

X

THE HEBREW SOLUTION

THEODICY (*continued*)

WE have considered two of the constructive ideas of the Hebrew Apologia, the Divine Purpose and End and man's freedom and sin. What, in the light of their knowledge of God, did the Hebrews make of that bitter cup of outward evil of which they had to drink so deeply, in their experience of foreign conquest and captivity, as well as in those ordinary sufferings and sorrows to which all mankind is exposed? We have seen how they explained Sin. How did they explain Evil?¹

(4) There is no attempt, of course, to give any philosophic account of it. The Old Testament writers nearly always deal with concrete situations and with particular evils past, present or future. Thus the prophets are mainly concerned with the Assyrian and Babylonian dangers, and with the ultimate disaster of the Captivity, not with such generalisations as we find in the impeachments of the universe which I have cited in the opening part of this book. The main, if not the only attempt to give some general explanation of why there is so much suffering, and why, above all, there is death in a world created and ruled by

¹ I use the word in this chapter in the sense of outward as distinct from inward, or moral, evil.

God, is found in the Fall history, which Bishop Gore has described as "an inspired myth." This is, at least, as much an endeavour to show why suffering, toil and death, as well as why sin, came into the world. The essential point is that it links up sin and death, and contains the promise that one day both will be overcome.

Certainly the Hebrew mind at its highest never accepted the Stoic attitude of the higher Paganism, that the manifold evils of human existence were eternally and unconditionally decreed for mankind, and that all that man could do in presence of ineluctable fate was to keep his own spirit erect, or pass unsubdued from the world by the "open door" of suicide. The prophets, who are the true spokesmen of Israel, invariably treat the calamities that crowded so thick and fast upon their people as sorrows which, if Israel had done rightly, need never have been, which were, therefore, not God's ideal will for them, but which since they had sinned they must undergo, in order that they might repent and turn to Him again. They were, in a word, the righteous judgments of God. But there was grace behind the judgment, and always breaking through the gloom, there is the Messianic Hope. The evils which the prophets have to face, are to them not unconditionally fixed and fated. They are one and all disciplining and contingent evils, God teaching men by the consequences of their own actions.

The two conceptions with which we began, the linear interpretation of history, and the conception of sin as the abuse of man's freedom, are thus fused with the conception of outward evil and

calamity as contingent and disciplinary in the Hebrew prophets, and the ways of the almighty, just and gracious God are thereby justified to men.

Such in outline is the scheme of thought which we find in the prophets, and were it necessary for our purpose, it could be shown to underlie also the Psalms and the historical writings, and also, with certain modifications, the wisdom literature of the Old Testament as well. Beneath its infinite variety of form there is this substantial unity of view throughout the whole, springing from its view of God.

I shall briefly sketch the leading Old Testament ideas on the subject, and shall then inquire as to how far these Old Testament truths help us to deal with the riddle of the world to-day.

The whole period during which Hebrew thought on the problem of suffering and evil reached its climax, was one of profound emotional tension, and the thinking is what modern philosophy calls "existential," in the highest degree, vivid, intuitional, illuminated as by lightning flashes. Three great figures, above all, stand out from the rest to give us the full Hebrew thought on the sufferings of Israel, one of them an obscure herdsman, and the other two utterly unknown to this day by name, but known everywhere where men can think and feel at all, the authors of the Book of Job and the second Isaiah.

(a) The Book of Amos, says a notable scholar,¹ "is the most wonderful phenomenon in the history of the human spirit." He appears out of an obscure life as a "herdsman" in a land, as he

¹ Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*.

believes, ripe for judgment, and pronounces its impending doom. There have been many cranks and fanatics who have done the same since then, without anything out of the way happening, or any result following in the change of men's thought. But in the case of Amos the prophecies came true, and he initiated changes in the fundamental ideas of mankind that were radical and that are living still. We are not concerned here with the personality of Amos, however, but with the message of his book. It was addressed to a people who through a period of peace and prosperity had become slack and rotten in their morality, and who, because they kept up a punctilious observance of outward ritual, believed that God was on their side, and that their prosperity was a proof of divine favour. To this people Amos utters his terrific prophecy of coming judgment, basing it on their cruelty to the poor, their avarice and drunkenness and violence. Their claims to special favour from God because of His covenant with them are a delusion. Their privileged position darkens their guilt. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities." What are these coming punishments? Their overthrow in war, the sack and burning of their palaces, hunger in city and country, pestilence and wholesale slaughter by the sword. What gave the prophet his certainty that these things were coming upon his people? His knowledge of the moral enormities that were going on around him, and his assurance that Almighty God was just. The greater part of the book is about the sins of Israel and the coming judgments of God

upon them for having broken the Covenant, which enjoined justice, mercy and purity between men and women, rich and poor. As they have had the greater privileges, so will the doom of the chosen race be the greater. But Amos begins his prophecy by predicting a like doom to the surrounding nations: on Damascus for its cruel oppression of Gilead; on Philistia and Edom for their inhuman slave raiding; on Ammon for its outrages on women and children; on Moab for its savage desecration of the body of the King of Edom. Such inhumanities are hateful to God and cry aloud for His judgments. Now there can be no doubt whatever that this conception of doom and requital runs through practically the whole of Hebrew prophecy. It is an essential part of the prophets' conception of history, which is that moral wickedness, sooner or later, calls down divine judgment upon men, or, to use Pauline language, that sin works death.

We shall reserve meantime the question of how far this conception is taken up into the Christian revelation, and further, the question how far it is believable to-day. We are at the moment concerned simply with the mind of the Old Testament. True or false, this was certainly the prevailing way in which Israel accounted for its own national sufferings, and it was largely because of this interpretation that it was enabled to keep its faith in God through the terrible ordeal through which it was to pass in the "iron furnace" of Babylon. Had it not been for this interpretation, in all probability the whole religion would have been dissolved, there would have been no "remnant" and no return from Babylon, and Israel would

have to-day been a half-forgotten Semitic tribe, engulfed, like so many of the contemporary peoples, by the Euphrates empires. If, instead of facing the moral realities of the situation and calling their people to repentance and faith, the prophets had impeached the universe for its cruelties to its helpless victim, man, there would never have been any return from the Exile, and the whole later history of redemption could never have been. There would have been no nation to whom the Son of God could have come.

For it is clear that without the fundamental conception that sin within works sorrow, suffering and death in the world without, there could never have been the Messianic Hope. The whole motive of this hope is that the Messiah or Christ that is to be will deliver His people not only from sin, but from suffering and oppression, and give them life and happiness and freedom. Without this belief, moreover, the whole later development of apocalyptic thought would become meaningless. For the very nerve of that apocalyptic thought is that God will judge the world and save His people from the doom that will fall upon the Gentiles and the unbelieving in Israel. How radically the abandonment of this belief would alter the whole world of Christian theology it is unnecessary to show. Indeed we cannot dispense with this fundamental conception of sin and its penalty without making meaningless a large part of the thought of both the Old Testament and the New. It is one of the structural ideas not only of the prophetic conception of history, but of the whole Bible. I do not believe that we can dispense with it without disaster to

the whole Christian solution of the riddle of the world.

(b) But we may hold this and yet recognise that the Hebrew mind sometimes misapplies its principle and presses it beyond due limits. We may marvel sometimes at the rashness with which some of the prophets predicted specific judgments upon individual and national sinners against the laws of God, or the *naïveté* with which the chronicler ascribes the disasters and prosperities of Israel and Judah to the ritual orthodoxy of their monarchs.

We can do this with the greater freedom inasmuch as we find within the Old Testament itself so tremendous a protest against misapprehension of the principle as we find it in the Book of Job. This wonderful book was written by an unknown writer at least two hundred years after Amos came forth from the mountains to prophecy doom upon Israel. By general agreement it is the greatest work of literature in the Old Testament, and its thought is as noble as its form. "There is nothing like it either in the Bible or outside it," said a notable New Testament scholar, Professor Bruce, "nothing so thorough, so searching or so bold." "I call it," said Thomas Carlyle, "apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen. . . . It is our first oldest statement of the never-ending problem—man's destiny and God's way with him here on this earth. . . . Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody in the heart of mankind—so soft and great; as the summer midnight, or the world with its seas and stars." Superficial readers of the Old Testament often

think of this book as being the only book in the Hebrew literature to deal with that problem of the sufferings of mankind which is so troubling the deeper thought of our own time. In truth, as we have seen, it forms only one element in a much richer solution. Others, again, think of it as a mere rebellious protest against what is assumed to be the outworn view of the Old Testament in general, that earthly prosperity attends the righteous, and present and future doom the wicked. Strangest of all is the endeavour to class the unknown author as one of the great sceptics of Israel. Mr Lippmann here falls into the quite inexcusable blunder of saying that Job, finding the problem of undeserved suffering inexplicable, falls back in the end on the idea of "an impersonal" God. This is a mere travesty, surprising in a critic usually so well informed. The book is really one of profound faith, faith that believes though it cannot understand. Unless Job had believed that his wild protests had done injustice to God, why should he have "abased himself and repented in dust and ashes"? The book is directed not against the fundamental prophetic view of Amos and the prophets, who, be it observed, always speak of the nation, of its sins and their penalties, but against a quite illegitimate wholesale transference of that conception to the lives of individual men and women. This in Job's time seems to have been the conventional orthodox view, against whose cruel injustice Job raises his impassioned protest, reproaching those well-meaning "friends" who come to him in his grief and ruin, and "speak falsely on behalf of God." They add new injuries

to his already overwhelming sorrows, by assuming that one so afflicted must be a greater sinner than his neighbours, and by seeking to bring him to repentance in order that God may restore his fortunes.

It is probable that the ordeal of the Captivity, and the tragic fortunes of some of the noblest of Israel's leaders had deeply stirred the thought of many among the exiles, of whom the unknown author was one. His book is an example of the seriousness with which the Hebrews took the whole problem before us. It deals with only one phase of the problem, the sufferings of the righteous, and the challenge which these sufferings give to faith in God. "Job," it should be noted, does not really question the broad prophetic view, but the book unquestionably shows that the writer did not think that it completely solved the problem. Certainly the attempt to apply it in its rigour to the case of every individual sufferer awakens his passionate indignation, and it may be granted that his book made an end for good of all pious "falsehood for God." It cleared the ground by its apparent blasphemies, and so prepared the way for something deeper. But the strange and arresting thing is that the book has no clear positive answer of its own. It is true that the prologue explains the sufferings of Job as meant to give him an opportunity to display his faith and rectitude, that the Elihu speeches give as explanation the purifying effect of suffering, and that in the epilogue we see Job's fortune and home restored to him again. But it is very uncertain if these speeches belong to the original book, and it is possible that

the prologue and epilogue are an older framework on which the writer wrote his poem. In any case we do not feel that the author is nearly so deeply interested in them as in the great survey of the glorious universe which is given by the Almighty to Job in the climax of the book. To the superficial reader this panorama of the Nature world may seem an oddly irrelevant consideration. What has the glory of Nature to do with the hard lot of the righteous, we may ask. Do we not find to-day that Nature is the mystery? We forget that to Job everything in Nature was, beyond question, the work of God, and the vastness of Nature made him feel how great must be the depth of the Divine Wisdom, and how little he knew compared with the all-knowing Creator. How little he really knew! How much there was to know! How easily fuller knowledge might show God, in spite of all that seemed unjust, to be incomparably juster and kinder than Job could know. I cannot but think, too, that the author meant to show us and to depict Job as feeling; how amazingly beautiful and glorious the Nature world was, and to suggest to us how reassuring that beauty and sublimity are. They are a continual witness to us that something worth while is afoot in the vast processes of the visible world. In any case the real intuition of the book is seen in its climax, Job's humble confession that he has been rash and foolish in his judgments of God, and that he abhors himself for his blindness. We have here surely an implied assertion of faith in the perfect beauty and goodness of Almighty God. Job's main contribution to the solution of the problem is thus

twofold. The book clears a false theory out of the road, and so opens the way for a true solution. And it not only clears the way, but by its own grandeur makes us feel the vastness and mystery of the universe, and the need for humility and patience and faith in our quest for a solution. They who have learned the real lesson of the Book of Job will be careful how they rashly impeach the universe, or how they with like rashness put forth too facile defences of God. They will be sure that a solution, when it does come, will be worthy of the majesty and beauty of that great prologue to human history which we find in Nature, and pending such a solution they will believe and wait.

(c) The third great figure who comes forward with his prophetic message on the standard Hebrew problem is the unknown prophet usually known as the second Isaiah. Scholars differ as to the date of Job, and as to whether he came before or after the second Isaiah. Most of them believe that the two books date from about the same period. Certainly they both have had the same problem before them, the sufferings of the righteous. One can easily see why this should have been so in the days which followed the terrible disaster of the Captivity. The prophetic interpretation of this was, as we have seen, that it was the judgment of God on the unfaithfulness of His people, and that it could be restored by their repentance and return to Him. But by the second Isaiah, as by Job, that view is found insufficient to explain why the righteous should suffer as well as the guilty nation.

(5) Here the unknown prophet gives expression to a new idea or principle of faith which seems never

to have crossed the mind of Job, the principle of vicarious suffering. The righteous suffer not only in consequence of the sins of others, but for the sake of others. We have here a thought so profound that it is difficult for me to believe that the author of the Book of Job could have missed it, had the second Isaiah been earlier than he. It seems simpler to believe that the unknown prophet came later, and that in large measure he answered the question to which Job had been able to give no clear reply himself, the question of why, under the government of a righteous and gracious God, the innocent should suffer as well as the guilty.

The Book of the second Isaiah, like Job, is a magnificent work of imagination, but it is something more. It is a call to action and it made great history. It was meant to summon Judah to return from Babylon, and recover its fatherland and historic mission as the covenanted people. To this end much of the prophecy is directed to awakening the exiled people to the glory and sovereignty of its God, before whom all opposing might is as nothing. The prophet then seeks to reawaken his people to a sense of their vocation as the servants of this glorious and sovereign Lord, and passes on to the famous passage where the Servant appears as a Sufferer, despised and rejected of men, and then revealed to those who thus scorn him as suffering for their sakes and bearing the burden of their sins. We are then shown him as emerging triumphant from deepest disaster, and so the prophecy moves on to its climax in the victory of God's people and the thronging of all nations to worship Israel's God.

Into the many difficult questions raised by this noble prophecy it is unnecessary here to enter. We are only concerned with one point, the assertion of the vicarious law as a principle essential to understanding of God's ways with men.

"The fact of vicarious suffering was brought home to the mind of the prophet by what he observed in the spiritual history of his time. In the calamity of the Exile the greatest sufferers were necessarily those most loyal to Jehovah, and there may have been individuals who might be considered innocent whose tragic and inexplicable fate caused the greatest perplexity to believers in the justice of God. The problem of retribution was in the air, and was kept alive by facts like these. It may therefore be supposed that the prophet, with all this before him, was led further to perceive that the suffering of the righteous for the guilty is a divinely appointed law of the spiritual life, that it is a soteriological principle, and that this principle is so essentially bound up with the vocation of Israel that the divine purpose of salvation could only be effected by its operation. If this were his thought it was natural that it should find expression in his conception of the Servant of Jehovah, who embodies all that is of religious significance in the true idea of Israel."

Why, however, should we go back into that old world of Hebrew thought for an explanation of life as we have to experience it to-day? We do not so return because of any untenable theory of the equal authority of the Old Testament and the New. We, who through Jesus Christ believe in God,

¹ Skinner, *Commentary on Isaiah*, vol. ii, Appendix Note 1, p. 236.

have a fuller revelation of Him than had the Hebrews, and we are free in that fuller light to reinterpret that view of God and the world and the soul which we find in the Psalms and in the Prophets. But when, in that freedom, we deeply consider to-day the riddle of the world, and how, as believers in an Almighty God of absolute purity and goodness, we shall explain that riddle, we find that we cannot, in substance, dispense with any of these great constructive principles of Old Testament thought, that here we have, as it were, the ground-work of Theism. We must widen and deepen these conceptions in the light of the fuller knowledge of God and man which Christ has given, and of the new knowledge which we have of Nature and of history, but the essential framework will remain the same. We have already seen the relevance to our problem of the Old Testament conception of the Kingdom of God, of creation and of sin as the break in the divine order, caused by man's abuse of his freedom. We have now to consider the Old Testament conception of external evil as the divine judgment and discipline of man's sin. Is this true and relevant to the solution of the riddle of the world to-day?

It is nowhere stated in the Old Testament that sin is the cause of all the suffering in the world, and there are, according to one of the greatest authorities on Old Testament thought, two theories as to the presence of death in the world, one, the more deeply religious interpretation, ascribing its presence to the sin of man, and another taking it as something natural and due to the fleshly nature of man. But there is no doubt, as has been said, that

all through the Old Testament there runs the persistent conviction that all the greater calamities and sorrows of Israel are due to its sin, that sin is the way that leads to privation and sorrow and death, and that righteousness is the way of life. What we have to consider is the question as to whether this is true, or whether it is false. If it is true it must be of very great importance for the solution of the riddle of the world, for it would at once remove a large part of the ills of human life from the necessary, to the contingent and educative, element in human experience.

If we will take any of those impeachments of Nature which have been quoted at the beginning of this volume and examine them anew we shall find that in every one of them man is regarded as the victim of the world system, which unconditionally subjects him to many miseries of body and mind. Mr Julian Huxley, for example, in his account of the enormities of Nature which make it impossible for him to believe in God, after enumerating some of the miseries wrought by natural catastrophe: earthquake, pestilence, hereditary defect, and so on, pitches upon the war as the crowning example of all these God-denying elements in experience. It is not too much to say that if Amos were living to-day he would find in the war a proof that God existed. For he would say that if nations chose to live as they had for long been living, self-centred, greedy, jealous and tyrannous, then the war, sooner or later, was bound to come. The fundamental difference between Mr Huxley and the prophet Amos is that the one looks on man as a victim, and that the other looks

on him as a sinner. This compels the one to look upon God as unmoral and impersonal, while the other looks on Him as holy, just and good. Yet, with curious inconsequence, on the very next page Mr Huxley, though he is eager to show that his own view of Nature is impersonal, allows man to hope for deliverance from war if he will only be willing to learn the lessons of experience, and passes right over to the other point of view. "War itself," he says, "is not necessarily inevitable. The European War was inevitable when it came because of the fact that human intelligence, goodwill and virtue in 1914, and for all of history before it, were incomplete and insufficient." That is, of course, perfectly true. In substance it is Amos's case against Israel and its neighbouring nations, though he would have put his indictment more forcibly than to say of Tyre and Edom and Ammon and Israel that they were "incomplete and insufficient in intelligence, knowledge and virtue."

But if this second passage be true, it will not do to say that man is merely a victim, and to throw the whole responsibility of the war upon God, and then, in order to escape from the horror of supposing a Creator of the world so cruel, to depersonalise and unmoralise Him into a Nature Absolute. It is not possible to have it both ways. Either the war was inevitable or it was not. If it were, I admit that Mr Huxley's argument is sound. If it were not (and be it noted that Mr Huxley's whole book is directed towards an endeavour to rouse men to struggle against such evils as war), then man is a sinner, and war the consequence of his sins. In that case we are within sight, at least, of the prophetic

view of history which holds that God is teaching man, by His providence, the ways of justice, mercy and truth. He is educating him, in a word, by the consequences of his own actions. The war was not inevitable, it was contingent on man's sinfulness, and its anguish was meant to awaken man to the abominations of violence, greed and pride which brought it upon him. Is this language too strong to describe the pre-war mind of Europe?

I will cite here a description of modern diplomacy from a writer whose judgment carries unusual weight. In a pamphlet written during the war in defence of Viscount Grey, Professor Gilbert Murray thus describes the atmosphere of modern diplomacy. The passage is too long to quote in detail, but I do not think I am misrepresenting it by the following quotations: "There is something sordid and even odious about the ordinary processes of Foreign Policy. There is a constant suspicion of intrigue, a constant assertion of 'interests,' a dangerous familiarity with thoughts of force or fraud, and a habit of saying silken phrases as a cover for very brutal facts." In home politics it is different. There are common interests and a common law and standard which underlie the conflict of home politics, so that, in ideal at least, all can work together as a band of friends. "But Foreign Politics are the relations between so many bands of outlaws." These outlaws are not criminals who have been outlawed, they are working in a region where no law is recognised but that of force. Therefore they are all afraid of each other. "There is fear in the air, and it is fear that makes men lie." "Fraternity, public right and common sense, the problem is how

to practise them or even remember them, when one enters this market-place of chaffering outlaws, each with a knife in the belt."

Be it remembered that this description applies to the region commonly known as "Christendom," in which for nineteen centuries the Christian conception of God has been taught. It is clear that it has not been allowed to leaven the world of international relationships, otherwise men would have realised that insincerity, robbery and violence were as hateful to Him when practised by nations against each other, as when practised against one's fellow-men. The nations were in fact, in their relations with each other, living as if there were no God. There can be no kind of doubt as to what the prophetic dealing with the problem of Evil would have been so far as the war is concerned. They would have said: "There is no problem, the real mystery would have been if such sin had not worked out death."

It is surely of enormous practical importance to-day whether this view or the other is true. If God or Nature, by predestination or by fate, is responsible for the war, man being the pre-determined victim, I do not see any real ground for believing that we can ever eliminate warfare from human affairs. The Being who, whether personal or impersonal, prompts and unconditionally decrees such horrors, is certainly not on man's side in his endeavour to abolish them. If man has been His victim in the matter once, I think the reasonable course for him is to make up his mind that he will be His victim indefinitely. There might be some hope of reforming man, but when it comes

to reforming the Absolute Being, whether we call Him God, or whether we call it Nature, the hope of enduring peace becomes fantastic.

But it is a totally different matter if the responsibility lies upon man, if sin is an aberration from God's order, and the manifold evils of the war are the discipline of God. Surely this essentially Biblical idea means that the Sovereign of the universe is against the "Outlaws' Market," that it is hateful to Him, and that they who seek by reason and humanity to make an end of it, and supplant it by a finer order, may count upon His guidance and aid.

The victim view of man seems to me to lead logically and inevitably towards Stoicism for oneself and quietism as regards the evil of war, and in the end will play into the hands of the mighty reactionary forces that are sweeping the whole world back into the abyss. The austerer view of the Bible, that man is a responsible being and will be held to account by the Sovereign of the universe, ought, it appears to me, to breed creators of a new and better order. It is quite true that in the manifold confusions of our time we do not find men always where, from their faith or unfaith, we should expect them to be. But in the end great issues have a way of clearing the air, and great beliefs of claiming their own true followers who for a time, by the accidents of their personal history, have strayed into other camps.

It is an essential part, both of the Hebrew Apologia and the New Testament revelation, that man is something a great deal more than a tool or victim of the Sovereign Power who is either above good and evil, or unconscious of either ; that he is first of all a

free and responsible spirit who can choose good or evil, and in the second place that if he chooses and follows evil, either he, or some other with whom his life is interwoven, shall sooner or later suffer for it by the maiming or stunting or privation of life, in the broadest sense of the term. That this is integral to the Christian interpretation of the world, seems to me plain enough. I have said the principle that sin works death runs through Scripture from beginning to end. It is a thread that can only be torn out at the cost of destroying the whole web. But this great law has a purpose behind it. That divine purpose is not exhausted by rewards and punishments: these are means to ends beyond themselves, the growth and the education of the human race which God has created. Under this divine order men and women are meant to be taught by the consequences of their own actions, and in each great crisis their whole future depends upon their aptitude to learn and their loyalty to what they see to be highest.

We are in such a crisis now. We have learned something of the sinfulness of our condition, and the greater part of the intelligence and goodwill of the world has been awakened to discern not only the evil of the past, but the way to the escape from it. That to my mind is the explanation of the war which we derive from the Bible, and I submit that it is a much deeper explanation and more fruitful of promise for the future than the interpretation which simply regards man as victim of an unmoral impersonal power. It rests, as will be recognised, on two beliefs: the first, that man is a free and responsible being, capable of choosing

and pursuing good and evil, and second, that the environment around him is not neutral and morally indifferent to that choice, but in spite of appearance is definitely on the side of the good and against the evil.

Fierce and poignant as we have seen the modern protest against the cruelty and indifference of the universe to be, there can, I think, be little doubt that the great masters of human literature are in great preponderance on the other side. They do not impeach the cosmos as malignant, or even as indifferent, they trace man's sorrows to his defects and ill deserts. They may think of the cosmos as implacably severe and just, but not as making no distinction between good and evil in its reactions upon men. Are Dante and Milton in fundamental discord here with Goethe and Shakespeare? It may be said that this is not surprising when we consider how deeply the Christian lands have been influenced by the Bible. What, then, of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*? And if we turn from classical antiquity to the Far East, what are we to make of the faith of China that "Heaven" is displeased with those who rule unjustly and visits their people with famine and pestilence? What are we to make of the tremendous conception of Karma and retribution exacted to the uttermost farthing through all the transmigrations of human existence, which has dominated the entire development of the religions of India? Among all peoples man has found in his own accusing conscience a clue to the meaning of his environment. He has not thought of himself as victim, but as sinner, and as he has looked out upon the vast and dimly

lighted universe he has been afraid. He knows inwardly that he has heard the voice of Reality.

Were there space for it, I think it would be easy to show that this is a general human conception, running through the greatest literature of the world. As I have said, there is a general belief of mankind in the existence of gods or supernatural powers, and the belief also that these gods are on the side of the traditional customs and moralities. But nowhere do we find the general human idea of retribution expressed with such poignancy as in Amos and his successors, and nowhere do we find the problem of the undeserved suffering of the righteous finding so mighty an expression as in the Book of Job. The human protest against the human situation which we have stated in its modern form, finds there its classical expression. What are we to make of the answer of the second Isaiah? Is it a real answer to say that all mankind is not only under the law proclaimed by Amos, that if we sin we shall pay for it, but that we are also under the vicarious law under which the innocent can bear for them the consequences of the sins of others? The idea is wholly foreign to the Book of Job, which is dominated throughout by the belief that if God be just and good, then the righteous man shall prosper and the wicked man suffer. Job sees that it is not so, is faced with the horror of believing that the supreme God is wicked, is saved from this by a vision of the splendours of the universe, and confesses that he cannot explain the mystery, but is sure that, in spite of all appearances, God is good, and that he is in the wrong in his doubts. Can

we see to-day where he was in the wrong? Surely in the view that the goodness of God is identical with strict distributive justice and individual requital in this life, which, be it remembered, was the limited horizon within which Job's thoughts moved. Like his friends he desired a world of rigorous forensic justice, and was unable to think God good unless such was the world He had made. Now when we examine the five impeachments which I have quoted, we find that the same is true of these Job's comforters of to-day. Let us take Mr Huxley as typical of the rest. "Natural catastrophes occur and we see thousands of innocent men suffer for no cause. Diseases strike blindly" (*i.e.* irrespective of merit or demerit of the victim), "children are born deformed" (*i.e.* children who did not so deserve), "an idiot child is produced by the best of couples" (*i.e.* couples who deserved to have healthy children), "when we see the success of men who are cruel, unscrupulous or definitely wicked" (and therefore should have been ruined), "the hard lot of others who are industrious and upright . . ." (who deserved to be prosperous). "Most of all when we are confronted by the war . . . then it is difficult for many to believe in a personal God." What Mr Huxley desires before he can believe in a personal God is precisely what Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar desired, *i.e.* a world of exact requital. If he could find that the world of actual experience corresponded to this, he would presumably believe in Him. As it does not, he cannot.

Now let us see what such a world would be like. It would be a world in which everyone got just what he deserved of good or of evil, a world of

merit and demerit, and rewards and penalties, a legal and forensic world. Therefore, it would necessarily have to be an adult world. There could be no children in it, so far as I can think it out. For surely they could hardly come into a system from which grace was excluded. The existence of young, immature and wholly dependent beings and their growth towards maturity, can only be guaranteed if their parents and protectors are prepared to sacrifice themselves for their sakes, independently of the knowledge of whether their children will recompense them or not, or even whether God will recompense them or not. Children cannot live and thrive without love, and love seeketh not her own. The Eliphaz world, therefore, when thought out, must be a world without children, or with children who are little calculating machines on their way to be bigger calculating machines in a profit and loss world automatically dispensing joy and sorrow, life and death according to the *quid pro quo* which we insert in the mechanism. It would be a world in which sheer disinterested grace would be an alien, for what would be the use of men or women giving themselves generously away for others, when in reality nothing could be gained for these others by so doing, since their ultimate fortune would be determined solely by their own personal merit or demerit? It would be a world without generosity, sacrifice or grace, in which the wisest and best would be those who discerned their own interest most clearly by watching the judgments and rewards of God, and adjusting their conduct to the results of their calculations. It would,

therefore, obviously be a world in which, since there was no room for human self-sacrifice, there could be none for the self-sacrificing God, a world without the Cross of Christ.

Mr Aldous Huxley has written a biting satire of scientific Utopias in his book *Brave New World*, where he depicts a world which ignores values in its pursuit and mastery of facts. Into this strays an attractive savage, who by some strange chance of fortune has nurtured his soul upon Shakespeare, and sees love and death and joy and sorrow with Shakespeare's eyes. The end of his adventures in this "brave new world" is his horrified escape by suicide. This is what he thinks of it all. Better by far the world of Romeo and Juliet, and Henry and Falstaff, even if it be also the world of Othello and Hamlet and Lear, than this human hell!

One may doubt if the world of Mr Julian Huxley's desire constructed according to the principle of distributive justice alone would leave him in much better case.

It is deeply relevant to this issue that the great Eastern religions have tried out this conception of exact requital with a thoroughness unknown in any other faith. Indian thought, about the seventh century B.C., had, as we have seen, reached the conclusion that the inequalities of fortune in this world could only be explained by the principle of Karma, under which it was believed that every human being passed through many lifetimes, inheriting in each the requital of joy and sorrow that he had merited in previous existences. No man could escape his Karma, either in this life or the lives to come, until the kalpa or great year of the revolving

cycle had run itself out. So intolerable did this conception prove itself to be, that the goal of orthodox Hinduism was to escape utterly from the terrible "Wheel" by realising that all earthly existence was mere illusion, and that one was identical with Brahman and therefore beyond the world of illusion. Buddhism, starting also from the same belief in Karma, found its escape in the slaying of all desire from which came the illusion of existence, and so attaining Nirvana. In a word, both alike found the requital world of Karma intolerable and found escape by a kind of suicide of all individual existence.

We can transcend this too narrow conception of the universe by the conception of the vicarious law. Forensic justice has its own indispensable place in the development of society, but the moment we take it as adequate to explain the ways of God with man it breaks down altogether; either we must limit its application or commit the same blunder as Naturalism, *i.e.* mutilate reality.

For good or evil and so far as human history goes, men and women and children are not separate atoms. They are individual human beings, and yet they can only attain their full personal life as parts of a whole, as "members" of a society, and it is part of the divine government of the world that just as we profit by the virtues, so we suffer for the sins of others. I have tried to show that a world of this kind is a far better and finer kind of world to live in, and that far finer and greater personalities can be developed in it than in a world governed by strict methods of distributive justice.

(6) The Hebrew Apologia completes itself in its

doctrine of the Last Things. There, too, the creative impulse comes from faith in the Almighty God, of moral purity and grace, which is continually under challenge from the God-denying evil of the world. No coherent faith in God can dispense with an outlook upon the future. So the Hebrew Theodicy deals not only with the past creation of man in the divine image, and his lapse into sin and his present discipline under the vicarious law, but with the consummation of all God's ways with man in the far-off future. Under that challenge faith in the living God projects into the future the vision of a new world order which He will bring into being by His sovereign power in what was called by the prophets the Day of the Lord. In that day God would make His power and purity and grace manifest. In the present evil was manifest and the reign of God was hidden, but in the Day of the Lord the veil would be destroyed and the reign of God would become plain.

Like the advent of Christ in the New Testament the divine interposition is expected to come suddenly, and often speedily. As the present evil is flagrant the Day of the Lord is expected to come with sudden judgment on all existing wickedness of the world and on all unfaithfulness of Israel. In the earlier and happier days of Israel's history the Day of the Lord is thought of as a day of salvation and joy. But as the struggle of the prophets with the sins of their people grows more intense and the ominous shadow of the great Euphrates empires darkens, the note of judgment becomes more prominent, judgment upon Israel for its

unfaithfulness, and judgment upon their cruel and mighty oppressors. Yet always the true meaning and end of the Day of the Lord is not judgment but salvation. The judgment is only for the purifying of the earth. The real and final aim is the complete and world-wide victory of the divine rule, the consummation of the Covenant and the blessedness of the Last Age. Here, as in the New Testament Apocalypse, that Golden Age is described in a multitude of imaginative figures which are sometimes incoherent with each other. This is, of course, inevitable whenever we try to describe the future, for we cannot paint the future save in the colours of the past, and as on every linear view of history the end must be greater than the present or past, the endeavour to depict must break the ordinary moulds of speech and conception which are all, of course, fashioned out of past and present experience. All prophecy and all apocalypse when they depict the future must therefore necessarily show this superficial incoherence.¹ But the general drift of these splendid imaginative pictures of the future is perfectly clear. They vary with the personality and circumstances and dates of the prophets, some being narrower and some wider in their scope. But by the greatest of these the consummation of the divine purpose is depicted in the most splendid terms. There will be a new and deeper covenant. In the final Israel there is no longer any sin, the law of the Lord is "written in the heart." All are taught of God. "The Divine Spirit which now influences prophets only will then be poured out on all alike, on young and

¹ Leckie's *The World to Come and Final Destiny*.

old, on bond and free. This new covenant will be an everlasting covenant like God's great Covenant with man in the constancy of Nature: an unalterable pact, a covenant of peace, which makes its members sure of being heard of God before they ask. . . . The Divine Spirit which now influences prophets only will then be poured out on all alike, old and young, bond and free. From this there results a righteousness which covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. No one acts wickedly any more for the earth is full of the knowledge of God." In a word, the reign of sin in the world is displaced by the reign of God.

But not only will the Spirit of God transform the hearts of men; Nature is transformed as well. The land produces in luxuriant abundance. With the wild beast, with every hostile power, God makes a covenant that they do no harm. Early death will no longer threaten the happy. In fact, according to a still higher view, there is no more death, and God wipes away all tears from their faces.¹ The imagination of the prophet rises still higher. "A new heaven and a new earth receive the happy commonwealth of God."² There begins a wonderful unchanging day. The moon shines like the sun, and the sun as the light of seven days. "It is even said that God is to His people as moon and sun. And this transformation is not to undergo any new change. Like the new ordinances of Nature the seed of Israel is also to be forever before God."³ Nor is this glowing vision confined to the chosen people. Jerusalem remains

¹ Isa. xxv. 8.

² Isa. lxxv. 17 and lxxvi. 22.

³ Isa. xxx. 26.

in the foreground of the picture.¹ But to the ancient prophets the whole world will one day be "filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea." He has sworn by Himself that to Him every knee shall bow. "Thus we have a picture of the people of God surrounded by a world of converted nations. The Old Testament salvation broadens into universalism." The prophetic vision here finds expression in the 72nd Psalm which, with but little change, forms one of the finest of the Christian hymns: "His name (the name of the coming ideal King of Israel) shall endure forever. His name shall be continued as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in him. All nations shall call him happy. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things, and blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."²

Such was the prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God carried to its utmost reach. There is little here surely in common with the defeatist Christian view that all we can hope for from the long result of God's ways with the world will be the rescue of the elect few from the "mass of perdition" of mankind. Whence did the Hebrew psalmists and prophets derive this sublime conviction that the great brute powers of the earth were doomed to

¹ As one reads these ancient prophecies one is reminded of the tenacity with which Mazzini, for all the breadth and nobility of his conception of an associated humanity, always held on to the faith that Rome must necessarily be the centre of the world. And as has repeatedly been pointed out, of all the moderns Mazzini is likeliest a prophet of the Hebrew type.

² The quotations are from Schultz's summary, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. ii, chaps. 20 and 21.

go down before the apparently weak powers of the spirit, and that sin and death would vanish from the earth, and that this victory would endure? Their confidence sprang wholly from one source, their faith in the one almighty, pure, just and gracious God. This, and this alone, delivered them from the weary cyclic view of history, gave them the faith in a controlling purpose, and led them to unfold that purpose in terms of the salvation of all mankind. And the thing that drove that faith to unfold its riches with that splendid boldness beyond all question was the challenge of the evil of the world. Their faith in the long result of time rounds out and completes that with which our account of the Hebrew Theodicy began. This is the climax towards which in Nature and in providence God is moving on the linear course of history. It is that which all along He has been creating from the moment "when all the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy."

The same expectation of the triumph of the Kingdom of God in history reappears in the New Testament as the Advent faith. However we may interpret that faith, and here we inevitably meet with the same apparent contradiction as in the Old Testament pictures,¹ whether we think of the Advent as the bodily return of Christ in glory and power, or as the triumph of the Spirit of Jesus in the world of time, it seems to be an essential part of the Christian as of the Hebrew faith, that it shall expect that victory not only in the life to come but in this world. If we cut that out of the

¹ Leckie, *The World to Come and Final Destiny*, pp. 17-19.

picture something essential is taken away, and with the cleavage in the Christian hope there must necessarily come a change in the Christian ethos as well.

(7) But we have not yet completed the picture of the Hebrew Apologia or of its doctrine of the Last Things. It is to us to-day very surprising that the belief in personal immortality only appears at a late stage of the Old Testament revelation. That it should have been so is as good a proof as can be given of the gradual character of revelation. We have to make a distinction, however, between survival and immortality. The science of religion, among many other unexpected results, has shown that in spite of all the terrifying accompaniments of mortality, the human race, as a whole, has always believed that the human spirit lived on after death. The tombs of prehistoric times give the clearest indication of this in the provision which they show for the departed on their journey into the unseen world into which their fellows believed that they had gone. Sir James Frazer has shown that the belief in survival exists among primitive people in practically all ages and all lands. Death, in the sense of mere extinction, seems naturally incredible to man. The acceptance of extinction is a product of artificial civilisation. But the life into which the departed go is usually conceived as poorer and less substantial than life in this present world. The dead live in the realm of shadows or "shades," they are seen sometimes as "ghosts," and are often thought of as jealous of those enjoying the fuller life of the earth. Eminently characteristic of the pagan view of the after-life is the

passage in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus meets Achilles in the realm of shades, and congratulates him on his fame among living men and his sway in the underworld, only to meet with the indignant reply:

Speak not soft words concerning death to me,
Glorious Odysseus; rather had I be
A thrall upon the acres to a man,
Portionless and sunk low in poverty,
Than over all the perished dead below
Hold lordship.¹

That the early Hebrews believed in this kind of survival there are many indications in the Old Testament.²

It is difficult for those who have been used to read the Old Testament in the light of the New to realise how bare must have been the outlook on the life beyond death of the great figures of early Hebrew antiquity, but the plain truth is that not till the history was far advanced did any of the Hebrews see what for us to-day seems the inevitable inference from their faith in God, and had little personal hope beyond the grave. Their hopes were concentrated on their descendants, on their people, and on the cause of God. Now and again there are, it is true, gleams of light in the stories of Enoch and Elisha, and hints of something as yet unrevealed, but the working everyday faith even of the devout Israelite had little place for the thought of a consummation beyond the grave. I imagine that they simply accepted the human situation as their fathers had always done, and left their personal future to God

¹ *Odyssey*, Book xi. Mackail's Translation.

² Isa. xiv. 9; Ps. lxxxviii.; Job xxx. 23; etc., etc.

as unknown and unknowable by man. When we think of this acquiescence as strange we are reading back into it our far more highly developed sense of personal individuality and its rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We must remember that the Hebrew acquiescence was then shared by nearly the whole human race. What shattered it from without and dissolved it from within was the Captivity, and the great widening and deepening of the conception of God that came with the greater prophets.

The new faith in personal immortality is thus due to a growing faith in God and a new sense of the worth of the individual man. Neither factor can be ignored. The Captivity shattered the whole protecting shell of the "theocracy" with its king and priesthood and worship and sacred land. Bereft of all these, Israel in captivity was left with only its inward assurance of God's sovereign grace and purity, and His imperative call to moral fidelity to His promises and law if the disaster was to be retrieved. The nation was seen to be less fundamental than the community of faithful individual Israelites, the "remnant," the true Israel, which survived the Exile. With that there came an altogether new sense of the worth and meaning of the individual Israelite, and with that a whole world of new problems, and a great commotion of creative life and thought which finds expression in Job and in the second Isaiah, and in the later psalms. For a time the older ideas of survival in an underworld of the shades lingered on, in strange contrast with the glowing pictures of the future earthly triumph of the Kingdom of God. But the faith which had created

and projected these splendid visions, as time went on, dissolved these survivals. The faithful dead would be raised again to share in the common triumph, and as the individual believer became surer of his value to his gracious God, he became sure also that that God would deliver him from death.

The whole process of thought is laid bare in the 73rd Psalm: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden my right hand. Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth. But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." The soul, threatened by the sovereign evil of extinction, turns to God, and out of communion with Him derives the assurance of victory over death.

There is a close parallel here with the much earlier use of the Messianic Hope, when the nation, threatened with destruction, turned to its God whose almighty grace had taken it into covenant, and out of its assurance of that sovereign power and grace derived the assurance of ultimate victory over all that threatened its existence.

It was the work of the age of Judaism which succeeded the Old Testament period to combine these two hopes in one under the form of Apocalypse. But into that it is unnecessary here to travel. The roots of both the Messianic Hope and the hope of individual immortality lie deep in the supreme treasure of Israel's history, its faith in the truth of the revelation of the sovereign grace of Almighty God.

That this assurance of immortality is part of the inheritance of all believers in Jesus Christ is, of course, too plain to be ignored. To all Christian believers God is the Almighty Father, and it is incredible that the Almighty Father could suffer any one of his true sons and daughters to pass into nothingness.

Here is to-day the one solid ground for believing in immortality. If God is almighty, and if His nature be love and if, believing this, I love and trust Him in return, the relationship must be imperishable, He cannot let me pass into extinction. He will "guide me with his counsel while I live" and afterwards "receive me to glory." The 73rd Psalm is as true as ever it was. We can only escape its conclusion by denying its premises in the power and grace of God.

Hence the intimate disclosure of the Divine Nature and Purpose which came with Jesus Christ has brought with it a great reassurance and enrichment of the faith in immortality. The conclusion which Israel reached with infinite difficulty at the close of a long process of education has become in the Christian revelation the starting-point of a new and revolutionary development.

It is very significant that even the word immortality rarely occurs in the New Testament. It is a negative though a noble term, and the significant word in the New Testament is "Eternal Life." Jesus Christ is "the Prince of Life, who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to life through His Gospel." Clearly mere everlasting survival would be a very doubtful boon to man. It is significant, surely, that, as we have seen, Indian

religion has found the idea of eternal transmigration so intolerable that both its great developments in Buddhism and Brahminism have found their chief good in deliverance from it, the one by Nirvana, the other by absorption into the Divine Essence. Even the promise of mere everlasting continuance of our present earthly existence would be found by many to-day a dubious boon. "There are people," it has been said, "who cannot dispose of a day; an hour hangs heavy on their hands, and you offer them rolling ages without end!"¹ From such a heaven of boredom Nirvana might well to some seem a deliverance, but the heaven of Christianity is one of ever-increasing life. We, most of us, possess a dream life, as well as a waking life. Most people, so far as my observation goes, would be sorry to lose that nightly dream life, for on the whole it seems to be a pleasant incident of sleep. Yet few indeed, if they had to choose, would choose it in preference to the real life and love and striving of every day. This may have its sorrows and frustations, but it is real and it is worth while. We may get some idea of what the New Testament means by "Eternal Life" by stating the comparison as a proportion: "As is our dream life to our everyday life, so is our everyday life to the Life Everlasting." Eternal Life is a quality of life indefinitely richer and deeper than common life, and quantitatively it is everlasting. Such is the New Testament transformation of the Old Testament hope. It is the sublimation and intensification of all that is greatest, loveliest and dearest in this present life. It is to be with those whom we love,

¹ Emerson, quoted by Pringle Pattison, *Idea of Immortality*, p. 205.

and who have gone before us, and those whom we love who will follow us, and to be "with Christ" in "the Father's House" for ever and ever. Who would exchange that for any Nirvana?

The attainment of the hope in immortality completes the Hebrew Theodicy as I read it. The six seminal ideas, which I have enumerated, the linear conception of history, which we find expressed in the Kingdom of God; Divine creation; man's freedom and sin; suffering and death as man's judgment and discipline; the vicarious law; the Messianic age and the hope of immortality—they one and all spring from the great creative centre of the Old Testament revelation, the conception of God as sovereign, pure and righteous and gracious. Faith in such a God, in such a world as ours, leads inevitably to such an interpretation of His ways with men. Each one of these seminal interpretative truths is given and attained in the struggle with evil, and taken all together in connection with the conception of God, they give us the substance of what is known as Old Testament Theology. I believe that it is still the ground-work of all true Theism, the outline and the way in which we must interpret the great riddle of human existence, before which so much of the graver thought of our age stands bewildered and dumb.