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# THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

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THE  
BIBLE AS LITERATURE

BY

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AND OTHERS

With an Introduction

BY

THE REV. LYMAN ABBOTT, D.D.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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THERE are two ways in which we may approach the Bible: the theological and the literary. We may assume that God has given us a revelation, we may conclude that a revelation from a God of truth must be altogether true, with no element of error in it; and then taking up the Bible we may make it our duty to reconcile all its teachings with this assumption. Or we may take it up without any prior assumption, we may re-examine it, — the date, authorship, and contents of its various books, — to ascertain what is apparently the truth concerning it; and from this examination we may form a judgment as to whether it is inspired by God and contains a revelation from Him, in what sense and to what degree it is inspired, and how far and on what subjects it is a revelation. The first I call the theological

method, the second the literary method. The former method has been a not uncommon one; the latter is both the more scientific and the more reverent. It is not for us to determine what kind of a revelation a God of truth must be supposed to have given us and then deduce the character of the Bible from that determination. It is for us to see what kind of a revelation He has given us, and to accept that gift humbly, reverently, thankfully.

When in this spirit we take up the Bible to examine it, we discover at once that it is not a book but a library; that it is composed of sixty-six different books bound up together; that they were apparently written by forty or more different authors; that they were written at different epochs, for different readers, under widely different circumstances; and that more than twice as many years elapsed between the first and the last writing as elapsed between the writing of Chaucer's poems and the writing of Tennyson's.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I assume, as it is quite safe to do, that the substance of the Book of the Covenant, including the Ten Commandments (Exodus xx. 1-xxiv. 7), dates from the days of Moses, and that the Gospel of John was written at the close of the first century of the Christian Era.

We further discover that it contains many different types of literature. Genesis is a collection of pre-historic narratives; Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy a collection of ancient laws, civil and ecclesiastical, embedded in history; Kings and Chronicles a series of historical records; Ruth an idyl of the common people; Esther an historical romance of court life; Job an "epic of the inner life;"<sup>1</sup> the Psalms a Hebrew Hymnal for Church and home worship; Proverbs a collection of wise sayings of many authors; the Song of Songs a drama of love strong under temptation; Ecclesiastes a poem, illustrating the "two voices" which are ever appearing in conflicting interpretations of human life, — the interpretation of cynicism, and that of faith and hope; and finally the books of the prophets, — volumes of sermons, chiefly on national affairs, by the great preachers of this peculiar people. And we also discover that in all these various ages and writers and forms of literature there is a common spirit and to a certain extent a common message. These books are bound together not merely by binders' thread, but by an intellectual and spiritual unity,

<sup>1</sup> So admirably entitled by Professor Genung.

which is the more remarkable since it appears in authors who write without concurrence of conscious design and without similarity in training, circumstance, or temperament. Legend, law, history, poetry, fiction, philosophy, preaching, — a common spirit pervades them all, a common purpose animates them all. We also discover that the spirit is not equally luminous, nor the purpose equally strong, nor the message equally clear in all; that between the doctrine of Joshua, "The Lord is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins," and that of the Psalter, "He forgiveth all thine iniquities, He healeth all thy diseases; He redeemeth thy life from destruction," there is a very apparent contradiction. In brief, we discover that there is in this literature, as in all literature, a growth in clearness of apprehension and of expression; that the light of this Hebrew anthology is one which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

One who has been accustomed to consider the Bible from the theological point of view finds two serious difficulties in the literary point of view. It seems to him at first irreverent, and indeed inconsistent with any theory of inspiration, to suppose

that the Bible contains legends and traditions, drama and fiction, in short, *belles lettres*, as well as history and law; and if he overcomes this difficulty, he halts at a second: How is he to know what is wholly true and what is only partially true, what is the word of God and what the human husk which contains it?

The first difficulty is a product of Puritan intellectual habits. The Puritan was essentially prosaic. He looked with suspicion on the great poet who belonged to his own school, — Milton, — and he condemned unsparingly the still greater poet who did not, — Shakespeare. He disapproved of fiction, for he confounded fact and truth, and thought nothing could be true which was not fact. He therefore reprobated all novels, tales, and dramas as essentially dangerous if not essentially vicious; and of course he could not imagine that the Bible contained such elements of peril to the soul. We no longer entertain his opinion as to secular literature; we honor poetry, fiction, and the drama: and therefore we have not his reason for imagining that they are excluded from the Bible. The sacred writers did not themselves confine their idea of divine inspiration to special

forms of life. The artificer of the Temple was regarded as inspired no less than the giver of the law;<sup>1</sup> the sacred song no less than the sermon.<sup>2</sup> That conception of inspiration which supposes that it is confined to historians, biographers, and law-givers, that conception of revelation which supposes that it is made only through the record of facts, is certainly narrower than that which supposes that God inspires the imagination as well as the reason, the poet and the romance-writer as well as the historian and the preacher, that, as He has made all human faculties, so He uses all to make Himself known to His children. He who has read the charming letters of Phillips Brooks to children will recognize that a man may reveal himself as truly by the very frolics of imagination as by serious counsel. And what is true of man is equally true of God. Some of Christ's most eloquent instructions were afforded through fiction,—the parables; why should we suppose that God disdained to use in the Old Testament what Christ used freely in the New Testament?

The other difficulty equally disappears if we look in the Bible to see what it says about itself. It

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xxxv. 30-35.

<sup>2</sup> Luke i. 67.



declares of itself that it is a hidden treasure. We must search for it, as men search for a hidden treasure, and must ourselves separate the gold from the alloy. It is not mined, coined, minted, and delivered to us with the King's stamp on it. The mining, coining, and assaying of it are left for us to do. And this because we can come to a real knowledge of the truth only by this very process. A revelation of truth which exempted us from toil and research, and released us from intellectual and moral responsibility, would be no revelation at all. It is by the exercise of moral discrimination that we gain the power to discriminate.

There are three very simple principles which the student of the Bible should ever bear in mind in this process of Bible study; they will save him from falling into an error which has not been uncommon and which has proved a cause of great and needless perplexity. There is no room here either to elaborate or to demonstrate these principles: I can only state and briefly apply them. The first is that the Bible does not contain and does not purport to contain a revelation of all truth; it affords simply a revelation or unveiling of God. The second is that this revelation or unveil-

ing of God reaches its consummation in the life, teaching, and above all in the character of Jesus Christ, who is God manifest in the flesh. The third is that this revelation of God is not made exclusively in the Bible: it is made also in Nature, in Providence, and in our own spiritual consciousness. It is for us so to interpret the Bible that these three shall agree. Anything in the Bible which is inconsistent with the character and teachings of Christ may be safely regarded as in so far human, fallible, and imperfect. If, for example, Christ tells us to love our enemies, and pray for them who despitefully use us, and we find in the Old Testament a Psalm which pronounces a blessing on him "that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones," we may be perfectly sure that the latter is not a revelation of the divine spirit. It is rather a revelation of that spirit from which Christ has come to deliver us. Anything in the Bible which clearly contradicts the unquestionable facts of Nature we may be equally sure is an imperfect interpretation of the divine method in Nature. Our system of astronomy is to be derived from the stars, not from the Bible, and if they conflict we are to correct the Bible by the stars, not

the stars by the Bible. Finally, God does not speak contradictory things, one to each individual through his conscience, the other to humanity through an ancient record. When these seem to conflict we must follow the voice which is within rather than the voice which is without. We must so interpret what ancient men tell us they understood God's voice to be as not to make it contradict what God's voice plainly and clearly says to us. We may and often ought to hold our own moral judgments in abeyance, until we have given the question which perplexes us further study and consideration. But what, after the fullest and most conscientious consideration appears to us to be our duty, must be taken by us as a divine direction, and whatever in the words of others contradicts this inward monitor, we must either believe we do not understand or we must believe to be erroneous. In a word, we must either think we do not understand the interpreter or else that he did not understand God.

With these reflections on the spirit with which the Bible is to be studied and used, and with the profound conviction that the more free our study the more sacred the book will become to us, I

heartily commend to the reader this little volume as a valuable aid to the better understanding of the Bible. The more thoroughly and freely the human life and character of the sacred writers and their immediate auditors is studied, the clearer to the student will be the revelation of God afforded by the writings, — a revelation unparalleled for its strength and beauty by any other of the world literatures.

LYMAN ABBOTT.

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE.



# I.

## THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE.<sup>1</sup>

BY PROF. RICHARD G. MOULTON, PH. D.

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ONE of our old dramas bears the somewhat remarkable title, "A Woman Killed with Kindness." It would seem as if a similarly constructed title might well describe the Bible in the hands of its English readers; it is a "Literature Smothered by Reverence." Of course, as a source of spiritual life the sacred Word has its full vitality and vitalizing force. But the Bible is something besides this; the very name "Bible" may be translated "Literature," and, considered as literature, it must be confessed that the Bible is exercising little influence upon those to whom it is familiar. Moreover, it would seem that it has been reduced to this state of inanition through an extreme reverence, which, being divorced from intelligence,

<sup>1</sup> Professor Moulton's work, "The Literary Study of the Bible" (D. C. Heath & Co.) is designed as a text-book to the general subject.

has proved mischievous. It has been felt that, in the case of so transcendent a message, the very sentences containing it were sacred. But, in thus doing homage to the separate sentences, readers have lost that linking between sentences and sentences which gave to them all their real force; to the devout reader the Bible has become a store-house of isolated texts, of good words. He scarcely realizes that it exhibits the varieties of literary form familiar to him elsewhere, — essays, epigrams, sonnets, stories, sermons, songs, philosophical observations and treatises, histories and legal documents. Even dramas are to be found in the Bible, and also love-songs; nay, so far does dumb show enter into the ministry of Ezekiel that some of his compositions might fairly be described as *tableaux-vivants*. The distinction between things sacred and things secular, which exercises so questionable an influence upon our times, seems unknown to the world of the Old Testament. Its literature embraces national anthems of Israel in various stages of its history, war ballads with rough refrains, hymns of defeat and victory, or for triumphant entrance into a conquered capital; pilgrim songs, and the chants with which the family parties beguiled the jour-



neys to the great feasts; fanciful acrostics to clothe sacred meditations or composed in compliment to a perfect wife; even the games of riddles which belong to such social meetings as Samson's wedding. With the single exception of humorous literature, for which the Hebrew temperament has little fitness, the Bible presents as varied an intellectual food as can be found in any national literature.

But the anxious inquiry will be made by some: Will not this literary treatment of Holy Writ interfere with its higher religious and theological uses? The question ought to answer itself: if the Divine Revelation, which might have been made in so many different ways, has in fact taken the form of literature, this must be warrant sufficient for making such literary form a matter of study. But this is an understatement of the case; not only is the literary study of the Bible permissible, but it is a necessary adjunct to the proper spiritual interpretation. No doubt edification of a kind may be drawn from an isolated verse or a brief succession of sentences; but it is only when each literary section has been understood as a whole in its plain or natural meaning that it is safe to go forward to the deeper spiritual signification. The neglect of

this principle is responsible for many of the fanciful and even grotesque interpretations of the old commentators. To take an example, Solomon's Song contains the following passage: —

By night, on my bed,  
I sought him whom my soul loveth;  
I sought him, but I found him not.

A commentator like Quarles was ready from this single verse to plunge into mystic interpretation. His book of emblems represents a female figure, conventionally signifying the human soul, standing with a flat candlestick in her hand by a bedside; she is turning down the bed-clothes, and appears surprised to find nothing inside them; while on the floor, hidden from her but visible to the reader, is the figure of the Saviour, in the attitude of one who has tumbled out of bed. No irreverence, of course, is intended; but such ludicrous literalism would be impossible to any one reading the poem as a piece of literature, who must see that the words quoted are the beginning of an exquisite dream of the heroine losing and again finding her lover. Nor when the dream has been fully caught is there any loss of mystic symbolism. All sections of the poem are a celebration of conjugal love. But the Old and New Testaments alike apply the

imagery of Bride and Bridegroom to the relations between the soul and Christ, or the Church and its Head, and thus all the thoughts and emotions of the poem can have their spiritual applications. First in order of time is that which is natural — the plain literary interpretation — and afterwards that which is spiritual.

The point to be pressed upon the reading world at the present time is that the Bible is, above all things, an *interesting* literature. No class of readers can afford to neglect it, for — with the single exception noted above — every variety of literary interest is represented in the books of the Old and New Testaments. And, in marvellous manner, all these kinds of literary beauty are concentrated in a single work, — the Book of Job. This has an epic story for its basis; if it has less of lyric than of any other form, yet this lyric element — the Curse — is among the most famous passages in all poetry. The bulk of the book is a drama, in which there are characters finely discriminated and meeting in sharp contrast, an open-air scene and chorus of spectators, and a plot which has its dénouement in a thunderstorm — the overlooking of which scenic touch has led to misunderstanding of the speeches attributed to God.

The matter of the poem embraces ethical questions, and even questions of social science, which are still the themes of our philosophers; while so artistically are the various elements blended that each stage of the drama — from prologue to epilogue — has the function of stating or shadowing a different solution of the world's great mystery of pain. Such a blending of all kinds of interest in a single work cannot be paralleled in any other of the world's masterpieces.

Among the separate branches of literature the lyric poetry of the Bible ranges from the early Songs of Deborah, or of Israel by the Red Sea, danced by answering choruses of men and women, to such ideal and deeply spiritual meditations as the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Psalm. Critics by no means partial to the religious side of Scripture have recognized that in lyric poetry the Hebrew leads the literature of the world. Of epic poetry, on the contrary, it has been the custom to say that the Bible has no example. But the truth is rather that the definition of epic poetry needs enlarging to take in the stories of Scripture; the ignoring of these has led to the common mistake that "epic" is equivalent to "fiction." Except in this one matter of being part of the national

history, these Biblical stories produce upon our minds just the effect of epic poems. Such a story is that of Joseph, with its ironic situations and poetic justice; or that of David and Saul, brimful of adventure; or the mixed verse and prose that make up the story of Balaam; or the exquisite idyl that unites in so sweet a bond the melancholy beauty of Naomi and the shy grace of Ruth; or the crown of them all, the Book of Esther, which is saved from being an exciting novel with a double plot only by the accident of its being historically true. These stories are epic gems in a setting of sober history. And this setting will appeal to a different literary taste, presenting history in all its forms, from the archæology of Genesis, or the constitutional history of the following books, to the ecclesiastical digests of Chronicles.

It is impossible here to name all the departments of Biblical literature. A nation's whole philosophy — in that picturesque dress which has given to Hebrew philosophy its name of "Wisdom" — may be read in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and the Apocryphal books of Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon; read in their proper order, they display the whole devel-

opment of that philosophy, from the brief, disjointed observations that make up Proverbs, to the first troubled attempt to read the meaning of life in Ecclesiastes, and the recovered serenity when, in the Book of Wisdom, a wider survey of life harmonizes analysis and faith. The literature of oratory is splendidly represented in Deuteronomy; and no collection of speeches in secular literature has the interest which is given to the orations of Moses by the dramatic setting of the book, which presents the pathetic situation of Moses at Pisgah, until pathos becomes triumph and rhetoric gives place to song. Philosophy and oratory belong to all literatures; but the Bible has all to itself the department of prophecy. This gathers into one distinct literary form sermons and political speeches; burdens on hostile peoples that suggest the satires of secular literature; the mystic poetry of visions; dramatic dialogues like Micah's controversy before the mountains, or Jeremiah's intercession in a season of drought; while all ordinary literary forms are transcended when Joel and Isaiah present advancing judgment in a spiritual drama that has all space for its stage and all time for the period of its action.

In intrinsic worth, then, the Old Testament is

second to none of the world's great literatures. Moreover, it has, in common with the literature of Greece and Rome, been the main factor in the development of our modern prose and poetry. For the English-speaking people, no liberal education will be complete in which classical and Biblical literatures do not stand side by side.





LITERARY ASPECTS OF GENESIS.



## II.

### LITERARY ASPECTS OF GENESIS.

BY THE REV. JOHN P. PETERS, PH. D., SC. D., D. D.

*Of St. Michael's Church, New York.*

THE use of the Bible as a dictionary of religion has somewhat obscured its literary character. It is most admirably arranged for reference to texts by means of chapters and verses on the principle of a dictionary, but this arrangement, so well adapted to that use, renders it difficult reading, and often hides from view the true connection of its parts. We read it by chapters, stopping in the middle of a narrative, losing much of the literary beauty, failing oftentimes to apprehend the general structure, and the relation of parts to one another as conceived by the author.

To comprehend the book of Genesis as its author designed it we must throw aside these late divisions into chapters and verses, so convenient for purposes of reference, and search for the author's own divisions. When we do this we shall

find that the author of Genesis arranged that book according to a very definite and simple scheme, prefixing to each section what we may call a chapter heading, stating the contents of that particular chapter or section. These chapter headings are unmistakable when once attention has been called to them. The first is found at Chap. ii. 4: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." The next chapter, the third, for there is an introductory chapter, i. 1-ii. 3, which has no heading, because a first page or chapter or section is always clear as such to both eye and ear without anything further, has a similar heading, v. 1: "This is the book of the generations of Adam." The fourth chapter, vi. 9-ix. 29, is "The generations of Noah;" the fifth, x. 1-xi. 9, "The generations of the sons of Noah;" the sixth, xi. 10-xi. 26, "The generations of Shem;" the seventh, xi. 27-32, "The generations of Terah."

Here the author starts afresh. He has carried the story down from the creation to Abraham, the great father of the Hebrews. His manner now changes. He has more to narrate. There is less genealogy proportionally, and more detail, more

stories. Arranging the work in modern fashion, we might call the first eleven chapters the first book of Genesis. With the twelfth chapter begins the second book. Here, as in the first book, the first chapter or section has no heading, and for the same reason, that it requires none. It is only the succeeding chapters which require headings, because without them the reader might not observe that a new chapter had begun. The Hebrews did not use, it must be remembered, our modern devices of numbering, spacing, and the like, any more than they used brackets, quotation marks, italics, capitals, punctuation, and all the other devices which have been devised in modern times for purposes of convenience and precision.

The first chapter of the second book of Genesis, the eighth of the entire book, xii. 1-xxv. 11, is the story of Abraham. At the beginning of the ninth chapter, xxv. 12-18, there is a chapter heading of the same character as those in the first book: "These are the generations of Ishmael." The tenth chapter, xxv. 19-xxxv. 29, is "The generations of Isaac;" the eleventh chapter, xxxvi. 1-xxxvii. 1, is "The generations of Esau;" the twelfth chapter, xxxvii. 2 to the close of the book, is "The generations of Jacob."

We have, then, according to the scheme of the author, two books, the first with seven chapters, a mystical number, starting with the creation in seven days, and bringing us down to the entrance into Canaan of Abraham, the great father of the Hebrews; while the two books together, composed of twelve chapters, also a mystical number, bring us down to the twelve patriarchs, ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the beginning of the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt. The scheme is mystical, and yet so plain that were the book now arranged in its chapters as the author planned them, with their headings, the most careless reader must at once observe the purpose and character of the work.

Genesis is the first volume in a series treating of the early history of Israel. According to the conception of the author, Israel began with the creation of the universe, because God had Israel in mind when He began to create, and a history of the beginnings of Israel must commence with the history of the beginnings of the universe. Our volume opens, therefore, with the creation of the universe: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The second chapter overlaps the first somewhat. It is concerned with the

preparation of the earth for the dwelling-place of man, and the formation of a garden of delight in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates. There man, Adam, is placed, and everything in the garden is given to him to use, excepting one tree, the fruit of which he may not eat. Then out of his very flesh and bones is formed for him a helpmeet, woman. But with sex sin comes into the world; they eat of the forbidden fruit; man and woman are driven out of Eden, the garden, and there begins for the human race the hard life of toil and child-bearing, and strife and envy and murder. Of the children of this first pair one is a herdsman, another tills the ground. God accepts the offering of the herdsman and not that of the husbandman, and in envy, Cain, the husbandman, slays Abel, the herdsman. Little by little men learn to build cities, to work in copper and iron, to make musical instruments, and the like. The third chapter gives us genealogical lists of the descendants of Adam, as far as Noah. Then it tells us of the loves of gods and men, the resulting race of giants, and the wickedness of the earth. Only Noah was good. The next chapter, the fourth, tells of the purification of the earth by a great flood, from which only Noah and his family were saved, he having at the

command of God built a great box, or ark, in which he floated safely over the waters. Toward the close of the chapter we hear of the cultivation of the vine and the discovery of wine by Noah. The next chapter records the re-peopling of the earth by the three sons of Noah. All nations known to the author are classified as descended from one of these three sons, and their differences in language are accounted for by the story of the tower of Babel. The sixth and seventh chapters are brief and dry, consisting of genealogies tracing the descent of Terah from Shem and of Abraham from Terah, showing the close racial affinities of Hebrews and Aramæans. So the author briefly sums up the history of the universe and of mankind before Abraham, and prepares the way for the story of the ancestors of the Hebrews.

The second part of the book deals at far greater length with the story of the immediate ancestors of Israel. The locality is the land of Canaan. Hither Abram, or Abraham, has come by the command of God, and here he and Lot, his nephew, wander back and forth with their flocks and herds. Abraham has a very beautiful wife, Sarai, or Sarah, so beautiful that when, driven by famine, they once wander to Egypt, the Pharaoh becomes enamored



of her. But although God has promised that Abraham shall become a great nation, Sarah remains barren. Lot and Abraham separate, and Lot becomes the father of Ammon and Moab, to the east of the Jordan. Abraham himself by an Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, as also by another wife, Keturah, becomes the father of various nomadic Arabic and Aramæan tribes inhabiting the country south and east of Canaan; but from none of these is Israel descended. Finally, when it seems impossible that God's promise shall be fulfilled, when Sarah is old and withered, by the announcement of an angel, a son, Isaac, is born to them; and just as you think that Abraham's trials are ended and his faith rewarded, God calls upon him to sacrifice this long hoped for and only son. The boy is bound upon the altar, and the father's hand is raised to slay him, when God interferes to save him, and gives Abraham a ram to sacrifice in his stead. This father of the future Israel may not marry a wife from the nations of Canaan, for the blood of Israel must be kept pure; so when Abraham is "old, and well stricken in years" he sends Eliezer his servant to Mesopotamia to choose for Isaac a wife from his, Abraham's, people. The wooing of Rebekah for Isaac

by Eliezer (Gen. xxiv.) is from the literary point of view the most beautiful thing in the whole book of Genesis, a prose idyl.

The next chapter, "The generations of Isaac," has comparatively little to tell of Isaac. It tells us rather the history of his children before his death. Isaac and Rebekah have two children, twins, of whom Esau, or Edom, is born first, and Jacob, or Israel, second. Esau is a rough, careless, generous man of the field, Jacob is crafty and shrewd, an acquirer and a man of civilization. He is a typical Jew in the sense in which Homer's Ulysses is a typical Greek. Jacob supplants Esau, first buying his birthright for a mess of pottage when Esau is faint with hunger, and later by the help and at the instigation of his mother Rebekah, whose favorite he is, defrauding Esau of the blessing of their blind old father, which was the equivalent of a deed of primogeniture. For this he is obliged to flee for his life from the outraged and wrathful Esau, and betakes himself to Mesopotamia, to the home of his Aramæan uncle, his mother's brother. Here there is a constant struggle of wit between him and Laban his uncle. When he had worked seven years for his cousin Rachel, whom he loved, Laban gives him her elder sister, the blear-eyed Leah.

But in this struggle of wit Jacob finally wins. He gains Rachel as well as Leah, and by a cunning trick wins the better part of the increase of Laban's flock. Once more he must take to flight, pursued this time by Laban. On Mt. Gilead Laban overtakes him, and the two strike a covenant by which Jacob retains what he has gained, and Mt. Gilead becomes the border between Israelites and Aramæans. Then Jacob crosses the Jabbok, makes peace with Esau, and settles down in Canaan, in the neighborhood of Shechem.

The next chapter is the chapter of the genealogies of Jacob's twin brother, Esau, with lists of the dukes and kings of Edom, which is Esau. The fact that Edom was older as a nation than Israel, told mystically in the story of Jacob and Esau, is here stated in plain words, and we have a list of the kings of Edom before there was a king in Israel.

The final chapter contains the story of Jacob after the death of Isaac, but deals principally with his children, the name-fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The former chapter recorded the birth of these children. Two of them, Joseph and Benjamin, the last and youngest, were children of Rachel, the favorite wife. The interest of this

chapter centres about the fortunes of Joseph, the son of the favorite wife. He wins the hatred of his brethren, and is sold by them to wandering Arabs, who in their turn sell him into slavery in Egypt. There, after resisting at the risk of his life the seductions of his master's wife, he finally becomes a great prince, and the administrator of the realm. Then after some dramatic scenes he rewards his brothers good for evil, and brings his father and all his family to Egypt, where he settles them in wealth and prosperity. The story is narrated with great power, and is a beautiful piece of work from the artistic standpoint. Following this there is a brief narrative explaining in the form of a story why the tribe of Ephraim was greater than its elder brother Manasseh; then a poem, called the "Blessing of Jacob," characterizing the twelve tribes of Israel as they appear in history; and finally the death of Jacob and of his son Joseph, which latter is the true hero of this chapter as Jacob was of the preceding.

In reading any book one naturally asks, Who is its author? At the head of the book in our English Bible we read: "The First Book of Moses, commonly called Genesis." This title does not appear in the original Hebrew. There the book is

anonymous, without indication of authorship and also without name. The Hebrews designated it by its first words "In the Beginning." The name which is prefixed to the book in our translation, as well as the designation of authorship, is taken from the Greek translation of the work made in Alexandria in Egypt in the second century B. C. or thereabouts. In the name "Genesis" or "Beginnings" the Greek translators were most happy. It exactly expresses the contents of the book. In entitling it "The First Book of Moses" they were not so happy. Almost all modern scholars reject this title as incorrect, and regard the book as written some centuries after the time of Moses. In view of this pretty general agreement of the scholars we should probably do well to drop the title "First Book of Moses" and content ourselves, however regretfully, with the anonymity of the original Hebrew.

The next question which we ask ourselves is, Whence did the unknown author derive his material? Is the work an original composition, or did the author make use of material already in existence? If the latter, how has he handled that material? No one can read the book of Genesis critically without observing striking differences of

style in different parts of the book. Take, for instance, the prologue, the chapter on creation, and compare it with the story of Adam in Eden in the second chapter. The language of the prologue is unornate, its method is stiff and precise, and it is repetitious, after the manner of legal documents. The story of Adam in Eden, on the other hand, is in the language and style of literature as distinguished from that of law or theology or science. It lacks the precision, but is easy, flowing, and picturesque. But not only is there a difference in style, there is a similar difference in the point of view. The theological conception of the first chapter is highly exalted and spiritual. God is a spirit, working in a spiritual manner. He is infinite, and by His word all things are made. The cosmogony of this chapter has never been equalled, much less surpassed. It is a marvellous creation, and it is the work of a theologian. The conception of God in the second chapter is anthropomorphic, and the view of His relation to man and the world the popular view. God brings the animals which He has made to the man to see what he will call them, and as he calls them so they are named. Then, as there is no fit mate for the man among the animals, God puts him to sleep,

and, removing one of his ribs, fashions out of it a woman. This has the quality of poetry, and there is something very beautiful in its quaintness and naïveté; but it must be characterized as folk lore in distinction from the scientific and theological treatment of the first chapter. Further than this, we observe when we read the two chapters together a certain amount of duplication. The second chapter is to some extent a duplicate of the first. It tells us once more, but in a different manner, of the creation of the world, of vegetation, of animal life, but above all of man. In the first chapter we are told that God created mankind in His own image, both male and female. In the second chapter the Lord God makes a man, and then later out of his ribs fashions a woman.

What we observe in these two chapters runs through the whole book. There are two distinct narratives, one legal and theological in tone, careful and precise, full of genealogies, exalted in its spiritual conceptions, but generally stiff and unattractive from the literary standpoint; the other, attractive and often extremely beautiful in its style, but naïve and primitive in its conceptions, expressing the imaginings of the folk as over against the thought of the scholar. Out of these two nar-

ratives in the main our author composed his work, joining them together in a manner suited to his time, but alien to our present literary methods, not concerned too carefully to conceal the joints, or harmonize minor disagreements and inconsistencies; and it must be confessed that his work has been well done. The ordinary reader even of to-day does not observe the discrepancies and duplications, unless the critic calls them to his attention, and the composite work has a character and charm of its own through its very differences of style and conception superior to that of either narrative by itself. Out of the one the author has fashioned the framework, the bones of his new creation, and out of the other the flesh and blood. So he has made a finished and well-rounded whole, a true artistic creation, entitling him to the name of author and not merely compiler. To quote a homely proverb,

“’T is neither butter nor bread,  
But the way it is spread.”

Critics have pointed out that the second of the two narratives described above, the folk narrative, is itself composite, composed of two stories joined together into one at a still earlier date. They are, however, so similar in tone and so closely joined



together that it is no easy task to separate them. There are further a few documents or episodes which may have come to our author in one or the other of the two main documents, but which are manifestly separate compositions older than the narratives in which they are imbedded. Such are the poems scattered here and there through the book, the "Sword Song of Lamech" (iv. 23, 24), the "Blessings of Isaac" (xxvii. 27-29, 39, 40), and above all the "Blessing of Jacob" (xlix. 2-27), none of which, unfortunately, are printed as poetry in the authorized version of the English Bible. Such also is that interesting episode (xiv.) where Abraham is depicted as a valiant warrior victorious over the great kings of Babylonia and Elam, and such are some of the genealogies and lists incorporated entire by later narrators.

These are our author's sources. What is their value, and what their origin? Some of the genealogies in the first part of the book, giving us an account of the origins of civilization, are strikingly similar both in names and treatment to certain Phœnician fragments which have come down to us, while recent discoveries have revealed the fact that some of the stories there contained, and especially that of the flood, were known to the Babylonians.

The material of the first part of Genesis was presumably the common property either of all the peoples of Semitic stock, or at least of the northern division of the Semites, to which Hebrews, Phœnicians, and Babylonians belonged. Each nation treated this material in a different manner. The peculiar feature of the Hebrew treatment of the common stock of legends and traditions is its vastly higher tone of spirituality, that property which theologians term inspiration, by which the common material has been virtually transformed and filled with a new and exalted significance.

Comparing Hebrew literature with Greek, we might call the first part or book of Genesis the "Hesiod of the Jews." But if this be compared with "Hesiod," then the second part must surely be called the "Homer of the Jews." In it we find the traditions of the Hebrew race, the legends of local holy places, the interpretation of tribal names, the explanation of sacred rites and ancestral customs, woven into a story of the great heroes of the dim and shadowy past. History and romance, fact and fancy, religion and worldly wisdom, are combined in one national story.

The heroes of Genesis are eternal. Even aside from the deep religious significance of the book,

which cannot be overlooked by the serious student, the work is one which will always be read and studied by young and old, scholars and simple folk alike. The child finds Genesis the most charming book in the Bible; the grown man hears it with a different but equally great fascination. And to appreciate it fully it should be heard, not read, or at least this is true of those parts which belong to the folk narrative. These are the work of skilful *raconteurs*, and some of them, like the "Destruction of Sodom," the "Wooing of Rebekah," the "Wiles of Jacob," and the story of Joseph or the "Younger Brother" are among the most finished pieces of the *raconteur's* art which have been handed down in any language.



# THE LAW OF MOSES.



### III.

#### THE LAW OF MOSES.

By PROF. A. B. BRUCE, D.D.

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THERE is no part of the Old Testament of which it is so difficult for ordinary readers to get a clear idea as that which relates to Hebrew legislation. There is such a mixing up of narrative with law, and such a lack of classification in the legal sections, that the reader of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy rises from perusal with a feeling of bewilderment. The difficulty of obtaining any distinct conception of the subject is greatly increased by the fact, brought to light by modern inquiry, that the laws contained in the Pentateuch do not form a homogeneous body proceeding at one time from one and the same legislative mind, that of Moses, but really consist of successive strata of legal enactments, representing widely separated periods of time having much in common but also not a little in which they do not agree, so that they cannot be united into one har-

monious whole. All these strata bear, in Jewish tradition, the name of Moses; but, in this use of the name, "Moses" simply stands as a general heading for Hebrew law, as "David" stands for Hebrew poetry and "Solomon" for Hebrew wisdom.

The whole Old Testament books, and especially the Books of Moses, stand very much in need of arranging and editing to make them intelligible and enjoyable reading for ordinary Christian people. This has been much felt of late, and efforts have been made to meet the want. Among these an honorable place is due to a work recently published by two American scholars. I refer to "Scriptures Hebrew and Christian," arranged and edited as an introduction to the study of the Bible by Drs. Edward T. Bartlett and John P. Peters, of Philadelphia. The outside title of the work (consisting of three volumes) is "The Scriptures for Young Readers." Sunday-school teachers would find it a most valuable aid towards opening up the Bible to their pupils. In this work, in Vol. II., "Hebrew Legislation" is given all together, forming a chapter of some seventy pages. The matter is not arranged in strict accordance with recent critical views, but the editors have had these views before their minds and have benefited by them.



The laws of Israel are classified under four heads: I. The Ten Words; II. The Book of the Covenant; III. Levitical Codes; IV. The Deuteronomic Code. Modern critics would invert the order of III. and IV.

These are the great divisions of the subject. The Ten Words (the Decalogue) form the strong foundation of the whole legislative edifice. They go back, according to the weightiest authorities, to Moses himself — his supremely important personal contribution to the statute-book of Israel. The "Book of the Covenant" means the body of laws found in Exodus xx. 23–xxii. 33. Of this brief code, or fragment of a code, Professor Ryle, in his valuable work on the Canon of the Old Testament, says: "It is suited to the needs of a society in a very early stage of civilization. If, as may well be allowed, the main substance of its laws has descended from the Mosaic legislation, there is no reason to doubt that it has also, at different times, been adapted, by subsequent revision, to the requirements of the people when they were in the enjoyment of a settled agricultural life." "The collection," he adds, "is not to be regarded in the light of an exhaustive official code of statutes, but rather as an agglomeration of laws, perhaps tran-

scribed from memory or extracted fragmentarily for some private purpose from an official source" (p. 25).

The "Deuteronomic" code means the body of laws on various subjects to be found in the Book of Deuteronomy from chapter xii. onwards, chapters i. to xi. being a sort of sermon on the importance of keeping the law. The name "Deuteronomy" means "the law over again," the implied notion being that Moses, before he died, repeated in the hearing of the people the laws he had given them before, as if to impress them with the duty of keeping them in remembrance and putting them in practice: as if he said, "Now do not forget them, my children." But the laws in the fifth book of the Pentateuch are not a mere repetition of those in Exodus and Leviticus. They differ in important particulars. And there is reason to believe that the "Deuteronomic" laws were not later but earlier than the "Levitical code" contained in the middle books of the Pentateuch. The Levitical code was the latest, uppermost stratum of the successive layers of Hebrew legislation. It took its final form in the hands of Ezra and his associates, and represents the period of the Babylonish exile and the post-captivity era. The Decalogue

goes back to Moses. The Book of the Covenant may have been in existence 1000 B.C. The Deuteronomic code belongs to the time of King Josiah, who reigned in the seventh century B.C. Ezra brings us a century and a half nearer the Christian era. All three of the codes (II., III., IV.) have, of course, much in common in respect both to religion and to civil life. The Hebrews were very conservative. They clung tenaciously to what was old, and even when they innovated they wished the new to pass for old. A great deal of what is in all the codes goes back probably to very ancient times. Each code repeats the tradition with variations or additions adapted to new circumstances. Common to all the codes, including the Decalogue, is the combination of religion and morality, duty to God and duty to man.

While all the codes have much in common, they have their distinctive characteristics. The grand distinction of the Decalogue is that it deals only with that which is fundamental in religion and morals. "Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself" — is its sum. There is no *ritual*, but only the ethical, the universally important and perennially valid. Even the Fourth Commandment is ethical at the core, a humane statute

securing a resting-time for labor-drudges, slaves, and even for the beast of burden.

The Book of the Covenant on its religious side reaffirms the great doctrine of the Decalogue that there is but one God. Comparing it with the codes which come after, it is to be noted that it does not insist on *one central sanctuary*. Exodus xx. 24, as it is rendered in "The Scriptures for Young Readers," runs thus: "Altars of earth shalt thou make to me, and sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be worshipped I will come to thee and bless thee." On the human side this very ancient body of laws has, of course, much to say on the subject of justice between man and man. Crude and quaint in form, the statutes bearing on this topic commend themselves as essentially just and reasonable. "Eye for eye," "tooth for tooth," is a barbarous law literally carried out; nevertheless these phrases embody, in homely form, the fundamental principle of civil jurisprudence, that for all wrong there must be adequate compensation. The rights of bondsmen and bondswomen are not, as we might have supposed, overlooked in this primitive code. Indeed, that is the very first topic dealt

with in the code, after the duty owing to Jehovah has been briefly enforced (Exodus xxi. 2-11). The fact may indicate that there was much need for this humane protective legislation to defend the weak against the strong, which the Bible never fails to do. Just one other feature may be noticed in this early body of laws, what may be called the element of kindness, or Christianity anticipated: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass astray, thou shalt bring it back to him. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee fallen under his burden, thou shalt forbear to leave him" (Exodus xxiii. 4, 5). How much is involved in this simple injunction! It is in one concrete instance an anticipation of the great law of Jesus, "Love your enemies."

Passing on to the Deuteronomic code, formulated centuries later, one obvious point of contrast is much greater elaboration. The little Book of the Covenant has grown to be a large, bulky book of laws, with a lengthy sermon prefixed to it. Yet, after all, it is, in the main, merely an expansion of the earlier code. On the religious side, however, there is one very marked difference. The Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant had both said, with emphasis, *one God*. But Deuteronomy says

not only one God, but, with quite remarkable emphasis, *one sanctuary*. The law enforcing this stands at the head of the code (chapter xii. 1-7). By the time this new code was compiled, it had been found that the early freedom in worship had led to great abuses, to disastrous imitation of the vile rites of the Canaanites. Therefore the law of a central sanctuary was regarded by the best men in Israel as a reform, and won the earnest support of the prophets of the seventh century before Christ. In reference to what I have called the Christian element, what we have to note is not contrast but development. The law of kindness has grown to larger dimensions, and now embraces a variety of particulars, such as that the hungry man shall be at liberty to help himself from a neighbor's standing grain or vineyard, and that gleanings must be left for the poor in the orchard and harvest-field. Even the wants of the beast of burden are mercifully provided for. "Thou shall not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deuteronomy xxv. 4). "Doth God take care for oxen?" asked Saint Paul. The God of the ancient Hebrews certainly did, and that doubtless was one reason why our Lord had a preference for the Book of Deuteronomy, as shown by the quotations from it

in the story of the Temptation. The second half of Isaiah and Deuteronomy were two favorite books of the Old Testament with Jesus. If we knew them as well as he did, we should not be surprised at this. The spirit of prophecy, in its noblest form, breathes through both.

I have left myself very little space to speak of the Levitical code, the latest of the four. The outstanding feature of it is the great prominence it gives to *ritual*. Priests, holy furniture, holy times, sacrifices, rules for securing ceremonial cleanness, — these and the like are the great topics of Leviticus. We are in a different world from that of the prophet Moses with his Ten Words concerning the great fundamentals of religion and morality. It is not that the men of Ezra's time did not care for the fundamentals. It is that the times, as they judge, call for laying stress on ritual. "One *God*," said Moses; "One *sanctuary*," said the reformers of Josiah's time; "One carefully regulated system of worship at the one sanctuary," said Ezra and his coadjutors. Probably the last mentioned movement was necessary, yet the prominence given to ritual was the beginning of a great evil, — the growth of legalism and rabbinism.

In the Levitical code, as distinguished from the

Deuteronomic, the class of religious officials has undergone development and gained in status. In Deuteronomy priests and Levites are one; the standing phrase is, "the priests, the Levites." In Leviticus and the late historical books (Chronicles) they are distinct: priests *and* Levites. In Deuteronomy they are a poor class, and as such recommended to the consideration of the charitable. In the Levitical code there is an elaborate system of tithes, which, if worked out, would make the once poor class a rich and influential corporation.



THE AGE OF THE JUDGES.



## IV.

### THE AGE OF THE JUDGES.

BY PROF. L. W. BATTEN, PH. D.

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THE treatment of this subject is limited in two ways, — by the space at command and by the character of the series to which this article belongs. In other words, it is a brief literary treatment of an interesting and important epoch in the history of Israel.

The sources of information are the books of Judges and Ruth, with various incidental allusions in other parts of the Bible, in the New Testament as well as in the Old. These scattered notices, however, coming mostly from ages long subsequent, are based on the one book which is our main reliance, and have, therefore, but a secondary value. There is much difference of opinion about the date of the writing of the Book of Ruth; and, though it is probably a product of the settled times of the monarchy, we may fairly accept the statement with which the book opens — “ And it was in the times

when the judges judged" — as giving the period to which the events narrated belong, even though, as Driver says, "distance seems to have mellowed the rude, unsettled age of the Judges."

Our chief source of information is, therefore, the Book of Judges. If we are lacking in variety of sources, we gain in other ways. As Dean Stanley says, "Hardly any portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, whether by its actual date or by the vividness of its representations, brings us nearer to the times described."

As the most casual reader must have observed, this book falls into three parts of quite different character. There is an introductory part, i. 1–ii. 5; the main body of the book, the stories of the heroes, ii. 6–xvi. 31; and an appendix containing two stories which throw light on the social and religious life of the times, xvii.–xxi. The first part describes the condition of the country at the opening of this period; not only has it marked affinities with the Book of Joshua, but some passages are almost identical with passages in that book. The second part is made up of a collection of stories of Israelitish heroes from different sources put together for a religious purpose. There is unity of aim with diversity of authorship. The

aim is expressed in the setting in which nearly every narrative is placed,—“And the people of Israel again did that which was evil in the eyes of Jahveh, and Jahveh delivered them into the power of. . . . And the people of Israel cried unto Jahveh, and Jahveh raised up to them a deliverer, . . . and the land had rest.” This setting is the work of an editor who combined the various narratives to show the providential hand of God in the darkest and most troubled period of Israel’s history.

In one case — the story of Barak and Deborah — the editor had at command and has happily preserved both a prose and a poetical account. The latter, the Song of Deborah, is the earliest portion of the book, probably one of the earliest portions of Biblical literature, and apparently a product of the Northern Kingdom.

The third part narrates two incidents, — the expedition of the Danites against Laish, xvii., xviii., and the war with Benjamin, xix.–xxi. These narratives are placed at the end of the book on account of their subject, not because they belong to the closing part of this period.

The age of the Judges properly includes Eli and Samuel, the latter marking the transition to a new epoch of a different character. Samuel was

the connecting link between the Theocracy and the Monarchy.

“It is by representing the mode of being of a whole nation and a whole age,” says Taine, “that a writer rallies round him the sympathies of an entire age and an entire nation.” We read literature not so much for itself as for the life of which it is an expression. Indeed, the test of literature is its power to portray life, real or ideal. We must look into the Book of Judges to read the life of which it is a picture. “For merely human interest,” says Stanley, “for the lively touches of ancient manners, for the succession of romantic incidents, for the consciousness that we are living face to face with the persons described, there is nothing like the history of the Judges from Othniel to Eli.”

The period is often called “the age of anarchy.”<sup>1</sup> The Book of Judges gives color to that designation, expressing forcibly the unsettled condition: “In those days there was no king in Israel; each one was wont to do that which was right in his own eyes” (xvii. 6). Moses had held the tribes together under his rule, trying to secure a national unity without sacrificing tribal rights. Joshua held them together by his great power as a military

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* Scriptures Hebrew and Christian, Pt. I. c. 18.

leader, and by the hard necessities of a war for existence. Before Joshua's death the tribes took up their abodes in the sections assigned to them. The conquest, however, was not complete. Each tribe had battles of its own to fight against the remnant of the Canaanites. Joshua had not attempted to appoint a successor, as Moses had done. The times were such as to make such action impossible, as each tribe was concerned with its own affairs, and could not easily be induced to lend a helping hand to the others.

Judah and Simeon, however, united their forces and succeeded in driving all the Canaanites from their borders, except those in the valley who possessed the formidable chariots of iron. Joseph (Ephraim) succeeded in capturing Bethel, and secured a sure footing in their portion. Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali were only partially successful in the conquest of their portions, having hostile tribes within their borders who were only gradually reduced to subjection. The tribe of Dan was least successful. They were forced into the mountains by the fierce Amorites, and made so little headway against them that a part of the tribe went far to the north and captured the peaceful Phœnician city of Laish, and

thus Dan — the new name of the city — became the northernmost point of Israel.

This stage of the conquest continued a considerable time after the death of Joshua. It is introductory to the age of Judges, the time when there was neither king nor judge in Israel.

But there was as yet no peace for Israel. Enemies within their borders were supplemented by enemies without. The wars of the time were for the most part mere plundering expeditions. The foes of Israel tried to reduce them to the condition of tributaries, so as to make the land a source of revenue. The enemies came from all directions — Cushan-rishathaim from the distant east, Sisera from the north, the Philistines from the west, Midian, Moab, and Ammon from across the Jordan. It was the invasions of these various nations that brought out the heroic characters of the time, the men whose valiant deeds were praised in early song and story, and whose character as God-fearing and God-directed men was ever held in sacred remembrance.<sup>1</sup> The deeds of these men made a deep impression on the popular mind, because the nation, or some part of it, was delivered by them after years of defeat and humiliation. It is one thing to

<sup>1</sup> See I Sam. xii. 11; Heb. xi. 32.



resist the first encroachments of a hostile power; it is quite another thing to break the hold of an enemy which has for years held oppressive sway over a people whose spirit is crushed and whose hope is dead.

The Judges are thirteen in number. Of these, Abimelech stands by himself as one who brought upon his country war and distress rather than victory and peace. Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon are little more than names to us. Othniel and Ehud are of only secondary importance, while the great Judges were Barak (with whom the name of Deborah is indissolubly associated), Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson — these are the men whose heroism people never forgot.

The English word "judge" but inadequately renders the Hebrew *shophet*. In Phœnician, as we know from inscriptions and from Livy, the same word, *suffet*, was applied to a civil ruler, who exercised, as a matter of course, judicial functions.

It is expressly stated of each of the chief Judges, except Jephthah, that he was raised up of God to rescue Israel when punishment had effected its disciplinary purpose. Barak undertook the war at the prophetic command of Deborah, who is as much the hero of the victory over Sisera as Barak or

“Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.” Even in the case of the rude border-chief Jephthah, it is clearly implied that his mission was the result of God’s grief at Israel’s suffering (x. 16 ff.).

Like all other great men, the Judges were the product of the times. Great men are not really wanting in any age, only the exigency to call them out. Israel suffered until some soul moved by the Spirit of God could bear it no longer. Such a one takes his life in his own hands, organizes as many bold hearts as he can stir up in sympathy with himself, and goes against the enemy. The success of the expedition brought the leader into such prominence that he became the natural ruler of the people for life. In one case the crown was offered to the returning victor, Gideon, and in another case — Jephthah’s — the permanent headship of the tribe was the price of leaving the freebooter’s careless life for the war against Ammon.

One Judge stands quite apart from the rest in several ways. Samson — whose name is derived from the Hebrew word for sun, *i. e.* *shemesh* — was appointed to his mission before he was born. Like Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist, he was born of a mother whose expectation of children had long

since passed away. Unlike the other Judges, his work was purely individual; he never associated others with him, but fought his battles single-handed. So far as the records go, he never lifted his finger in his divine mission against the Philistines except in personal revenge. Milton has made much of his last days in his great poem, "Samson Agonistes," but, unhappily, his picture of Samson's nobleness is not in agreement with the hero's last prayer: "Strengthen me, O God! this once, that I may have revenge on the Philistines at one stroke for my two eyes" (xvi. 28).

The collector of these stories believed that he saw in the deeds of the heroes, even of Jephthah and Samson, the hand of God working for the welfare of his people. He was not mistaken; for the more we study the times, the more plainly we can see that into the darkness the light was beginning to penetrate, that out of the disorder order was beginning to emerge, — in other words, that a few people at least were made to see that Israel must have a unity both political and religious. It was impossible for Israel to prosper worshipping a host of gods or insisting too much on the independence of the tribes. The Song of Deborah shames the tribes who refused to join in the war in which

the prophetess, with divinely given insight, could see that all had a common interest; and, on the other hand, it gives just praise to those who rallied about the standard of Barak. But the success of that battle was not due wholly to the valor of leaders or men, but to the help that came from above:

“They fought from heaven,  
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera” (v. 20).

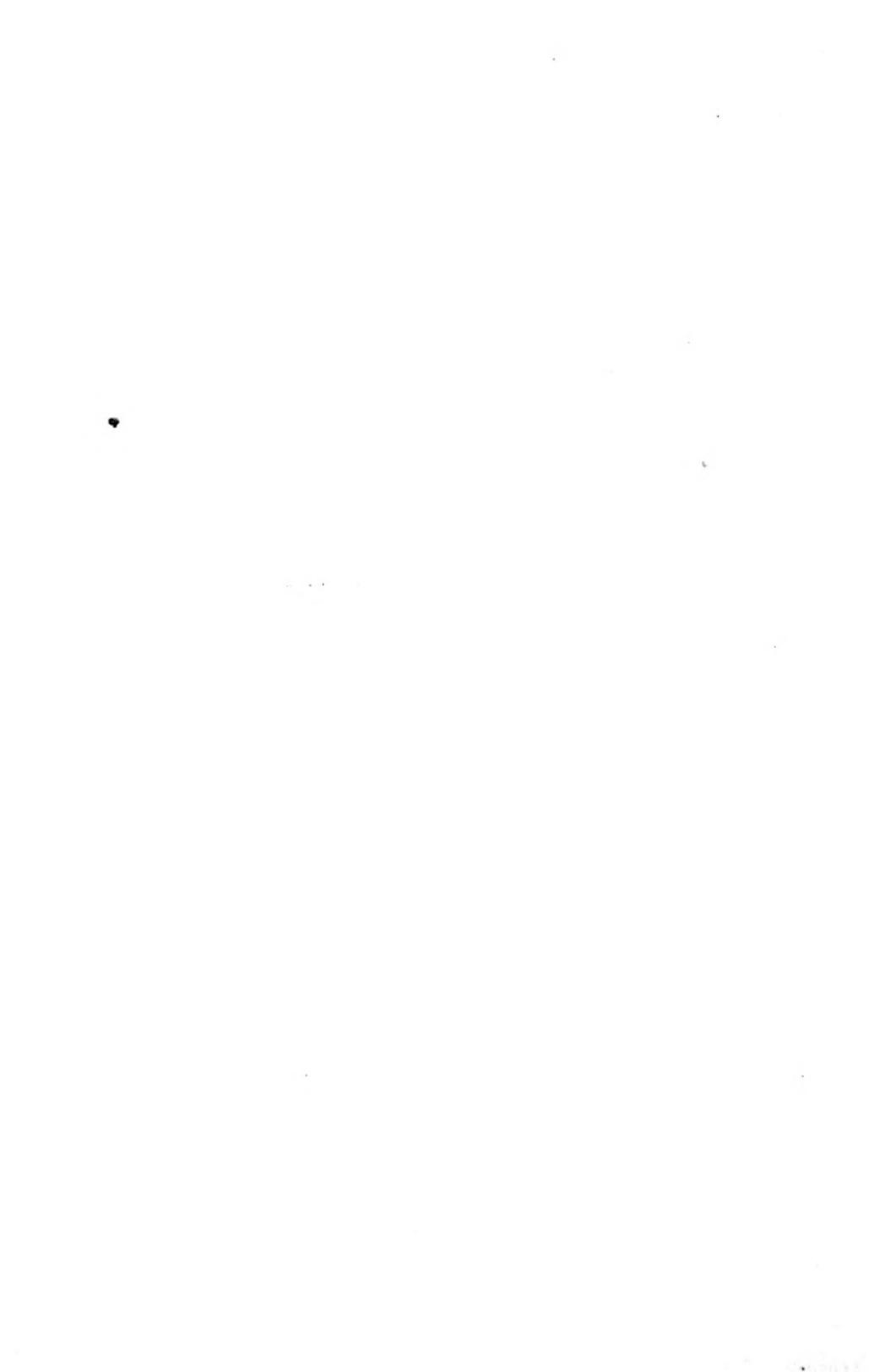
“The people learned by perpetual struggle,” says Ewald, “to defend right valiantly their new earthly home and the free exercise of their religion, and were thereby preparing for coming generations a sacred place, where that religion and national culture might unfold itself freely and fully.”

Dean Stanley compares this period to the Middle Ages, and the comparison is certainly striking; but for Americans it is more suggestive to compare the age of the Judges with the troubled period of our history immediately following the Revolutionary War, when we were “one nation to-day, and thirteen to-morrow.” Under the great Washington and the pressure of war the Colonies were held together pretty firmly; but as soon as the pressure

was relieved the period of disorder began. From the very confusion, however, the great lesson of national unity was learned in part, though it took another bloody war to make the "Union forever" an unquestioned fact. The united kingdom of all Israel, and the worship of Jehovah alone as the God of Israel, were the two great products of this age, not springing to the birth full-grown indeed, but so far established that no permanent backward movement was possible.



RUTH AND ESTHER.





## V.

### RUTH AND ESTHER.

BY THE REV. JAMES M. WHITON, PH. D.

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COULD the two books we here put together stand together in our Bible, it were in happy contrast, so like and yet so unlike. Here the Peasant and the Queen exhibit, in the idyl of the one and the drama of the other, in times eight centuries apart, the same nobility of soul amid the sorest trials, whether in the country or in the court. And yet it is not a less felicitous arrangement which in our Bible, following the order of the Septuagint and of the Vulgate, between the scenes of blood and misery depicted in the books of the Judges and of Samuel, introduces, like the desert oasis with its palms and well, the sweet prose-poem of Ruth. Here is rest for the soul in its artless tale of days that seem

“Bound each to each by natural piety,”

and of a love that “many waters cannot quench.” The sketch of the patriarchal simplicity in which

the wealthy landowner superintends his farm-hands, and shares their noonday meal, seems designed to strike the chords in which Horace, weary of the splendor of imperial Rome, loved to sing of the unspoiled country. That its heroine is a woman of the fiercely proscribed race, which might not even to the tenth generation enter into the congregation of Israel, seems almost in intentional contrast with the rigor with which Ezra put all mixed marriages under ban. At least, it reminds us of the protest which Jesus made against Jewish intolerance by choosing as his pattern of neighborly love a Samaritan. The Talmud has admiringly reckoned it as chief among the Hagiographa, — the third principal division of the Old Testament. It was the portion of Scripture appointed to be read at Pentecost, in whose liberal festivities the Law enjoined bountiful remembrance of the poor, the stranger, and the widow. For such was Ruth.

The theme is common, yet one that we weary of no more than of the grass and the flowers, — filial piety, devoted, courageous, self-respecting, winning recognition and reward by patient, modest merit. It comes to us from what we deem more dark and cruel times than ours, bearing witness to the unspoiled goodness that from old has ever

dwelt on earth. Unsurpassed in naïve simplicity, it is in some respects unique. It beautifies with the tenderest sympathy a relationship that is often too fruitful of antipathy. In the crisis of events it borrows a peculiarly romantic flavor from the singularity of a marriage claim legitimate then, but unimaginable now.

In the four chapters of the book four scenes unfold, in which a blighted life is made, through the struggle of devoted love, to bloom again.

Famine has made Naomi an exile, and death has made her a childless widow in a foreign land. In her old home her lot will be less intolerable, and thither she will return. But her daughter-in-law, Ruth, insists on going with her, though there the intolerable lot which Naomi shuns will be her lot, — a childless widow among foreigners. Her impassioned protestation against Naomi's affectionate remonstrance has become the classic confession of the most indissoluble union known to love, — "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." Here between the lines we see on what a home had fallen the midnight of trouble, which forms the first scene of the story.

So Naomi returns, and Ruth with her, to Beth-

lehem, where well-to-do kinsmen still dwelt. That they were also well disposed the story shows. But Naomi's future was now involved with Ruth's, and Ruth had to win reputation in Bethlehem. In undertaking the duty of breadwinning for them both she soon does this. In going forth as a gleaner among the village poor, "her hap was" to light on the rich kinsman's field. He knew her story, but not her face. On learning her name, he gives her, not only protection from the insult to which her work might expose her, but a share in the reapers' luncheon, and, above all, the kindly encouragement for which the struggling poor hunger equally with their bread. Thus the second scene of the story brings, after the midnight of trouble, the morning star of hope.

In the third scene we come to the dawn of the day. Assured now of the esteem of the rich kinsman for Ruth as well as for herself, Naomi has recourse to the custom then prevailing, which recognized a childless widow's right to re-marriage with the next of kin, the first son of such a marriage being reckoned as the heir of her deceased husband, that his name might be perpetuated. Bold as may seem the proceeding of Ruth, in obedience to her mother-in-law's directions to

claim this right of Boaz, it was strictly legitimate. Moreover, assured trustfulness in assured goodness can presume on much. That some risk was run by each in that solitary night-colloquy appears in his word of caution: "Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor." But to the pure all things are pure. More of real modesty is in a chaste frankness than in prudery. Doubtless Ruth's trustful boldness lent a charm to her virtue. The village magnate feels the charm, and warms toward his worthy claimant with a tenderness more fatherly than lover-like. "My daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest, for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

The concluding scene is occupied with the legal transactions in which Boaz fulfils this promise, and with the wedding amid public congratulations. A son is then born to Ruth, who thus became the great-grandmother of King David. So long before the writer's time had these things happened, that it was necessary for him to explain the legal process by saying, "Now this was the manner in former time in Israel." The congratulations offered to Naomi, when in her grandson's birth her midnight of trouble has changed into the noonday of pros-

perity, are for Ruth's sake, "for thy daughter-in-law, who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him," — a word which in the lips of Hebrew women was the hyperbole of praise. In the love of David for Jonathan, for the rebel ingrate Absalom, in that deep spring of feeling whence flowed his psalms, we recognize the spirit of his ancestress, the loving Ruth.

"The fountains of Hebraic song  
Are in thy heart, fair Ruth,  
Fountains whose tides are deep and strong  
In deathless love and truth."

Well worthy is her story of a place in the sacred volume, whose promise of a heaven to come is too often permitted to obscure its teaching, that this depends on culture here of the heavenly spirit of self-sacrificing love. In Ruth the Christian poet's lesson lives incarnate, —

"The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we need to ask —  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God."

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With Esther we enter a larger world, but the same spirit is dominant there as in Ruth's narrower

sphere, — the high resolve, the steadfast constancy, that

“grasps the skirts of happy chance,  
And breasts the blows of circumstance,”

but for a more brilliant prize than idyllic Bethlehem offered :

“ And lives to clutch the golden keys,  
To mould a mighty State’s decrees,  
And shape the whisper of the throne.”

Here are regal splendor, despotic power, sensual passion, intriguing servility, murderous revenge. And here on this dark and stormy sea is a young woman, gifted with beauty, discretion, courage, who masters these menacing elements and becomes the savior of her people. Her dramatic story is full of the strange turns that fancy delights in, from the distaff to the throne, from the banquet to the gibbet; full also of the singular chances, so-called, in which the most trivial things, as in a hair-balance, determine destiny. These give it the zest of a thrilling novel. Yet truth is often stranger than fiction, as in the story of that illegitimate child of a Livonian peasant-girl, who became Catherine I. of Russia.

Less salient, yet not less distinctive, are the book’s other singularities, so intensely Jewish in

national feeling, so utterly un-Jewish in the silence about the God and the land and the law of Israel. It reads like a fragment of Persian history, a secular book in the sacred volume. But secular and sacred history are one to him who sees in all .

“One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.”

The book of Esther is in form a history, in substance a drama, quite compliant, too, with the Horatian canon, that a drama should consist of five acts, no more, no less:—

“*Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu.*”

The most natural division of it is as follows:

Act I. Esther's Elevation to the Throne (chapters i., ii.). Act II. Haman's Plot, and Esther's Trouble (chapters iii., iv.). Act III. Esther's Courage, and Haman's Fall (chapters v., vi., vii.). Act IV. Esther's Undoing of Haman's Plot, and Mordecai's Elevation to Haman's Place (chapter viii.). Act V. Esther's Deliverance of her People, and the Institution of its Commemoration (chapter ix.). Epilogue: The Glory of Ahasuerus, and the Greatness of Mordecai (chapter x.).



Dear to the Jewish heart is this book for the national spirit that glows therein. Fitley is it appointed to be read at Purim, a national rather than a religious festival, commemorating a national deliverance. Such a festival befits such a people, whose symbol is the bush that burned but was not consumed, and whose history is the record of the age-long deliverance of a life oftentimes marvellously preserved.

In the first act a cup of wine too much, and the tipsy whim which resulted from it, lead strangely to the elevation of a Jewish maiden to be Queen of Persia in a brilliant transformation, which is reflected in her change of name from Hadassah (myrtle) to Esther (star). Presently her uncle, Mordecai, chances to discover a plot against the king, and she reports it in his name, but his merit goes unrequited at the time, — another chance, but by and by of happy consequence.

In the second act the fell fury of a hereditary foeman, in a feud nine centuries inveterate, unwittingly strikes at the queen's life by a plot to exterminate her people. But the higher power to which he refers the determination of the day of doom by the chance of the lot fixes it eleven months ahead, and secures time for countervailing

agencies to work. Esther intervenes at peril of her life. She is doubtful of her lord's capricious temper. Her moves are wary. He promises "even to the half of the kingdom." She merely begs him to banquet with her, and bring her enemy Haman. She and he must stand face to face, when she finds the time ripe to thrust into the king's astonished hand the scales into which Haman unawares has cast his life against hers. But something checks her disclosure that day. She puts off the king's curiosity by promising to tell him to-morrow, if he and Haman will dine with her again. Whether the delay that proved so opportune be the contrivance of fiction, or part of the romance of facts, it occasions a surprising prelude to the impending crisis.

Chance after chance thickens the plot. That night the king happened to be sleepless, and one read to him from the history of the realm. It happened, again, that the part read recorded Mordecai's discovery of the palace plot, and also that the king bethought himself to ask if he had been rewarded. It happened, too, that Haman had been advised to rid himself at once of Mordecai, and came to ask for the death-warrant, when, again, it happened that the king spoke first:

“What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor?” Naturally thinking, “That means me,” the audacious favorite proposes to set the man on the king’s horse, wearing the royal crown and robes, and to conduct him through the city by the hand of a chief nobleman, proclaiming his merit. Where else is there so striking a picture of that

“Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself,  
And falls on the other”?

“Make haste, and do as thou hast said to Mordecai the Jew.” So narrowly does Mordecai escape all, to win all! With such presentiment of fate comes Haman to the banquet again, where Esther, apprised, no doubt, of the new turn of affairs, now confidently awaits her enemy. Short, sharp, terrible, the ensuing crisis in which he falls, like a Satan from heaven to the pit

In the fourth act Esther achieves her most difficult task, reversing the royal decree for her people’s destruction, which was constitutionally irreversible. Such is the practical inconvenience which besets any theory of infallibility in king or pope. Her tears and pleas avail to nullify the decree by an edict authorizing resistance to its execution. Here

she discovers how well a higher power had wrought for her by determining Haman's lot to a day remote enough for her effective intervention. The moral meets us throughout the story, how the wicked must beware of, while the good may hope in, those incalculable elements of God's world which men call chance. In these the "divinity that shapes our ends" appears, however unmentioned his name.

A moral difficulty emerges for us in the fifth act, and its account of Esther's final triumph. It seems a sanguinary demand she makes: "Let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows." But is this mere cruelty, or a precaution against revenge? For thus the Jews' act in killing the men received an intimidating sanction from the royal order for the gibbeting of the corpses. At any rate, we must remember that it is but two centuries, as Macaulay reminds us, since leaders of Parliamentary opposition were liable to pay the forfeit of defeat upon the scaffold, and Cromwell thought it a military necessity to put an Irish garrison to the sword. There is a chord in the book that vibrates to the spirit of revenge, but need not therefore be deemed to have been strung by it.

The open questions of the origin of the Purim feast, and of the historical probabilities of the narrative, do not affect the literary or the moral value of the book. Its right to a place in the canon was early contested. Luther disparaged it as full of "heathen naughtiness." Bleek declares that "no other book of the Old Testament is so far removed from the spirit of the Gospel." Dr. Glad-den regards it as "absolutely barren of religious ideas or suggestions." But so Christlike a man as Dean Stanley thus gives his judgment: "The story of Esther, glorified by the genius of Handel and sanctified by the piety of Racine, is not only a material for the noblest and the gentlest of meditations, but a token that in the daily events — the unforeseen chances — of life, in little unremembered acts, in the fall of a sparrow, in the earth bringing forth fruit of herself, God is surely present. The name of God is not there, but the work of God *is*."



THE BOOK OF JOB AS LITERATURE.





## VI.

### THE BOOK OF JOB AS LITERATURE.

BY JOHN F. GENUNG, PH. D.,

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WHEN the great French organist Guilmant was in our country a few years ago, a person coming from one of his recitals was overheard to remark: "Oh, yes, I suppose I ought to call it wonderful; but there was n't any *tune* to it." The remark showed that the man's standard of music was a simple popular melody like "Home, Sweet Home" or "Onward, Christian Soldiers," which he had perhaps expected to hear played with the assured skill of a master, or embellished with unheard-of effects of harmony and instrumentation. At all events, what he had heard had evidently not found him, had not spoken to an inner need of his plebeian taste.

Let us not be too ready to sneer at this man. His implicit demand for a tune was reasonable and natural; it was, in fact, the universal demand.

We all require in music that is to have power over us, that it shall say something to our hearts, shall awaken some melody that already pulsates within us. It must have a tune in order to have meaning. We require the analogue of this in any work of literature that is to be vital in us; the poem or the story must have some definite melody that calls forth a responsive throb from that inner place where our hopes, our ideals, our chastenings are, else all its splendor of word and imagery is so much empty display. In conceding this, however, we have by no means condemned the organist for his failure to reach his vulgar hearer; nor do we thereby reproach the great author because his audience, though fit, is few. The hearer needs to be tuned up, not the musician down. There is a region of truest melody, of loftier utterance, to which he has never ascended. He is like the valet who brings to the view of heroism only his narrow valet-soul; he can contain only according to his capacity; all beyond is meaningless. If he were larger in life, deeper in spirit, wealthier in nature, out of that wilderness of tone that he now hears so unappreciatively would emerge a melody greater than he has ever conceived; he would find himself listening with responsive heart, as many another

hearer has listened, to a strain from the deep music of humanity.

The Book of Job contains some of the profoundest world-music ever chanted; but the melody, the tune of it, has rarely been heard in its real greatness and compass. And the reason is, I think, because men have generally brought to it too small a soul, or because they have contemplated it, not from our universal nature, but from some one narrow side. If we approach it with a dogmatic soul which has an ear only for systems of doctrine or evidences of inspiration; if we approach it with a prosaic soul which sticks fast in questions of dead fact or of the authenticity of documents; if we bring to it merely the homiletic soul which can recognize nothing but texts for sermons, we get something indeed, for the book is rich on many sides, but the great undertone of its central melody is not for us any more than if it were a thing without life giving sound. Such approaches as these are concerned merely with the poem's outworks; they do not find the throb of its heart. Nor can we rightly appreciate it until we bring to it not only all that is in us, but that is in us as enlarged and purified. By this I do not mean that we must be learned in order to read it; the learning we need

is just that experience of trial and spiritual chastening which awaits every earnest-hearted man. Thus the language that the Book of Job speaks is the language of the universal thinking and feeling humanity; or, in other words, the language of the best literature; such language as is pressed out of the world's Dantes and Shakespeares and Miltons. "Literature," says Mr. John Morley, "consists of all the books — and they are not so many — where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form." Apply such a definition as this to the Book of Job, and you will find that the book still retains in enhanced significance all the good that other methods of approach have yielded, while also it gains beyond expression in its meaning for our common human nature. It becomes, as Carlyle has defined it, an "all men's book;" we recognize in it the pulsating soul of the wide world before that soul has shut itself up in prejudice of belief or narrowness of doctrine, and yet after it has been so "salted by fire" as to be deeply aware of the mystery of existence. Thus the straightforward literary study of the book proves to be not only the simplest, but the broadest, freest, most natural and comprehensive. By it the great poem is brought in from

the remote regions where ecclesiasticism and erudition have forced it to moulder, to the wide plains, or rather table-lands, of all men's experience, to dwell with them every day, a vital and upholding influence. By it we interpret the book most nearly in the spirit of the book itself; which in truth is the only adequate standard of interpretation.

Such a literary approach invests every part and procedure of the poem, matter and form alike, with a new and transfiguring significance.

In its form — the splendor of its passion and imagery, the purity of its poetic diction, the fine articulation of its structure, the unity and continuity of its embodied idea — it yields in no respect to the most disciplined skill of the modern man of letters. Whatever age produced it was certainly an age in which the literary art had attained not only a high but a well-rounded development. If we do not linger further on its artistic form here, however, it is because it seems better to devote our space to considering the great effects which, by virtue of its art, real though hidden, it produces on those for whom it was intended; those readers to whom literature is not so much a form as a power. Even the study of literary forms soon pushes out into a region scholastic and technical,

leaving the all-men's plane. The reader addressed by universal literature cares not so much that a sonnet contains fourteen lines as that it embodies a fruitful thought; not so much that a great work is in poetry as that it is inspiring and uplifting. He can, however, walk with its protagonist; he can respond to the march of its action; he can share in its attitude toward life and nature and God and the unseen. Let us see how these great literary potencies appear in the Book of Job.

Take the great personage in which all the storm of word and action centres, the patriarch himself. "There are great personalities," says the writer already quoted, "who march through history with voices like a clarion trumpet and something like the glitter of swords in their hands. . . . Contact with them warms and kindles the mind." The remark applies not only to the world of actual fact but to that truer history which we call literature. Prometheus and *Œdipus*, Lear and Othello, are real and vital existences to us, teaching us by their great experiences no less truly than if we could visit their birthplaces and record their lives. So is Job, the Hebrew Prometheus; and the greatness of his patience, the sublimity of his allegiance to the godlike, are affected no whit by the question

whether we can find that city of the Hauran where he sat with the elders in the gate or not. It is as a great epical hero that he lives for us and for history. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord," was Saint James's lesson from the book; it may stand as the great object-lesson for the ages: as Othello stands for a noble heart tortured by jealousy; as Macbeth, in a manner wholly apart from his historical existence, stands in Shakespeare's pages for an ambitious soul dallying with and yielding to temptation. In such a gallery of great lives and passions the patriarch of Uz is to be counted among the most eminent. In calling him an epical hero I am not touching the comparatively idle question whether the poem is epic or dramatic. That question belongs to the outworks of the study. But what is of central importance is that here we have a man like ourselves, giving utterance to our most agonized thoughts, fearlessly approaching the mystery that encompasses us all, and conquering therefrom a character, a strength of honest manhood, that once gained may always stand the needy world in good stead. Such a conception as this is epic, whatever the outward form of the poem; the hero, with his words and acts, builds a veritable epos for

the centuries to enshrine among their great spiritual possessions.

Take again the action of the poem, the melody, so to speak, that most deeply determines its significance. An unduly narrow view that is which regards it as a religious debate on the question why God allows the righteous to suffer, — a view that raises the action no higher than the dogmatic standard of Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar. But there is a great conflict of character going on, an action uttered between the lines which is sublimer than they have souls to see. It is the battle between the seeking for self and the seeking for the divine, between service for wages and service for love. Job on his ash-heap, in darkness and misery, groaning with disease, and deserted as an accursed being by friends, remains absolutely honest with himself and loyal to his ideal of the godlike, even against God Himself as it seems, until his faith battles its way to victory in the survival of good and right beyond the tomb. Thus in pain and conflict is discovered the great Newtonian law of the spiritual life, that the true service of God is not work for reward; it is a heart-loyalty, a hunger after God's presence, which survives loss and chastisement; which in spite of contradictory seeming cleaves to



what is godlike as the needle seeks the pole; and which reaches up out of the darkness and hardness of this life to the light and love beyond.<sup>1</sup> In the presence of such an action, the mere debate on the question why the righteous suffer is so small a part that it sinks to insignificance; it is only the wordy vehicle whereby the littleness of men, their false dignity, their hidebound traditions, their dogmatic intolerance, their vanity of knowledge, beat against the great rock-soul of the patriarch as he wages his battle for disinterested love. This central theme is for all men; in it is vitally involved the spiritual evolution of manhood. An epic for the world it is, therefore, not for theologian or scholar or Jew or Christian alone; a song for humanity, with the largeness, the sanity, the sublime beauty of universal literature.

An eye that so clearly discerns spiritual things as does that of the author of this Book of Job may be expected to look out steadily and truly into the world of nature. Accordingly we find here some of the greatest nature-poetry ever written, — poetry that reveals a keen eye for the beautiful, and es-

<sup>1</sup> The writer begs to refer to a little book of his, "The Epic of the Inner Life" (Boston, 1891), from which (page 20) the above sentence is quoted.

pecially for the sublime in the world, for the wonders of the rocks and the wildness of the wastes, for cloud and snow and hail, for the power and wisdom displayed in animal life, for the grandeur of the seas and the heavens. Ancient and solemn the diction, but underneath it is a spirit of accurate observation, of unconventional fidelity to fact, which we too lightly think was first brought to expression by Wordsworth and Tennyson. In it all, too, is an insight which pierces beyond the phenomenal to the divine soul of all things; so that it is like nature as viewed by a celestial visitant, who sees not the mere outside, but those inner qualities that are struggling to make themselves visible through our muddy vesture of decay. It is the true nature-poetry, because it sees the world of nature folded in the arms of its Creator and everywhere obedient to His will.

In the same way the spirit of poetry, of the universal human heart, pulsates in all its approach to the greater mysteries of life and death. In the theme that forms the profound undertone of the world's most solemn literature — the theme of that Power which holds us in a grasp unevadable, which casts down and builds up, slays and makes alive as it will, — the heart of our author beats in unison

with the heart of the world, giving no oracular utterance as from the mountain of absolute revelation, but sending forth the cry of those who see through a glass, darkly, blinking nothing of the terror and the dread, yet in the face of it all assuming that attitude which best befits us as we enter the cloud, and which, for life and character, is the true solution of the world's enigma. It is much that from the depth of inexplicable mystery one voice has learned to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." No greater utterance has ever illumined the pages of literature.

Such is a hint at some of the things which the Book of Job reveals when studied as a monument of the world's literature. Its melody is solemn and sublime, requiring the chastened ear to hear; but, rightly heard, it strikes the deepest chords of the human and the divine.

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