are said to be unfeeling, grim, and mediaeval, incredible in this enlightened age; but is there any way out of them, if we take into account what our nature is moulded to need and cling to, and what 'godless' men have done with it?

But let us turn to the brighter of these texts. 'Hope maketh not ashamed.' There will be an internal increase of blessedness, power, purity in that future, a fuller possession of God, a reaching out after completer likeness to Him. So if we can think of days in that calm state where time will be no more, 'to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant,' and the angel Hope, who kept us company through all the weary marches of earth, will attend on us still, only having laid aside the uncertainty that sometime veiled her smiles, but retaining all the buoyant eagerness for the ever unfolding wonders which gave us courage and cheer in the days of our flesh.

Job 14:14 Job's Question; Jesus' Answer

> **'If a man die, shall he live again?'— JOB 14:14**
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> **'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'— JOHN 11:25, 26 .**

Job's question waited long for an answer. Weary centuries rolled away; but at last the doubting, almost despairing, cry put into the mouth of the man of sorrows of the Old Testament is answered by the Man of Sorrows of the New. The answer in words is this second text which may almost be supposed to allude to the ancient question. The answer, in fact, is the resurrection of Christ. Apart from this answer there is none.

So we may take these two texts to help us to grasp more clearly and feel more profoundly what the world owes to that great fact which we are naturally led to think of to-day.

I. The ancient and ever returning question.

The Book of Job is probably a late part of the Old Testament. It deals with problems which indicate some advance in religious thought. Solemn and magnificent, and for the most part sad; it is like a Titan struggling with large problems, and seldom attaining to positive conclusions in which the heart or the head can rest in peace. Here all Job's mind is clouded with a doubt. He has just given utterance to an intense longing for a life beyond the grave. His abode in Sheol is thought of as in some sense a breach in the continuity of his consciousness, but even that would be tolerable, if only he could be sure that, after many days, God would remember him. Then that longing gives way before the torturing question of the text, which dashes aside the tremulous hope with its insistent interrogation. It is not denial, but it is a doubt which palsies hope. But though he has no certainty, he cannot part with the possibility, and so goes on to imagine how blessed it would be if his longing were fulfilled. He thinks that such a renewed life would be like the 'release' of a sentry who had long stood on guard; he thinks of it as his swift, joyous 'answer' to God's summons, which would draw him out from the sad crowd of pale shadows and bring him back to warmth and reality. His hope takes a more daring flight still, and he thinks of God as yearning for His creature, as His creature yearns for Him, and having 'a desire to the work of His hands,' as if His heaven would be incomplete without His servant. But the rapture and the vision pass, and the rest of the chapter is all clouded over, and the devout hope loses its light. Once again it gathers brightness in the twenty-first chapter, where the possibility flashes out starlike, that 'after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God.'

These fluctuations of hope and doubt reveal to us the attitude of devout souls in Israel at a late era of the national life. And if they show us their high-water mark, we need not suppose that similar souls outside the Old Testament circle had solid certainty where these had but a variable hope. We know how large a development the doctrine of a future life had in Assyria and in Egypt, and I suppose we are entitled to say that men have always had the idea of a future. They have always had the thought, sometimes as a fear, sometimes as a hope, but never as a certainty. It has lacked not only certainty but distinctness. It has lacked solidity also, the power to hold its own and sustain itself against the weighty pressure of intrusive things seen and temporal.

But we need not go to the ends of the earth or to past generations for examples of a doubting, superficial hold of the truth that man lives through death and after it. We have only to look around us, and, alas! we have only to look within us. This age is asking the question again, and answering it in many tones, sometimes of indifferent disregard, sometimes flaunting a stark negative without reasoned foundation, sometimes with affirmatives with as little reason as these negatives. The modern world is caught in the rush and whirl of life, has its own sorrows to front, its own battles to fight, and large sections of it have never come as near an answer to Job's question as Job did.

II. Christ's all-sufficing answer.

He gave it there, by the grave of Lazarus, to that weeping sister, but He spoke these great words of calm assurance to all the world. One cannot but note the difference between His attitude in the presence of the great Mystery and that of all other teachers. How calmly, certainly, and confidently He speaks!

Mark that Jesus, even at that hour of agony, turns Martha's thoughts to Himself. What He is is the all-important thing for her to know. If she understands Him, life and death will have no insoluble problems nor any hopelessness for her. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' She had risen in her grief to a lofty height in believing that 'even now'—at this moment when help is vain and hope is dead—'whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee,' but Jesus offers to her a loftier conception of Him when He lays a sovereign hand on resurrection and life, and discloses that both inhere in Him, and from Him flow to all who shall possess them. He claims to have in Himself the fountain of life, in all possible senses of the word, as well as in the special sense relevant at that sad hour. Further, He tells Martha that by faith in Him any and all may possess that life. And then He majestically goes on to declare that the life which He gives is immune from, and untouched by, death. The believer shall live though he dies, the living believer shall never die. It is clear that, in these two great statements, to die is used in two different meanings, referring in the former case to the physical fact, and in the latter carrying a heavier weight of significance, namely the pregnant sense which it usually has in this Gospel, of separation from God and consequently from the true life of the soul. Physical death is not the termination of human life. The grim fact touches only the surface life, and has nothing to do with the essential, personal being. He that believes on Jesus, and he only, truly lives, and his union with Jesus secures his possession of that eternal life, which victoriously persists through the apparent, superficial change which men call death. Nothing dies but the death which surrounds the faithful soul. For it to die is to live more fully, more triumphantly, more blessedly. So though the act of physical death remains, its whole character is changed. Hence the New Testament euphemisms for death are much more than euphemisms. Men christen it by names which drape its ugliness, because they fear it so much, but Faith can play with Leviathan, because it fears it not at all. Hence such names as 'sleep,' 'exodus,' are tokens of the victory won for all believers by Jesus. He will show Martha the hope for all His followers which begins to dawn even in the calling of her brother back from the grip of death. And He shows us the great truth that His being the 'Life' necessarily involved His being also the 'Resurrection,' for His life-communicating work could not be accomplished till His all-quickening vitality had flowed over into, and flooded with its own conquering tides, not only the spirit which believes but its humble companion, the soul, and its yet humbler, the body. A bodily life is essential to perfect manhood, and Jesus will not stay His hand till

every believer is full-summed in all his powers, and is perfect in body, soul, and spirit, after the image of Him who redeemed Him.

III. The pledge for the truth of the answer.

The words of Jesus are only words. These precious words, spoken to that one weeping sister in a little Jewish village, and which have brought hope to millions ever since, are as baseless as all the other dreams and longings of the heart, unless Jesus confirms them by fact. If He did not rise from the dead, they are but another of the noble, exalted, but futile delusions of which the world has many others. If Christ be not risen, His words of consolation are swelling words of emptiness; His whole claims are ended, and the age-old question which Job asked is unanswered still, and will always remain unanswered. If Christ be not risen, the hopeless colloquy between Jehovah and the prophet sums up all that can be said of the future life: 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest!'

But Christ's resurrection is a fact which, taken in connection with His words while on earth, endorses these and establishes His claims to be the Declarer of the name of God, the Saviour of the world. It gives us demonstration of the continuity of life through and after death. Taken along with His ascension, which is but, so to speak, the prolongation of the point into a line, it declares that a glorified body and an abode in a heavenly home are waiting for all who by faith become here partakers in Jesus and are quickened by sharing in His life.

So in despite of sense and doubt and fear, notwithstanding teachers who, like the supercilious philosophers on Mars Hill, mock when they hear of a resurrection from the dead, we should rejoice in the great light which has shined into the region of the shadow of death, we should clasp His divine and most faithful answer to that old, despairing question, as the anchor of our souls, and lift up our hearts in thanksgiving in the triumphant challenge, 'O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?'

Job 22:21 Knowledge and Peace

'Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.'— JOB 23:21

In the sense in which the speaker meant them, these words are not true. They mean little more than 'It pays to be religious.' What kind of notion of acquaintance with God Eliphaz may have had, one scarcely knows, but at any rate, the whole meaning of the text on his lips is poor and selfish.

The peace promised is evidently only outward tranquillity and freedom from trouble, and the good that is to come to Job is plainly mere worldly prosperity. This strain of thought is expressed even more clearly in that extraordinary bit of bathos, which with solemn irony the great dramatist who wrote this book makes this Eliphaz utter immediately after the text, 'The Almighty shall be thy defence and—thou shalt have plenty of silver!' It has not been left for commercial Englishmen to recommend religion on the ground that it produces successful merchants and makes the best of both worlds.

These friends of Job's all err in believing that suffering is always and only the measure of sin, and that you can tell a man's great guilt by observing his great sorrows. And so they have two main subjects on which they preach at their poor friend, pouring vitriol into his wounds: first, how wicked he must be to be so haunted by sorrows; second, how surely he will be delivered if he will only be religious after their pattern, that is, speak platitudes of conventional devotion and say, I submit.

This is the meaning of our text as it stands. But we may surely find a higher sense in which it is true and take that to heart.

I. What is acquainting oneself with God?

The first thing to note is that this acquaintance depends on us. So then there must have been a previous objective manifestation on His part. Of course there must be a God to know, and there must be a way of knowing Him. For us Jesus Christ is the Revealer. What men know of God apart from Him is dim, shadowy, indistinct; it lacks certainty, and so is not knowledge. I venture to say that there is nothing between cultivated men and the loss of certain knowledge of God and conviction of His Being, but the historical revelation of Jesus Christ. The Christ reveals the inmost character of God, and that not in words but in deeds. Without Him no man knows God; 'No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him.'

So then the objective revelation having been made, we must on our part embrace that revelation as ours. The act of so accepting begins with the familiar act of faith, which includes both an exercise of the understanding, as it embraces the facts of Christ's revelation of the Father, and of the will as it casts itself upon and submits to Him. But that exercise of faith is but the point which has to be drawn out into a golden line, woven into the whole length of a life. And it is in the continuity of that line that the average Christian so sadly fails, and because of that failure his acquaintance with God is so distant. How little time or thought we give to the character of God as revealed in Jesus Christ! We must be on intimate terms with Him. To know God, as to know a man, we must 'live with' Him, must summer and winter with Him, must bring Him into the pettinesses of daily life, must let our love set to Him, must be in sympathy with Him, our wills being tuned to make harmony with His, our whole nature being in accord with His. That is

work more than enough for a lifetime, enough to task it, enough to bless it.

II. The peace of acquaintance with God.

Eliphaz meant nothing more than mere earthly tranquillity and exemption from trouble, but his words are true in a far loftier region.

Knowledge of God as He really is brings peace, because His heart is full of love. We do but need to know the actual state of the heart of God towards us to be lapped and folded in peace that nothing outside of God and ourselves can destroy. If we lived under the constant benediction of the deepest truth in the universe, 'God is love,' our peace would be full. That is enough, if we believe it to bring peace. The thought of God which alarms and terrifies cannot be a true thought. But, alas! in proportion as we know ourselves, it becomes difficult to believe that God is love. The stings of conscience hiss prophecies to us of that in God which cannot but be antagonistic to that in us which conscience condemns. Only when our thought of God is drawn from the revelation of Him in Jesus Christ, does it become possible for any man to grasp in one act of his consciousness the conviction, I am a sinner, and the conquering conviction, God is Love, and only Love to me. So the old exhortation, 'Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace,' comes to be in Christian language: 'Behold God in Jesus, and thou shalt possess the peace of God to keep thy heart and mind.'

Knowledge of God gives peace, because in it we find the satisfaction of our whole nature. Thereby we are freed from the unrest of tumultuous passions and storms of self-will. The internecine war between the better and the worse selves within ceases to rage, and when we have become God's friends, that in us which is meant to rule rules, and that in us which is meant to serve serves, and the inner kingdom is no longer torn asunder but is harmonized with itself.

Knowledge of God brings peace amid all changes, for he who has God for his continual Companion draws little of his supplies from without, and can be tranquil when the seas roar and are troubled and the mountains are cast into the midst of the sea. He bears all his treasures with him, and need fear no loss of any real good. And at last the angel of peace will lead us through the momentary darkness and guide us, after a passing shadow on our path, into 'the land of peace wherein we trusted,' while yet in the land of warfare. Jesus still whispers the ancient salutation with which He greeted the company in the upper room on the evening of the day of resurrection, as He comes to His servants here, and it will be His welcome to them when He receives them above.

III. The true good from acquaintance with God.

As we have already said, Eliphaz was only thinking, on Old Testament lines, that prosperity in material things was the theocratic reward of allegiance to Jehovah. He was rubbing vitriol into Job's sores, and avowedly regarding him as a fear-inspiring instance of the converse principle. But we have a better meaning breathed into his words, since Jesus has taught us what is the true good for a man all the days of his life. Acquaintance with God is, not merely procures, good. To know Him, to clasp Him to our hearts as our Friend, our Infinite Lover, our Source of all peace and joy, to mould our wills to His and let Him dominate our whole selves, to seek our wellbeing in Him alone—what else or more can a soul need to be filled with all good? Acquaintance with God brings Him in all His sufficiency to inhabit else empty hearts. It changes the worst, according to the judgment of sense, into the best, transforming sorrow into loving discipline, interpreting its meaning, fitting us to 'bear it, and securing to us its blessings. To him that is a friend of God,

'All is right that seems most wrong

If it be His sweet will.'

To be acquainted with God is the quintessence of good. 'This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.'

Job 22:26-29 What Life May Be Made

> **'For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. 27. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows. 28. Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee: and the light shall shine upon thy ways. 29. When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, … lifting up; and He shall save the humble person.'— JOB xxii. 26-29 .**

These words are a fragment of one of the speeches of Job's friends, in which the speaker has been harping on the old theme that affliction is the consequence and evidence of sin. He has much ado to square his theory with facts, and especially with the fact which brought him to Job's dunghill. But he gets over the difficulty by the simple method of assuming that, since his theory must be true, there must be unknown facts which vindicate it in Job's case; and since affliction is a sign of sin, Job's afflictions are proof that he has been a sinner. So he charges him with grossest crimes, without a shadow of other reason; and after having poured this oil of vitriol into his wounds by way of consolation, he advises him to be good, on the decidedly low and selfish ground that it will pay.

His often-quoted exhortation, ‘Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee,’ is, in his meaning of it, an undisguised appeal to purely selfish considerations, and its promise is not in accordance with facts. Whether that saying is noble and true or ignoble and false, depends on the meanings attached to ‘peace’ and ‘good.’ A similar flaw mars the words of our text, as understood by the speaker. But they can be raised to a higher level than that on which he placed them, and regarded as describing the sweet and wonderful prerogatives of the devout life. So understood, they may rebuke and stimulate and encourage us to make our lives conformed to the ideal here.

I. I note, first, that life may be full of delight and confidence in God.

‘Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.’ Now when we ‘delight’ in a thing or a person, we recognise that that thing, or person, fits into a cleft in our hearts, and corresponds to some need in our natures. We not only recognise its good, sweetness, and adaptation to ourselves, but we actually possess in real fruition the sweetness that we recognise, and the good which we apprehend in it. And so these things, the recognition of the supreme sweetness and all-perfect adaptation and sufficiency of God to all that I need; the suppression of tastes and desires which may conflict with that sweetness, and the actual enjoyment and fruition of the sweetness and preciousness which I apprehend—these things are the very heart of a man’s religion. Without delight in God, there is no real religion.

The bulk of men are so sunken and embruted in animal tastes and sensuous desires and fleeting delights, that they have no care for the pure and calm joys which come to those who live near God. But above these stand the men, of whom there are a good many amongst us, whose religion is a matter of fear or of duty or of effort. And above them there stand the men who serve because they trust God, but whose religion is seeking rather than finding, and either from deficient consecration or from false conceptions of Him and of their relation to Him, is overshadowed by an unnatural and unwholesome gloom. And all these kinds of religion, the religion of fear, of duty, of effort, of seeking, and of doubt fighting with faith, are at the best wofully imperfect, and are, some of them, radically erroneous types of the religious life. He is the truly devout man who not only knows God to be great and holy, but feels Him to be sweet and sufficient; who not only fears, but loves; who not only seeks and longs, but possesses; or, in one word, true religion is delighting in God.

So herein is supplied a very sharp test for us. Do our tastes and inclinations set towards Him, and is He better to us than anything beside? Is God to me my dearest faith, the very home of my heart, to which I instinctively turn? Is the brightness of my day the light of His face? Is He the gladness of my joy? Is my Christianity a mill-horse round of service that I am not glad to render? Do I worship because I think it is duty, and are my prayers compulsory and mechanical; or do I worship because my heart goes out to Him? And is my life calm and sweet because I ‘delight in the Lord’?

The next words of my text will help us to answer. ‘Thou shalt lift up thy face unto God.’ That is a clear enough metaphor to express frank confidence of approach to Him. The head hangs down in the consciousness of demerit and sin. ‘Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me,’ wailed the Psalmist, ‘so that I am not able to look up.’ But it is possible for men to go into God’s presence with a sense of peace, and to hold up their heads before their Judge and look Him in the eyes and not be afraid. And unless we have that confidence in Him, not because of our merits, but because of His certain love, there will be no ‘delight in the Lord.’ And there will be no such confidence in Him unless we have ‘access with confidence by faith’ in that Christ who has taken away our sins, and prepared the way for us into the Father’s presence, and by whose death and sacrifice, and by it alone, we sinful men, with open face and uplifted foreheads, can stand to receive upon our visage the full beams of His light, and expatiate and be glad therein. There is no religion worth naming, of which the inmost characteristic is not delight in God. There is no ‘delighting in God’ possible for sinful men unless they can come to Him with frank confidence, and there is no such confidence possible for us unless we apprehend by faith, and thereby make our own, the great work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. So, secondly, note, such a life of delighting in God will be blessed by the frankest intercourse with Him.

‘Thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.’ These are three stages of this blessed communion that is possible for men. And note, prayer is not regarded in this aspect as duty, nor is it even dwelt upon as privilege, but as being the natural outcome and issue of that delighting in God and confident access to Him which have preceded. That is to say, if a man really has set his heart on God, and knows that in Him is all that he needs, then, of course, he will tell Him everything. As surely as the sunshine draws out the odours from the opening petals of the flowers, will the warmth of the felt divine light and love draw from our hearts the sweet confidence, which it is impossible not to give to Him in whom we delight.

If you have to be driven to prayer by a sense of duty, and if there be no impulse in your heart whispering ever to you, ‘Tell your Love about it!’ you have much need to examine into the reality, and certainly into the depth of your religion. For as surely as instinctive impulse, which needs no spurring from conscience or will, leads us to breathe our confidences to those that we love best, and makes us restless whilst we have a secret hid from them, so surely will a true love to God make it the most natural thing in the world to put all our circumstances, wants, and feeling into the shape of prayers. They may be in briefest words. They may scarcely be vocalised at all, but there will be, if there be a true love to Him, an instinctive turning to Him in every circumstance; and the

single-worded cry, if it be no more, for help is sufficient. The arrow may be shot towards Heaven, though it be but slender and short, and it will reach its goal.

For my text goes on to the second stage, ‘He shall hear thee.’ That was not true as Eliphaz meant it. But it is true if we remember the preceding conditions. The fundamental passage, which I suppose underlies part, at least, of our text, is that great word in the psalm, ‘Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.’ Does that mean that if a man loves God he may get everything he wants? Yes! and No! If it is supposed to mean that our religion is a kind of key to God’s storehouse, enabling us to go in there and rifle it at our pleasure, then it is not true; if it means that a man who delights himself in God will have his supreme desire set upon God, and so will be sure to get it, then it is true. Fulfil the conditions and you are sure of the promise. If our prayer in its deepest essence be ‘Not my will, but Thine,’ it will be answered. When the desires of our heart are for God, and for conformity to His will, as they will be when we ‘delight ourselves in Him,’ then we get our heart’s desires. There is no promise of our being able to impose our wills upon God, which would be a calamity, and not a blessing, but a promise that they who make Him their joy and their desire will never be defrauded of their desire nor robbed of their joy.

And so the third stage of this frank intercourse comes. ‘Thou shalt pay thy vows.’ All life may become a thank-offering to God for the benefits that have flowed unceasing from His hands. First a prayer, then the answer, then the rendered thank-offering. Thus, in swift alternation and reciprocity, is carried on the commerce between Heaven and earth, between man and God. The desires rise to Heaven, but Heaven comes down to earth first; and prayer is not the initial stage, but the second, in the process. God first gives His promise, and the best prayer is the catching up of God’s promise and tossing it back again whence it came. Then comes the second downward motion, which is the answer to prayer, in blessing, and on it follows, finally, the reflection upwards, in thankful surrender and service, of the love that has descended on us, in answer to our desires. So like sunbeams from a mirror, or heat from polished metal, backwards and forwards, in continual alternation and reciprocation of influence and of love, flash and travel bright gleams between the soul and God. ‘Truth springs out of the earth, and righteousness looks down from Heaven. Our God shall give that which is good, and the earth shall yield her increase.’ Is there any other life of which such alternation is the privilege and the joy?

III. Then thirdly, such a life will neither know failure nor darkness.

‘Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee, and the light shall shine upon thy ways.’ Then is my will to be omnipotent, and am I to be delivered from the experiences of disappointments and failures and frustrated plans that are common to all humanity, and an essential part of its discipline, because I am a Christian man? Eliphaz may have meant that, but we know something far nobler. Again, I say, remember the conditions precedent. First of all, there must be the delight in God, and the desire towards Him, the submission of the will to Him, and the waiting before Him for guidance. I decree a thing—if I am a true Christian, and in the measure in which I am—only when I am quite sure that God has decreed it. And it is only His decrees, registered in the chancery of my will, of which I may be certain that they shall be established. There will be no failures to the man whose life’s purpose is to serve God, and to grow like Him; but if our purpose is anything less than that, or if we go arbitrarily and self-willedly resolving and saying, ‘Thus I will; thus I command; let my will stand instead of all reason,’ we shall have our contemptuous ‘decrees’ disestablished many a time. If we run our heads against stone walls in that fashion, the walls will stand, and our heads will be broken. To serve Him and to fall into the line of His purpose, and to determine nothing, nor obstinately want anything until we are sure that it is His will—that is the secret of never failing in what we undertake.

We must understand a little more deeply than we are apt to do what is meant by ‘success,’ before we predict unfailing success for any man. But if we have obeyed the commandment from the psalm already quoted, which may be again alluded to in the words of my text—‘Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him’—we shall inherit the ancient promise, ‘and He shall bring it to pass.’ ‘All things work together for good to them that love God,’ and in the measure of our love to Him are our discernment and realisation of what is truly good. Religion gives no screen to keep the weather off us, but it gives us an insight into the truth that storms and rain are good for the only crop that is worth growing here. If we understand what we are here for, we shall be very slow to call sorrow evil, and to crown joy with the exclusive title of blessing and good; and we shall have a deeper canon of interpretation for the words of my text than he who is represented as speaking them ever dreamed of.

So with the promise of light to shine upon our paths. It is ‘the light which never was on sea or land,’ and not the material light which sense-bound eyes can see. That may all go. But if we have God in our hearts, there will be a light upon our way ‘which knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’ The Arctic winter, sunless though it be, has a bright heaven radiant with myriad stars, and flashing with strange lights born of no material or visible orb. And so you and I, if we delight ourselves ‘in the Lord,’ will have an unsetting sun to light our paths; ‘and at eventide,’ and in the mirkest midnight, ‘there will be light’ in the darkness.

IV. Lastly, such a life will be always hopeful, and finally crowned with deliverance.

‘When they’—that is, the ways that he has been speaking about—‘when they are cast down, thou shalt say, Lifting up.’ That is an exclamation or a prayer, and we might simply render, ‘thou shalt say, Up!’ Even in so blessed a life as has been described, times

will come when the path plunges downwards into some ‘valley of the shadow of death.’ But even then the traveller will bate no jot of hope. He will in his heart say ‘Up!’ even while sense says ‘Down!’ either as expressing indomitable confidence and good cheer in the face of depressing circumstances, or as pouring out a prayer to Him who ‘has showed him great and sore troubles’ that He would ‘bring him up again from the depths of the earth.’ The devout life is largely independent of circumstances, and is upheld and calmed by a quiet certainty that the general trend of its path is upward, which enables it to trudge hopefully down an occasional dip in the road.

Such an obstinate hopefulness and cheery confidence are the natural result of the experiences already described in the text. If we delight in God, hold communion with Him and have known Him as answering prayer, prospering our purposes and illuminating our paths, how shall we not hope? Nothing need depress nor perturb those whose joys and treasures are safe above the region of change and loss. If our riches are there where neither moth, rust, nor thieves can reach, our hearts will be there also, and an inward voice will keep singing, ‘Lift up your heart.’ It is the prerogative of experience to light up the future. It is the privilege of Christian experience to make hope certainty. If we live the life outlined in these verses we shall be able to bring June into December, and feel the future warmth whilst our bones are chilled with the present cold. ‘When the paths are made low, thou shalt say, Up!’

And the end will vindicate such confidence. For the issue of all will be, ‘He will save the humble person’; namely, the man who is of the character described, and who is ‘lowly of eyes’ in conscious unworthiness, even while he lifts up his face to God in confidence in his Father’s love. The ‘saving’ meant here is, of course, temporary and temporal deliverance from passing outward peril. But we may permissibly give it wider and deeper meaning. Continuous partial deliverances lead on to and bring about final full salvation.

We read that into the words, of course. But nothing less than a complete and conclusive deliverance can be the legitimate end of the experience of the Christian life here. Absurdity can no further go than to suppose that a soul which has delighted itself in God, and looked in His face with frank confidence, and poured out his desires to Him, and been the recipient of numberless answers, and the seat of numberless thank-offerings, has travelled along life’s common way in cheerful godliness, has had the light of heaven shining on the path, and has found an immortal hope springing as the natural result of present experience, shall at the last be frustrated of all, and lie down in unconscious sleep, which is nothingness. If that were the end of a Christian life, then ‘the pillared firmament were rottenness, and earth’s base built on stubble.’ No, no! A heaven of endless blessedness and close communion with God is the only possible ending to the facts of the devout life on earth.

We have such a life offered to us all and made possible through faith in Jesus Christ, in whom we may delight ourselves in the Lord, by whom we have ‘access with confidence,’ who is Himself the light of our hope, the answer of our prayers, the joy of our hearts, and who will ‘deliver us from every evil work’ as we travel along the road; ‘and save us’ at last ‘into His heavenly kingdom,’ where we shall be joined to the Delight of our souls, and drink for evermore of the fountain of life.

Job 42:1-10 The End of the LORD

‘Then Job answered the Lord, and said, 2. I know that Thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can he withholden from Thee. 3. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. 4. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. 5. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. 6. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. 7. And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath. 8. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of Me the thing which is right, like My servant Job. 9 . So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job. 10 . And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.’— JOB 42:1-10 .

The close of the Book of Job must be taken in connection with its prologue, in order to get the full view of its solution of the mystery of pain and suffering. Indeed the prologue is more completely the solution than the ending is; for it shows the purpose of Job’s trials as being, not his punishment, but his testing. The whole theory that individual sorrows were the result of individual sins, in the support of which Job’s friends poured out so many eloquent and heartless commonplaces, is discredited from the beginning. The magnificent prologue shows the source and purpose of sorrow. The epilogue in this last chapter shows the effect of it in a good man’s character, and afterwards in his life.

So we have the grim thing lighted up, as it were, at the two ends. Suffering comes with the mission of trying what stuff a man is made of, and it leads to closer knowledge of God, which is blessed; to lowlier self-estimation, which is also blessed; and to renewed outward blessings, which hide the old scars and gladden the tortured heart.

Job's final word to God is in beautiful contrast with much of his former unmeasured utterances. It breathes lowliness, submission, and contented acquiescence in a providence partially understood. It does not put into Job's mouth a solution of the problem, but shows how its pressure is lightened by getting closer to God. Each verse presents a distinct element of thought and feeling.

First comes, remarkably enough, not what might have been expected, namely, a recognition of God's righteousness, which had been the attribute impugned by Job's hasty words, but of His omnipotence. God 'can do everything,' and none of His 'thoughts' or purposes can be 'restrained' (Rev. Ver.). There had been frequent recognitions of that attribute in the earlier speeches, but these had lacked the element of submission, and been complaint rather than adoration. Now, the same conviction has different companions in Job's mind, and so has different effects, and is really different in itself. The Titan on his rock, with the vulture tearing at his liver, sullenly recognised Jove's power, but was a rebel still. Such had been Job's earlier attitude, but now that thought comes to him along with submission, and so is blessed. Its recurrence here, as in a very real sense a new conviction, teaches us how old beliefs may flash out into new significance when seen from a fresh point of view, and how the very same thought of God may be an argument for arraigning and for vindicating His providence.

The prominence given, both in the magnificent chapters in which God answers Job out of the whirlwind and in this final confession, to power instead of goodness, rests upon the unspoken principle that 'the divine nature is not a segment, but a circle. Any one divine attribute implies all others. Omnipotence cannot exist apart from righteousnes's (Davidson's Job , Cambridge Bible for Schools). A mere naked omnipotence is not God. If we rightly understand His power, we can rest upon it as a Hand sustaining, not crushing, us. 'He doeth all things well' is a conviction as closely connected with 'I know that Thou canst do all things' as light is with heat.

The second step in Job's confession is the acknowledgment of the incompleteness of his and all men's materials and capacities for judging God's providence. Verse 3 begins with quoting God's rebuke (Job xxxviii. 2). It had cut deep, and now Job makes it his own confession. We should thus appropriate as our own God's merciful indictments, and when He asks, 'Who is it?' should answer with lowliness, 'Lord, it is I.' Job had been a critic; he is a worshipper. He had tried to fathom the bottomless, and been angry because his short measuring-line had not reached the depths. But now he acknowledges that he had been talking about what passed his comprehension, and also that his words had been foolish in their rashness.

Is then the solution of the whole only that old commonplace of the unsearchableness of the divine judgments? Not altogether; for the prologue gives, if not a complete, yet a real, key to them. But still, after all partial solutions, there remains the inscrutable element in them. The mystery of pain and suffering is still a mystery; and while general principles, taught us even more clearly in the New Testament than in this book, do lighten the 'weight of all this unintelligible world,' we have still to take Job's language as the last word on the matter, and say, 'How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!'

For individuals, and on the wider field of the world, God's way is in the sea; but that does not bewilder those who also know that it is also in the sanctuary. Job's confession as to his rash speeches is the best estimate of many elaborate attempts to 'vindicate the ways of God to man.' It is better to trust than to criticise, better to wait than to seek prematurely to understand.

Verse 4 , like verse 3 , quotes the words of God (Job 38:3; 40:7). They yield a good meaning, if regarded as a repetition of God's challenge, for the purpose of disclaiming any such presumptuous contest. But they are perhaps better understood as expressing Job's longing, in his new condition of humility, for fuller light, and his new recognition of the way to pierce to a deeper understanding of the mystery, by illumination from God granted in answer to his prayer. He had tried to solve his problem by much, and sometimes barely reverent, thinking. He had racked brain and heart in the effort, but he has learned a more excellent way, as the Psalmist had, who said, 'When I thought, in order to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I.' Prayer will do more for clearing mysteries than speculation, however acute, and it will change the aspect of the mysteries which it does not clear from being awful to being solemn—veils covering depths of love, not clouds obscuring the sun.

The centre of all Job's confession is in verse 5 , which contrasts his former and present knowledge of God, as being mere hearsay before, and eyesight now. A clearer understanding, but still more, a sense of His nearness, and an acquaintance at first hand, are implied in the bold words, which must not be interpreted of any outward revelation to sense, but of the direct, full, thrilling consciousness of God which makes all men's words about Him seem poor. That change was the master transformation in Job's case, as it is for us all. Get closer to God, realise His presence, live beneath His eye and with your eyes fixed on Him, and ancient puzzles will puzzle no longer, and wounds will cease to smart, and instead of angry expostulation or bewildered attempts at construing His dealings, there will come submission, and with submission, peace.

The cure for questionings of His providence is experience of His nearness, and blessedness therein. Things that loomed large dwindle, and dangers melt away. The landscape is the same in shadow and sunshine; but when the sun comes out, even snow and ice sparkle, and tender beauty starts into visibility in grim things. So, if we see God, the black places of life are lighted; and we cease to feel the pressure of many difficulties of speculation and practice, both as regards His general providence and His

revelation in law and gospel.

The end of the whole matter is Job's retractation of his words and his repentance. 'I abhor' has no object expressed, and is better taken as referring to the previous speeches than to 'myself.' He means thereby to withdraw them all. The next clause, 'I repent in dust and ashes,' carries the confession a step farther. He recognises guilt in his rash speeches, and bows before his God confessing his sin. Where are his assertions of innocence gone? One sight of God has scattered them, as it ever does. A man who has learned his own sinfulness will find few difficulties and no occasions for complaint in God's dealings with him. If we would see aright the meaning of our sorrows, we must look at them on our knees. Get near to God in heart-knowledge of Him, and that will teach our sinfulness, and the two knowledges will combine to explain much of the meaning of sorrow, and to make the unexplained residue not hard to endure.

The epilogue in prose which follows Job's confession, tells of the divine estimate of the three friends, of Job's sacrifice for them, and of his renewed outward prosperity. The men who had tried to vindicate God's righteousness are charged with not having spoken that which is right; the man who has passionately impugned it is declared to have thus spoken. No doubt, Eliphaz and his colleagues had said a great many most excellent, pious things, and Job as many wild and untrue ones. But their foundation principle was not a true representation of God's providence, since it was the uniform connection of sin with sorrow, and the accurate proportion which these bore to each other.

Job, on the other hand, had spoken truth in his denials of these principles, and in his longings to have the righteousness of God set in clear relation to his own afflictions. We must remember, too, that the friends were talking commonplaces learned by rote, while Job's words came scalding hot from his heart. Most excellent truth may be so spoken as to be wrong; and it is so, if spoken heartlessly, regardless of sympathy, and flung at sufferers like a stone, rather than laid on their hearts as a balm. God lets a true heart dare much in speech; for He knows that the sputter and foam prove that 'the heart's deeps boil in earnest.'

Job is put in the place of intercessor for the three—a profound humiliation for them and an honour for him. They obeyed at once, showing that they have learned their lesson, as well as Job his. An incidental lesson from that final picture of the sufferer become the priest requiting accusations with intercession, is the duty of cherishing kind feelings and doing kind acts to those who say hard things of us. It would be harder for some of us to offer sacrifices for our Eliphazes than to argue with them. And yet another is that sorrow has for one of its purposes to make the heart more tender, both for the sorrows and the faults of others.

Note, too, that it was 'when Job prayed for his friends' that the Lord turned his captivity. That is a proverbial expression, bearing witness, probably, to the deep traces left by the Exodus, for reversing calamity. The turning-point was not merely the confession, but the act, of beneficence. So, in ministering to others, one's own griefs may be soothed.

The restoration of outward good in double measure is not meant as the statement of a universal law of Providence, and still less as a solution of the problem of the book. But it is putting the truth that sorrows, rightly borne, yield peaceable fruit at the last, in the form appropriate to the stage of revelation which the whole book represents; that is, one in which the doctrine of immortality, though it sometimes rises before Job's mind as an aspiration of faith, is not set in full light.

To us, living in the blaze of light which Jesus Christ has let into the darkness of the future, the 'end of the Lord' is that heaven should crown the sorrows of His children on earth. We can speak of light, transitory affliction working out an eternal weight of glory. The book of Job is expressing substantially the same expectation, when it paints the calm after the storm and the restoration in double portion of vanished blessings. Many desolate yet trusting sufferers know how little such an issue is possible for their grief, but if they have more of God in clearer sight of Him, they will find empty places in their hearts and homes filled.