

This Darkness will not endure, and the symbols of God and of his truths that have been collected and sifted through the ages, will grow again in the soil of the soul refreshed by the frosts of a spiritual winter: the symbolism of the Mass, of the Holy Eucharist, of candles even, those glimmering and fragile symbols of our equally fragile faith. Whilst the dogmas and dogmatic facts will have a richer and deeper content, a new and more ethereal light shining upon them, now no longer the light of natural admiration for a beautiful thing, but the true light of faith, hidden and slender, but so beautiful as to make just earthly beauty seem almost ugly.

Christ is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, Christ the God made Man, made visible, for us to feed our senses, those senses which at first take too much to themselves and then are purified; for us to feed our minds, which again take too much self delight and again in their turn are purified, not abandoned, for Christ is the Alpha and Omega, Christ knowable by sense and mind.

THE BOOK OF JOB ¹

BY

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THE books of the Hebrew Bible may be divided into three groups: the Torah, the Prophets and the 'Writings'. This latter part is made up of works composed, collected or published for the most part after the return from exile to Babylon. One of the books it contains has as its title the single word *Job*. It is the name of a person who from the very first lines is presented to us as a just man, a believer, one who is rich and fortunate in life. The reader then leaves earth to catch a glimpse of what is taking place in heaven. Job is accused by Satan of self-interest in his piety. Yahweh allows Satan to afflict Job in the first instance in his material possessions and his family. Job accepts this trial. Still sceptical in the face of this proof of disinterestedness, Satan obtains from Yahweh permission to strike Job in his person, by disease. Job again submits. Three of his friends arrive to comfort him: Eliphaz the Themanite, Baldad the Suhite and Sophar the Naamathite. In their presence Job begins to speak. The prose narrative then ceases abruptly to give place to *poetic dialogue*.

¹ Being the first chapter of a book, *Job*, published by Les Editions du Cerf; here translated by K. Pond.

Job begins by giving vent to his suffering in a long complaint and then enters into a discussion with his friends. Three times in succession each friend has his say and on each occasion Job replies. They argue about the unfortunate man's culpability. When they are at last silent, after a long monologue by Job a new character comes on the scene: Eliu the Buzite, who in several speeches once more puts Job in the witness-box. No one interrupts. After Eliu Yahweh himself speaks. When Yahweh concludes Job realises that he has been wrong in arguing with, and calling in question divine Wisdom. The prose narrative then recommences. Yahweh heals Job of his disease and restores to him all his possessions. We learn that he died full of happiness in extreme old age.

The book of Job is like no other in the Bible. Its beginning is like that of an historical book. But the important place occupied by poetry in it makes us wonder whether it is an account of a real argument comparable, for instance, to that of Joan of Arc with her judges at the tribunal of Rouen. It does of course occur in the lives of Moses, David or the prophets that some individual breaks into poetry, but such poetry is always relatively short, for instance the song of Miriam, Moses's sister, on the occasion of the crossing of the Red Sea, or David's elegy on the death of Saul. There is no instance in the Bible of very long dialogues in poetic form taking place between the historical characters of the story. From this it may be concluded that the book of Job is a *drama*.

This does not necessarily mean that Job is an entirely imaginary person. The inspired author could have chosen a historical personage as hero of his poem, as Racine has done with Esther and Athalie. In this case two problems of criticism will arise: at what period did the author of the drama live and when did his hero live?

It is impossible to give definite dates. The drama of Job is anonymous. Nowhere, in the Bible or elsewhere, has any indication been found which would enable this poet, unknown like so many other writers of Biblical antiquity, to be identified. Where he lived is not known. He has completely hidden his identity behind his work. One can only guess that he was a highly cultured Jew who seems to have travelled, to have known Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula and perhaps the north of Arabia.

Can one at least date the work? That is not possible either, for all the chronological data are missing. All that is possible, by comparison with other books of the Bible, is to fix *very approximately* the period in which the book of Job appeared. Dhorme gives this period as between 500 and 450 B.C., for the book seems to have been influenced by the writings of the prophet Zacharias

(later than 520 B.C.) and to have been known to Malachias, whose prophecy has been dated about 450 B.C. Numerous other critics, in particular Budde and Hölcher, are less definite. The latter places the book between 400 and 200 B.C.

It is impossible to say whether the author of the drama regarded the personage of Job as historical or purely fictitious. Nowhere does he decide this question for us any more than Sophocles pronounces on the existence of Oedipus or Electra.

Two references to the person of antiquity known as Job occur in chapter xiv of the book of Ezechiel.² We read there: 'And if these three men, Noe, Daniel³ and Job shall be in it (i.e. the land): they shall deliver their own souls by the justice. . . .' (v. 14). Apart from the Bible the name of Job has also been discovered under the form 'Aiaab' mentioned in the letters of El Amarna, the correspondence of the petty kings of Canaan with the Pharaohs during the fourteenth century B.C. Dhorme points out that we even have a letter from this king Aiaab to Pharaoh. Several Jobs existed, then, and the author of the drama must have re-echoed the tradition relative to one of them.

At what time did the Biblical hero live? It is obvious from the Prologue that the author of the drama intends us to regard the action as taking place in the time of the Patriarchs, i.e. in the first half of the second millenium B.C. Job would seem to be a contemporary of Abraham or Jacob. More than a thousand years, then, separate the author from his hero. This was necessary. The Greek tragedians wrote their poems around the heroic figures of the Atrides or the Ladacides. And Racine insisted on the necessity of this lapse of time for the dramatist: 'It may be said that respect for heroes increases in the measure in which they are remote from us: *maior e longinque reverentia*'. Similarly the writer of Ecclesiasticus, in presenting his book, made use long after the event of the title and fabulous prestige of Solomon, from whom he was separated by more than 800 years.

Where did this person we know as Job live? The beginning of the Prologue affirms that it was in the land of Hus. The region can be tracked down. Travellers and Moslem pilgrims who today take the train from Damascus to Medina stop right out in the north Arabian desert at a station called Tebouk, to the south-east of the gulf of Akaba. The place is marked on the map. Moreover the district has become famous through the raids of Colonel Lawrence

² The second reference will be found in v. 20 (Tr.).

³ Daniel is a Phoenician hero, known from the texts of Ras Shamra.

during the 1914-18 war at the time of the Arab revolt. This is the ancient land of Hus formerly inhabited by Edomites. Only nomads could subsist there. The oases alone were occupied by villages or small towns similar to those in southern Algeria or Tunisia.

This region is the home country of Job, who was an Edomite. His name is Edomite too. It means the enemy. No symbolic meaning should be looked for in it.

The friends of Job were also Edomites. According to Dhorme, Theman, the place of origin of Eliphaz and a city well known to the prophets, must have been situated on the plateau known today as El Hesma 'which stretches from Tebouk to the Maan Aqaba road'. It is in this neighbourhood, too, that we must situate Suhi. Naamah, the home country of Sophar, would today be represented—still according to Dhorme—by the Djebel and Na'amah, 'a little more than 37 miles to the east of Tebouk'. Lastly, the town of Buze, associated with the Theman oasis by Jeremiah, was also situated in the country of Idumea.

Job and his friends are not, then, Israelites. They are reputed to have lived before Moses and not to have had the benefit of divine revelation. They are unaware of the special name of Yahweh and so never use it.

It should be added that the author and his hero belong to those groups of Near East philosophers of antiquity known as 'the Sages'.

From very remote times there had been living not only in the royal courts of Thebes and Babylon but in all those of the East, scribes skilled in diplomacy, in natural science and moral philosophy, which at that time were not differentiated in any way from theological and religious knowledge. These sages were the only people who knew how to read and write, who knew the traditions of the Ancients well, who were versed in the compilation of archives. They understood the rules of poetic form. They formed a caste of very influential intellectuals. The Egyptian Sages were the Pharaoh's customary advisers. They wrote treatises on morals which were full of fine distinctions, certain of which, such as the *Wisdom of Amen-em-ope* or the *Wisdom for Meri-Ka-ra*, for instance, are still extant. The Sages of Israel wrote works such as *Proverbs* or the *Ecclesiasticus of Ben Sidrach*. Now the Sages of Edom were famous throughout the whole of the East. Moreover the Sages of all countries formed a sort of international caste. They liked to travel. It has been noted that the author of Job had some acquaintance with Egypt. He spoke Aramaic as well as Hebrew and perhaps also Egyptian. He did not suffer from too narrow a sense of race prejudice. It was in no way distasteful to

him to eulogise an Edomite. The drama of Job is the tranquil story of a Sage conversing with other Sages; the author is himself a Sage.

But it is important not to misunderstand. The characters in the drama of Job whom we now know to have lived in the oases of Edom at the time of the Patriarchs do not behave at all as contemporaries of Abraham but as if they were contemporaries of the author who, except in the Prologue, was not setting out to write history supported by local colour. In much the same way Racine placed on the lips of Esther utterances worthy of a queen of Versailles. There is nothing which should shock us in this. It is a rule of creative dramatic art. The Hebrew poet has used these old Sages of Edom as instruments to express his own anguish, just as in the present day Anouilh makes use of the characters of Antigone and Eurydice. Moreover Job contains relatively few anachronisms, fewer by far than *Esther* or the dramas of Anouilh.

Can one speak of the author of Job as if it were a question of *more than one individual*? As we have seen the drama is preceded by a prologue and followed by an epilogue, both written in prose. Have this prologue and epilogue come from the same poet's pen as the discourses? If Job were not the only drama which the Bible contains, if we knew that it was the custom of Hebrew dramatists to preface their work by 'Ypothesis', the question would not arise. Again if one were considering some work of Western literature, its unity would only be called into question for very important reasons. But interpolation was a habit of Biblical writers. The Hebrew scribes of antiquity glossed the manuscripts of their libraries at leisure. They did not, as in critical editions of the present day, arrange their notes outside the text—they inserted them in it—and not only their notes but an entire new treatise was engrafted upon the original. Is the dramatic poem of Job a magnificent graft upon an older prose tale?

Put on their guard by this alternation of prose and poetry, critics have noted in the drama itself the presence of what one might presume to term other points of interpolation. The speeches of Eliu do seem to be a section introduced from elsewhere which did not form part of the primitive framework of the drama. The discourses of Yahweh have also been thought to form an addition. In these speeches certain parts have been noted which seem to be additions, for instance the descriptions of the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Finally, in the first part of the drama Job breaks off his argument with his friends in order to eulogise Wisdom (xxviii). The passage is a very fine one but it seems to lack any direct bearing on the subject. There again the impression is given of a break in

the normal development of the poem and of an extraneous interpolation.

It is true that the Church teaches that the whole of the book of Job is inspired and that she offers it for our religious veneration in the actual form in which it is. She has not, however, pronounced as to its being the work of a single author. So long as they respect the inspiration of the work as a whole, she leaves the critics free to build up their hypotheses. She knows that Hebrew methods of composition were not quite ours.

This matter of the book's being the work of a single author would be of only slight importance if it were not that it affects the interpretation given to the drama which changes completely according to whether one attributes the discourses of Yahweh or of Eliu to the principal author of Job or refuses to credit him with their authorship.

Three solutions have been offered to these critical problems:

Père Prat⁴ and Monsieur Bigot⁵ defend the theory of the drama's being the work of a single author. Leaving aside the question of the connection between the prose framework and the poetic discourses, and following the German exegete Budde, they attribute the speeches of Eliu to the poet who wrote the entire drama. And—still following Budde—they consider these discourses of Eliu to be *the key to the entire poem*. According to this solution Eliu is the mouthpiece of the author himself in the sense that the work as a whole must be interpreted in accordance with these speeches, containing as they do the solution to the problem of Job's suffering—the suffering of a proud man who has tried to probe too deeply into divine Wisdom and who has rebelled against his trials.

Against this exegesis which holds that the book is a strict unity, an entire school of critics subdivides the work, on the contrary, into successive strata, the work of numerous editors 'like Homer or the Sagas', says Cheyne. Bertie, again,⁶ breaks up the book of Job into six fragments. He distinguishes: 1. The story of Job in prose, comprising the Prologue and the Epilogue; 2. Job's lament, consisting of the monologues which begin and end the cycle of speeches (iii and xxix to xxxi); 3. The dialogue between Job and his friends; 4. Eliu's speech; 5. Yahweh's discourses; 6. The Wisdom poem (xxviii). He does not hesitate to proffer a text of the poem dislocated in such a way that each of these parts is wrested from the whole and interpreted separately. Dhorme has

⁴ Author of the article 'Job' in the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*.

⁵ Author of the article 'Job' in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*.

⁶ Cf. Bertie, *Le poème de Job*, Paris, 1929.

rightly protested against 'these masterpieces of brutal vivisection from which literary criticism has suffered so badly. . . .'

Finally there remain the moderate solutions; such as that envisaged, for instance, by Dhorme or that of Hölscher, the two best commentators on Job at the present day.

For Hölscher the prologue and epilogue are the utilisation and recomposition by the author of Job of an older traditional source as a framework for the dramatisation which contains the dialogues of Job and his friends and *one* of the speeches of Yahweh. It is in the course of a later rearrangement that the passages in Yahweh's discourse (later divided into several discourses) describing the ostrich, the crocodile and the hippopotamus, and the Wisdom poem were added. Finally a second editor added the speeches of Eliu.

Dhorme's hypothesis is original and fascinating. He suggests that the drama of Job has passed through three successive stages. The author first wrote the Prologue and the cycles of speeches. The work then ended with the final monologue of Job (xxxi, 40). Later, *the author himself* revised and completed his drama by adding to it the Wisdom poem, the discourses of Yahweh and the Epilogue. Finally, *another poet* of a somewhat later date, a disciple of the former, inserted Eliu's speeches.

In both these hypotheses the unity of the work remains almost intact; but it becomes impossible to regard the speeches of Eliu as anything other than a chance development and the key to the poem must not be looked for in these speeches. 'The way in which Eliu is presented; his disappearance without leaving the slightest trace, the secondary character of his intervention, the purpose and method of his arguments, the very personal and aramaicising colour of his style, are so many indications that the writer is working upon an already existing book and introducing a new character whose rôle will be to refute certain exaggerations of expression on the part of the principal speaker. In the remainder of the book we have noticed two successive phases. First the prologue and poetic dialogue, then the discourses of Yahweh, the Wisdom poem and the epilogue. The third phase is that in which a new inspired writer, not content to recopy or re-edit the original work, completes it and gives it its final form which is that of our canonical book'.⁷

When the question of authorship has been settled, the composition of the book seems to conform more or less to a definite type. The three friends who on three separate occasions each express themselves in speeches which are almost identical in length and which

⁷ Dhorme, *Job*, p. lxxii.

fit into the framework of Job's lament at the beginning of the book and his monologues at the end, the whole prefaced and concluded by the prologue and the epilogue and presided over by divine intervention, constitutes a harmonious whole which almost conforms to the canon of Greek perfection and contrasts with the habits of unbridled freedom in composition that one usually attributes to Biblical writers. To mutilate this is a pity. Moreover to make Eliu's speeches the key to the poem would seem to put forward a false interpretation. We are thus left to adopt Dhorme's hypothesis; at the same time we should be ready to admit that the prose narrative perhaps existed before the drama and that the poet has contented himself with adapting this to his purpose. Perhaps we must also recognise that there is in the Wisdom poem an interpolation of a date somewhat later than that of the magnificent work in which it is awkwardly inserted.

The work of criticism has not been confined to an attempt to throw light on the composition of Job. In many instances it has been necessary to strive to correct the Hebrew text which appears to be corrupt. Certain lines appear to be glosses added by copyists. Moreover one sometimes has the impression that the order of certain lines of poetry—or even of certain passages—has been interfered with. Such displacements must have occurred in Job's initial lament and this is unfortunate. In the third series of speeches the text of Sophar's final intervention is missing. It is possible that a part of his speech has been given to Job. It is certain that the end of the third series has been mutilated and damaged. In suggesting certain displacements of texts the critics are striving to make good, at least partially, the ravages of time on this great work. They are also trying to throw light on its obscure or difficult lines and the allusions to which we have no clue.

These mutilations of the text of Job and the obscurity which overcasts certain lines ought not to surprise us. It is the common fate which befalls the writings of antiquity be they Graeco-Latin or Hebrew. All have more or less suffered from the mistakes, slips and carelessness of the pen of several generations of scribes. We are fortunate if the *chefs d'œuvre* of antiquity do not come down to us hopelessly mutilated or in mere fragments, as has been the case with so many literary productions of Egypt and Assyria.

Translated by K. POND.