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Edited with an Introduction by A. Nairne
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Edited with an Introduction
by
A. NAIRNE, D.D.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

from the engravings by William Blake

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INTRODUCTION

A BIBLE is an edited collection of sacred writings ancient and modern. The Hebrew Bible is in three volumes, Law Prophets Writings. The Law contains what are called The five Books of Moses in the English version. The Prophets contain the prophetic histories, Joshua Judges Samuel Kings, and the Books of Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel with The XII (or Minor Prophets). Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah and Daniel, belong to the Writings, with the rest of the books which in the English Bible are translated from the Hebrew. Our Apocrypha represents the additions which were read in their Septuagint, or Greek Bible, by the Jewish Church at Alexandria. For the rest of the Old Testament our A.V. and R.V. are translated directly from the Hebrew, but follow the arrangement of the Septuagint which had been conserved in the Latin Vulgate, the heritage of the medieval Church in the West. This obscures the indications of date which the three volumes of the Hebrew Bible afford, and also creates prejudices about authorship concerning which the Septuagint makes many assertions where the Hebrew is silent. The Hebrew has no such title as The five Books of Moses, nor does it tell anything about the date or provenance of Job. To speak generally, the Hebrew Bible leaves large freedom for exercise of Higher Criticism.

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Indeed its three volumes indicate roughly the same dates for whole classes of books as criticism discovers. The Law is a collection made by the Jewish Church and ratified as canonical during the Captivity, as the narrative of Ezra tells. The Prophets were afterwards combined with the Law, though old-fashioned Jews (Sadducees) did not recognise their canonical value. This Prophetical collection, including with the Prophecies the Prophetical Histories, invests those Histories with historical authority superior to the ecclesiastical retrospect of Chronicles. As to the Scriptures, S. Luke xxiv suggests that in the first century A.D. these were still outside the Apostolic Bible, except the Psalms, the Prayer Book of the Synagogue, to which with Law and Prophets the risen Lord appeals when he explains the sufferings of Messiah to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

The Exile was the Bible-making era. Bible-making was collecting selecting editing. The Law was the final edition of age-old continuously developed law and historical tradition. The Prophets were the collected arranged and edited historical documents of the monarchic period, and the most precious part of that collection were the Prophets' own utterances, together with echoes from their successors and notes of narrative and liturgic hymns: fragrant readings for synagogue devotion. The Writings included Psalms Proverbs, collections of ancient poetry and wisdom combined with later work of like kind and tinged with contemporary feeling.

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On the whole this volume of the Jewish Bible represents the mind of the Exile; the most likely date for the composition of any book in this volume is the Exile; and Job may be thus dated.

This period was largely dominated by the Law; but far from wholly so. Faith in one true living God, for which Prophets had contended as it seemed in vain, was now the religion of Israel. The Prophets might seem in their own days to fail: but Israel was deaf to their doctrine because Israel was playing so strenuously a warrior nation's part in making history. That history, in its deed and suffering, clashed and combined with the prophetic preaching to create a new heart in the period of defeat reflection penitence and hope. Through the exilic and post-exilic era Israel was broadening and burgeoning. The Jewish Church was inaugurated and devoted to the proper work of the Church, worship scholarship salvation of the heathen, trust in God's purpose for the world and in the vocation of God's chosen people to carry out his purpose; and all this practically ordered and organised by Law, divine law, The Law of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Law as a bond of unity and permanence holds together the variety of exilic faith. The Psalter is the symbol of a deeper union, the catholic piety of all pure souls. Another element is Apocalypse, that impulse of a later Prophecy toward a more definite Messianic hope and therewith to that concentration of eternal life into such a doctrine of resurrection as appears in Daniel.

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Yet another is the rewriting of ancient history and its completion by contemporary record, as in Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah. And yet another is the reflective questioning Wisdom literature to which the book of Job belongs. This Wisdom, the philosophy of the Hebrews, was no new thing. In certain Psalms and Proverbs earlier forms of its expression are preserved, but it deepened and widened in the exilic period. It cared but secondarily for law and ritual. It recognised the piety of other nations, the naturally Christian souls. It delighted in the life and mystery of bird and beast and plant, in the loveliness and terrors of creation. It tolerated criticism of orthodox beliefs: in the words of an old-fashioned Jew, who was not a friend to all the new ideas, it put truth above all else and would strive for it unto death. And yet, as the Psalter drew all hearts together by the Spirit of worship, so charity directed truth in all disputes of Schools. The men of Wisdom were gentle scholars who listened to the still sad music of humanity, yet stood forth uncompromising champions of the oppressed and defenders of perplexed conscience and sometimes of moral failures. They were S. Lukes of the Old Testament. Into this class, exilic Wisdom interacting with various literary habits of the long exilic period, the Book of Job seems to fall quite naturally.

Job is an old story which has been refashioned to new purpose. It had always reached beyond the Hebrew nation: Job is of Uz, his Friends from the wide wide

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East. In the poem of the Captivity Job himself may sometimes remind us of afflicted Israel and the suffering Servant of the LORD, but he is rather a symbol of Mansoul, of his doubtful doom and his dependence on God.

The poem enlarges deepens purifies the idea of God. Even Prophets had proclaimed Jahveh, the LORD, too naively, like an earthly king, though King of kings: only in some chapters of the latter part of Isaiah is there anything quite like that divine infinity, out of which flows Job's conversion: the poem is the story of the new creation of what is described in the 1st Epistle of S. Peter as "conscience of God".

The story is a story. Job stands as symbol yet is vividly presented as a person. Actual events conversations characters form the theme through which strange harmonies develop. As in *Paradise Lost* the meaning is a battle for the soul of man, but that meaning emerges from the adventures of protagonists in heaven and earth which engross our wondering expectation.

This is the plan of the Book:

(I) Prologue. A scholar's adaptation of Hebrew folklore to a poetic dream shews Jahveh as King holding court in heaven. Sons of God, the guild of ministering angels, attend. The Satan—a title not a proper name—the Adversary, no malignant rebel but the Trier of Mansoul, comes with the rest, and is commissioned to try Job, a saint worth trial to the uttermost. Then Job's afflictions crowd upon him. His three Friends come to

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comfort him, Eliphaz the gentle, Bildad the learned, Zophar rough and glib of tongue.

(II) The fourfold argument in three rounds of interlocution between Job and the three Friends. The language rises from the plain narrative of Prologue to rhythmic grandeur, which Job enriches with ever deeper thought and bolder sincerity as he interposes between the successive orations of the Friends, turning more and more away from them to God, estranged though God seems to persist. In the first round the Friends offer the conventional assurance of popular theology that no good man can succumb to evil at the good hand of God. But Job's downright refusal to allow this trust which experience contradicts brings (2) the reflection that no man is truly good; that Job shares the common guilt of original sin; his claim to be blameless is itself sinful; hence his affliction. Again Job's fierce protest, with his mysterious appeal to God against God, God within against God in appearance, leads to (3) accusation of Job as guilty of definite and serious wickedness. Job rebuts the charge, not without wrath against the Friends and God. Bildad concludes in a short speech of dignity beauty and reverence. Zophar is already silenced and Job usurps his turn, repeating the denunciations Zophar had poured forth and applying these to the Friends themselves as the real sinners who will find a nemesis indeed.

Then (III) Job "takes up his own parable", opening with a lyric Hymn of Wisdom, in which he sings the

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mystery of God's transcendence in calmer strain part hopeful part resigned wholly yearning. Thence he passes into solemn declaration of innocence, and appeals to God for answer.

And (IV) the LORD answers out of the tempest, bidding Job set his littleness over against the immensity of the universe, yet testifying to a divine lovingkindness which cares for beasts as well as men. And Job submits. But the LORD goes on and pictures—for his admiration or humiliation, at any rate for his conscience sake the two huge brutes Leviathan and Behemoth—and now Job is humbled to the dust yet cleaves not to it. He survives weak but new born: the drama of a soul's conversion is finished.

Only a happy Epilogue is added (V): Job's restoration to the visible favour of God; like the Prologue a piece of the old story, and written like the Prologue in a scholar's delightful simplified prose.

This adaptation in Prologue and Epilogue of old tradition, its artistic juncture with the dialectic, "that conversation between friends directed to a noble end", is part of a reflective subtlety which characterises dates and influences the poem.

An example will explain. Job's oracle in chapter xix has been interpreted as certain hope of life beyond the grave wherein, without flesh but in undying spirit, he will enjoy vindication; or as a still bolder hope that from the resurrection of his very flesh he shall enjoy it; or simply

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that he will recover from his illness and plainly see retribution fall upon his Friends. The word *Goel*, redeemer or avenger, is also ambiguous. It was a fierce term in ancient days for the Blood-avenger of tribal feud. In one of the three interpretations of the whole passage it would bear just that meaning, whether applied to God or perhaps not even so transformed. In the other two it is certainly applied to God and takes a far more august significance.

But repeated meditation on the whole passage makes such question secondary. The deep thing is that the old word, sudden and fierce in first utterance, becomes mysteriously holy in the reverie to which the outburst grows. And so with the rest. Fears hopes questionings, from Sheol and the Pit to Resurrection preached by Pharisees, disturbed the mind of the Exile. But Job's passion transcends such religiosities. He yearns for union with God. That union is the final end of the story; Paradise Lost and Regained.

The linguistic style is in keeping; vigorous terse luminous, worthy of the best age of Hebrew, it has been credited to an early date. Whether any modern hebraist can infer so nicely is doubtful, but there seems a difference between the exilic scholar's literary skill and the free lyric of Isaiah of Jerusalem or the author of Psalm civ.

This does not apply to chapters xxxii–xxxvii in which Elihu discourses. These are strangely writ, hard to translate, in some places hard to recognise as Hebrew

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at all. Some fine phrases in A.V. and R.V. are haz-
ardously derived from a possibly corrupt but more likely
a clumsy original. Elihu interrupts the drama. Jahveh
notices him not, Job and his Friends ignore him. He is
introduced as a younger man, and that may be a hint
that the episode has been added to the book. How,
when, by whom, it is vain to guess. He throws little
light on the indomitable faith of Job or the perversity of
the Friends. He would supersede their old-fashioned
doctrine of retribution by one of remedial chastisement.
That gives him occasion to say some beautiful things in
the Spirit of the Exhortation in the Visitation of the Sick
in the Book of Common Prayer, but he is far from the
firm lines of that happy gospelling.

Some may think that chapters xl, xli are also super-
fluous, a rhetorical exercise spoiling Jahveh's answer.
But this rhetoric is no mere exercise. The Hebrew is
magnificent. The passage from simple nature to nature
touched with mythology is in keeping with the student-
taste which characterises the poet and partly indicates
his date. And there is more than student-taste: there is
theology and inspiration. The tremendous element in
the divine care and purpose of Creation, and the im-
potence of men in the midst of such sacramental
mystery, was needed to evoke Job's complete conver-
sion, and however alien to a modern treatise of divinity,
it also served to complete the poet's doctrine of God.

Two terms are used. In Prologue Epilogue and in the

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divine answer from the tempest Jahveh is a proper name, the Name of the God of Israel, in later times though written never pronounced in reading Scripture, Adonai being read instead. Adonai was translated Kyrios and Dominus in the Greek and Latin Bibles, and that is represented in the English Bible by The LORD in capital letters, though in a few places Jehovah imperfectly indicates the Hebrew word. The other term, Elohim, is translated God. This is not a proper name but a noun in the plural which perhaps points back to earlier reverence towards the Spirits of fire flood and air, the Angels of Psalm civ, forces of Nature as we more prosaically speak. The Sons of God in the Prologue are this holy array collectively. But Elohim, in its supreme significance as God, means, more than the sum, the essentially divine source and sway of all, the One God of universal nature, of world-wide worship, the Creator. Such God did Israel's nomad ancestors worship, however imperfectly, in the desert. His temple was the all-supernal sky. No form no name was his: "I am that I am", he (not Jahveh) answered Moses. Such God no man hath seen, but in the tempest he manifested his presence. The thunder cloud was his pavilion. He rode on the angels of wind. Seraphs of fire went forth from him, and his voice was thunder. This explains the overpowering glory of Nature in the divine answer to Job from the storm. The poet carries back to the unsophisticated space of ancient religion, clearing away the imitation of human passions with which the Friends attenuate it. Not Jahveh, King of Israel, favourer of the

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elect, bound to morality by rule, not such is God above all gods, Very God. And yet at last the poet does bring in Jahveh. But it is as when the Lord Jesus bids us pray to "Our Father, which art in heaven"—a cordial metaphysic. For the Name reveals the person, vivifies the idea, and as in Isaiah xlff. is purified of limitations. The Creator is the sustainer who cares for his creatures, cares for Job. Yet his care is no petty sentiment. Man and beast, Job and Leviathan, the Very God himself, are devoted to the All beyond the selves. And Job wakes to a new mind, in dust and ashes but in communion with the One True Living God; even as a bubble on the stream of his infinite purpose, yet at one with the stream. And so the Epic closes in lovingkindness: the child has come home to the Father of all.

That is the Epic of Job; no analysis of the problem of pain, nor justification of the way of God toward man, but the story of the conversion of a soul, to be read with anxious expectation of the issue and that sympathy which man's natural yearning for God provokes.

To that end this Introduction has been somewhat discursively composed. Few notes will be given with the text. Renan's version, in scholarly French, without adornment or annotation, holds readers by its uninterrupted flow, and offers a pattern of arrangement in a few large masses. In this homely edition alternative renderings, geographical historical critical explanations will be eschewed. The text will be taken from the English R.V., but its marginal renderings will be

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adopted without comment where necessary*. That this is often necessary is shewn by Dr Driver in his very perfect small edition, than which no better guide can be desired by plain readers who wish to clear away linguistic or theological difficulties. Minute students will turn to Driver's larger edition (in Clark's International Critical Series) or the elaborate and masterful commentary of C. J. Ball (Clarendon Press).

For readers of this pocket companion to the poem as a poem, the story as a story, sacred and inspiring, no further aids need be mentioned except that series of engravings which William Blake has left as the very crown of his poetic art. The series is given in reduced scale in Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, with valuable comment by Rossetti.

A. N.

WINDSOR
September 1935

* A list of these adoptions may be useful:

xii. 6	xx. 20	xxvi. 5	xxxvi. 16
xiii. 14-19	xxi. 24	xxx. 24	„ 18
xv. 20	„ 30	xxxi. 33	xxxvii. 23
xviii. 14	xxiii. 10	xxxiv. 14	xxxviii. 36
xix. 7	„ 12	„ 18 f.	xxxix. 24
„ 17	„ 17	„ 24	xlii. 6
„ 28	xxiv. 18		

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