Theology on the Web.org.uk
Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

Buy me a coffee https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

PATREON https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

therefore, the object of our belief is real, but the content inadequate, it will follow not only that our faith will not touch life in so many points as it might and will consequently be weak, but that the points at which it might touch life, and does not, will challenge and confuse it. In the nature of things, therefore, a belief in God which is inadequate in content will be weak in intensity. The apparent contradictions of this will be found on examination to be only apparent: the principle is undeniable. And if, as all Christians allow, the content of their belief in God comes in its fulness only through Christ, it must also be that apart from Him there is no full assurance that God is.

Or we may put it another way. One of the tragic experiences in life is that no truth which does not find expression in our activity can maintain itself alive in our belief. Refuse to act on a truth and it will grow unreal to you. There has, no doubt, been a whisper of God in our hearts, but we have shrunk from the acts in which it demands to be expressed, and so God has become unreal to us. And when this has happened the only way back is through One who gave His thought of God at all costs the expression which it demanded.

'For how many soever be the promises of God, in him (Jesus) is the yea: wherefore through him also is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us.'

In the Study.

Job's Wife.

By the Rev. W. J. Farrow, B.A., B.D., Shrewsbury.

'Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Renounce God and die.'—Job 2[9].

There is one person in the Book of Job to whom the writer has not done justice—Job's wife. Her grief must have been just as keen and deep as her husband's, yet it is passed over altogether. She is credited with one remark, which is harshly rebuked by Job; then she is mentioned no more, and from that point the book is wholly concerned with the theological problem of Job and his age. It is a great book: one of the greatest in the Old Testament; one of the greatest in the world's literature, yet surely not the last word from the woman's point of view.

The book is evidently poetry and not history. No five men in all the world's story ever kept up such a discussion—a discussion so full of lofty, sustained eloquence, illuminated by such apt illustrations and similes, and moving upon such a high emotional level. It is obviously the work of some poet who was putting his own thoughts upon the lips of others, debating the problem of his own soul, his own age, of all ages, by the method of drama. He may have been a poet who had passed through sorrows as vast as those attributed to Job, or a poet who was just putting the general case. Personally I incline to the former view. A man who could write so passionately must have suffered deeply; it was his own soul's problem he was hammering out as well as the general problem of the world's ever-recurring pain.

The book is one of the later books of the Old Testament. Probably the story of Job, which occupies the first two chapters and is written in prose, was a very old one, and in the writer's day was accepted as the classic instance of great and undeserved suffering on the part of a good man. The writer is unknown, but he took the story of Job and used it as an introduction to the discussion which follows on the meaning of pain and God's purpose in it. In dealing with the story he does justice to Job and his direful experiences, but he certainly fails to do justice to the wife: in the main he ignores her and her part in the sorrow.

I.

Sorrow's Hour.

Job was a wealthy, a happy, and a good man, but by a series of misfortunes, partly political and partly natural, he was suddenly robbed of all his substance and left poor. On the top of these calamities there befell a greater—the death of all his children at one dread stroke—and we are left with this pitiful contrast: one hour, a man possessing everything he could wish; the next, stripped bare, penniless and childless.

The scene that followed is dramatic enough, surprising to some extent, yet ever moving; it has never been better described than in the words of the original writer, 'Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell upon the ground, and worshipped; and he said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' That was the first word in the hour of his direst calamity—always an illuminating word, revealing the very soul of a man. Could anything be greater? 'He fell down and worshipped.'

One writer quotes a beautiful modern parallel from 'The Personal Memoirs of Dr. John Brown's Father': 'We were all three awakened by a cry of pain—sharp, insufferable, as if one were stung. . . . We found my father standing before us, erect, his hands clenched in his black hair, his eyes full of misery and amazement, his face white as that of the dead. He frightened us. He saw this, or else his intense will had mastered his agony, for, taking his hands from his head, he said, slowly and gently, "Let us give thanks," and turned to a little sofa in the room; there lay our mother, dead.' 'He fell down and worshipped.' Yes, but in Job the mother was alive; it was her children who were dead, and yet her grief is passed over unmentioned. It shows plainly enough—if it needed showing—that the book was written by a man, who made all the interest centre in Job and his problem.

After this series of calamities one other befell. Job was shattered in health; and broken in fortune and in body he went out beyond the borders of the village to sit among the heaps of ashes and mourn. It is then that his wife appears. 'Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God and die.' But he said unto her, 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' And thus rebuked and silenced, the woman passed from the scene. Inadequately dealt with, we all feel. Her part in the sorrow unexpressed and unrecognized; her problem brushed aside. Yet surely she had her problem, too.

II.

The Woman's Part.

Job's problem was intellectual, hers emotional; his was of the head, hers a problem of the heart. As one woman said when her son flung at her a retort which he thought rather smart, though a little involved, 'I don't know what your words mean, but I know you are hurting me.' Job's wife had her problem, as well as Job; different in a measure because she was a woman, yet surely equally real.

Now an edition of the Book of Job has been issued with illustrations, and the illustrations are by a woman; and one is a picture of Job's wife. It is referred to in the February number of The Expository Times. The picture represents her utterly overwhelmed with grief. 'She has thrown herself across Job's knees, as he sits on the ground—his brow shaded with sackcloth, his mouth half hidden with his hand, his eyes bewildered and heavy, as with sleeplessness. She lies across his knees, her left arm clasping her head, which is hidden. . . . The right arm hangs long and helpless, till the forefinger unconsciously touches the ashes.' 'Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God and die.' Not the cynical jeer, surely, of one who had never known belief, but the last gasp of a passionate heart broken in its desolation. 'Can you still keep your faith? Mine has gone—I care for nothing more; renounce God and die.' A terrible light is flashed upon this ancient grief by what a woman said recently, 'I prayed every day for six months, that my son might be spared, and now he is gone: I have no more use for God.'

'Can you still keep your faith? Mine is gone,' said Job's wife to her husband. 'Renounce God and die. I have no more use for God.' The sorrow of Job's wife has never been dealt with—perhaps never will be: certainly never by a man. And a woman would probably—wisely, let it alone, or at least not deal with it by words: by a picture perhaps, or by clasping the stricken mother in her arms and weeping out her grief with her.

III.

Keeping the Faith.

How Job tried to keep his faith the rest of the book tells. And what a heroic struggle it was! He battered the gates of heaven for a reason; stormed up to the very throne of God, demanding the meaning of the world's pain and woe, but even when in the end he failed to find a full explanation, he still kept his faith—'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' because the only alternative was everlasting darkness and endless death. He recognized that there are some problems which must wait, but that the life which loses faith loses itself. There are some things about which we must be content to know that there is a solution, without knowing what the solution is. Job found a man's way out at last. Did his wife ever find a way out, or had she no use for God ever afterwards?

I fancy we may find something of an answer in a poem like Kipling's 'Mother o' Mine':

If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

A woman who could never lose faith in her son could scarcely let God go, for that were endless loss for both.

That beautiful story from the life of Buddha, with which you are all familiar, hints at another answer. The little Indian mother brought her child to Buddha, not realizing that it was dead, or refusing to recognize the hard and final fact. 'Can you heal it?' was her plea. 'Yes,' said he, 'but first go, beg a mustard-seed from some house—but let it be a house in which none ever died, no father, no mother, no child or slave.' Far and wide her eager search went, ever in vain, and she came again empty-handed, but open-eyed—at last in some small measure understanding; lonelier in life, but not utterly broken:

I went, Lord, clasping to my breast
The babe, grown colder, asking at each hut—
Here in the jungle and towards the town—
'I pray you, give me mustard, of your grace,
A tola—black'; and each who had it gave,
For all the poor are piteous to the poor:
But when I asked, 'In my friend's household here
Hath any peradventure ever died—
Husband, or wife, or child, or slave?' they said:
'O sister! what is this you ask? the dead
Are very many, and the living few!'
So with sad thanks I gave the mustard back,
And prayed of others; but the others said,
'Here is the seed, but we have lost our slave!'
'Here is the seed, but our good man is dead!'
'Here is some seed, but he that sowed it died
Between the rain-time and the harvesting!'
Ah, sir! I could not find a single house
Where there was mustard-seed and none had died!
Therefore I left my child—who would not suck
Nor smile—beneath the wild-vines by the stream,
To seek thy face and kiss thy feet, and pray
Where I might find this seed and find no death,
If now, indeed, my baby be not dead,
As I do fear, and as they said to me.

'My sister! thou hast found,' the master said,
'Searching for what none finds—that bitter balm
I had to give thee. He thou lovedst slept
Dead on thy bosom yesterday: to-day
Thou knowest the whole wide world weeps with thy woe:
The grief which all hearts share grows less for one.'

Man finds one road; woman often another; but one way or the other the salt of life is to keep faith even in the midst of darkest sorrow. 'Renounce God and die'—words upon the lips of some woman centuries before Christ; 'I have no more use for God'—words of some poor broken-hearted mother in the midst of the awful calamity of the twentieth century: identical in their meaning and their agony, but both spelling—if unrelieved—death to the soul, death to man, death to the world.

It is easy enough to keep faith when all is bright as a summer's day, but the life of the world depends upon your keeping your faith when all is dark as a winter's night. If, when all is gone, when death and desolation have done their utmost, and the soul reels stunned from the mightiest blow that fate can deal, you can still say, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,' then faith is saved, and the world is saved, and day will dawn.

In Gethsemane and on the Cross the real work was done. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' We are not surprised that the words were wrung even from the lips of Christ when events were so hard to understand. But they were not His last. Had they been, they would have been fatal as well as final. Others came later, breathing a quiet which told of faith kept and a world saved: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

Something more than the salvation of your own souls is committed to you men and women to-day upon whom the nation's agony has thrust the possibility of overwhelming woe—the very salvation of the world's faith; and if you can keep true and sweet, brave and strong, in the midst of what is happening—and what may any day happen—then the worth of life will abide and the day of freedom come to the earth.

Virginibus Puerisque.

I.

MAY.

One-Roomed Houses.

'Where the birds make their nests.'—Ps 104[17].

I have no doubt some of you boys and girls can look back to a month of May when your father and mother moved to a new house.

Probably you gave the matter little thought; but you loved the change. Everything about you was new, and seemed so different from the things in the house you had just left. You went on making discoveries every day. Why, even boys and girls in the neighbourhood were strangers to you; you had to find new friends among them.

Mother was very, very busy then, and for months afterwards. Don't you remember? She kept working and planning things; all the time she was really wondering how she could get every one, from father down to the baby, comfortably settled. That, in a house of two or three rooms, is always the mother's great problem. But, in spite of a good deal that is very trying to the temper in those little homes, the mother is generally a very happy person indeed.

1. How would you like to live in a house of one room? When you think of it, doesn't your mind wander away to the fireside of some very poor person, and you say to yourself, 'I should not like it at all.' But there have been happy, though poor, homes in houses of one room. That was when people in them loved each other; remember that loving each other does not depend on having money.

I wish I could take you to see the wonderful one-roomed houses that are in my mind. May is the very best time in which to take a peep into them; they are perfect then—at least I think so. Like Peter Pan's cottage, some of them are away up in the tree-tops, but others you can see simply by standing on tiptoe, or it may be by kneeling down; they are in all sorts of out-of-the-way places.

I have a new neighbour just over the way,
Who took up her residence early in May.
And all of the furniture ever I saw
Was nothing but rubbish and sticks and straw;
But when I made her a call just now
I found she had furnished her house somehow,
All trim and tidy and nice and neat,
The prettiest cottage in all the street.
Of thistledown silk was her carpet fine,
A thousand times better and softer than mine;
Her curtains, to shut out the heat and light,
Were woven of blossoms pink and white;
And the dainty roof of her tiny home
Was a broad green leaf like an emerald dome.
'Tis the cosiest nook that you ever did see,
Mrs. Yellowbird's house in the apple-tree.

I had the good fortune to have a nest shown to me when it was empty. Its real place was the forked branch of a tree; I cannot tell you, however, how it came to be taken down. How wonderful that little home was! It was built of—what do you think? stalks of clematis blossom. The twigs were lightly interwoven leaving the branched heads outside, and it had been lined, oh so softly, with feathers and grass. A dear little mother bullfinch had built it, and just a little while before her four or five wee babies had opened their eyes and looked over the wall of it, down upon the wonderful world below.

Younger than we are,
  O children, and frailer,
Soon in blue air they'll be,
  Singer and sailor.

We, so much older,
  Taller and stronger,
We shall look down on the
  Birdies no longer.

They shall go flying
  With musical speeches
High overhead in the
  Tops of the beeches.

In spite of our wisdom
  And sensible talking,
We on our feet must go
  Plodding and walking.[1]

---

[1] R. L. Stevenson, 'A Child's Garden of Verses' (*Works*, xiv. 45).

2. There are different varieties among these one-roomed homes. Mother chaffinch builds one that is deliciously soft and mossy. Sometimes she chooses to place it in a hawthorn hedge, or she may find a very suitable place amongst laurel or other similar bushes. I should not wonder if you chanced to find one if you look for it; but don't be too forward, or you will frighten the gentle little mother bird. She is of course very much taken up with the care of her little ones.

Of course you know the mavis, or the song-thrush, to give it its proper name. She builds a wonderful little house. It is well plastered; for, like your mother, she prepares for the rough winds that are sure to come, and the baby-mavises are born naked, blind, and helpless. It is a sight worth seeing, the mother feeding the gaping nestful as soon as they are born, while the father, perched on a neighbouring tree, sings a wonderful song to his household. But although a young mavis is about as helpless a living creature as one could find, it soon learns to take care of itself.

A very wonderful bird called the moor-hen builds its nest with twigs and sticks in the middle of thick rushes by the edge of a loch or slow stream. Her brood are cleverer than the young mavises. Before they are a month out of the shell they can wash and dress themselves, frolic about with their mother, and even make their own living; think of that.

3. I knew a family of boys and girls whose house was surrounded with trees and bushes. Of course the little one-roomed houses were something they expected to see every spring (only from the outside, however). The one who first came upon a nest claimed it as his or her special property, and as far as possible protected it from the common dangers—you know them—cats and cruel boys. Many a peep they took, sometimes it was on tiptoe, and how they loved to see the heads of the dear little baby-birds when they did appear.

How do these wonderful creatures learn to build their little houses? It is God who teaches them. We say they do it by instinct. God put the instinct there. We have to learn everything we do, but unlike them we need never stop learning as long as we live.

Birds give us a great deal of happiness. They are happy themselves, and that in a very simple and beautiful way. Have you ever watched them picking up crumbs? How gracefully and how deftly they do it. Then they fly away up into the trees and sing for the sheer joy of life. If we only remember that the dainty little one-roomed houses of the hedges and the tree-tops are built after the plan of the Great Teacher, and that Jesus cared even for the baby sparrows, I feel sure that no nest would ever be treated with anything but love and respect. The thought of God's love and care would often be in our minds. We should want to thank Him for the builders of the houses in the tree-tops and hedges.

II.

Counting One by One.

'Counting one by one.'—Ec 7[27] (A.V.).

That is one of the first things we learn to do, isn't it? While we are little more than babies, before we know our alphabet or can read tiny words, we begin to count one by one. 'One, two, three, four, five,' we say, and feel very proud when we can count up to ten or twenty. And then, when we go to school, one of the first things we learn to do is to count one by one. We have to count coloured balls or beads, or little round coloured chalk marks on the blackboard, and we have to learn the difference between two and three and between four and five. We can't get a bit further on, we can't do addition or subtraction or multiplication, until we first learn to count one by one.

Now I expect you are all fond of counting one by one. You are making a collection of postcards or postage stamps, and every now and again you take out your album and count over the contents one by one. Or you are saving up your pennies to buy something special, and you take them out frequently and count them over one by one, and calculate how many more you will require to reach the desired sum. Or holiday-time is approaching, and over your bed you have an almanac, and every night you tick off one day—one day less to the holidays! You are still counting one by one.

And do you know that mother counts one by one too? What do you suppose she counts? Not her pleasures, not her treasures—just her boys and girls. If one of you were missing she would be very, very sad, and not all the others put together would make up for the loss of that one.

I was reading a story lately about a census that was taken over in New York. You know what a census is, don't you? It is a numbering of the people. Well, one man had to take the census in a crowded district on the east side of the city. He came to a tenement where there were a great, great many children, and he found a woman there bending over a wash-tub. 'Madam,' said he, 'I am the census-taker. How many children have you?' 'Well, lemme see,' said the washerwoman. 'There's Mary and Ella and Delia and Susie and Emma and Tommy and Albert and Eddie and Charlie and Frank and——' By this time the man was getting a little impatient, so he interrupted, 'If you could just give me the number,' said he. 'Number!' exclaimed the woman. 'I want you to understand that we ain't got to *numbering* 'em yet! We ain't run out o' *names*!'

Do you see it? It would be an insult to call you by a number. Mother and father have given you a name, and your name means you and all that stands for you. They count you one by one, and *you* won't do instead of Mary or George, and Mary or George won't do instead of *you*. You each stand for yourself. You are each precious in their eyes. You count for something very wonderful and valuable.

And God counts us one by one too. Out of all the hundreds of millions of people on the earth He knows you and loves you and cares for you as if you were the only one. In a sense you *are* the only one.

Away in Africa there is a strange tribe of natives, and it is said that they never count. They have no arithmetic. A gentleman once asked one of the tribe how many oxen he had, and the man replied that he didn't know. 'Then,' said the gentleman, 'how do you know if one is missing?' What do you think the man replied? 'Not because the number would be less,' he said, 'but because of a face I should miss.'

Will your face be missing at the end of the day when the grand roll of God's children is read? It will matter infinitely to God if it is.

III.

Absolutely It.

'Let it be done exactly.'—Ezk 7[23].

The other day I watched a girl sewing. Round her neck she had hung an inch-tape, and every now and then she stopped sewing, took her inch-tape and measured a fold in her cloth. Then she ran her needle and thread along the fold. She was making tucks, you see, and to make tucks that will look nice when they are finished you have to be frightfully particular. If you haven't got exactly the same distance between each tuck, or if you haven't got exactly the same depth of tuck, the consequences will be rather peculiar. The tucks will look like the waves of the sea. One will be dipping down to meet another, and a third will be rising up to touch its neighbour. The set of tucks and the whole garment will be spoiled if the measurements are not exact.

Inch-tapes are only for girls, the boys will say. But, boys, what about a foot-rule? That's just a masculine inch-tape. You use it, and you know that it would be almost impossible for you without the aid of a foot-rule to do any carpentry or handy jobs that require measurement. If you haven't one of your own, you know how you envy the workman who comes to the house and whips out a foot-rule from that capacious back-pocket of his. It positively makes your fingers itch to see him open out that rule and snap it together again in a sort of professional style.

Inch-tapes and foot-rules, plumb-lines and spirit-levels—they are all invaluable, for they help us to turn out correct and exact work. Guess-work may be clever, but it is risky and dishonest.

Now the world may be divided into those who use inch-tapes and foot-rules and those who don't. The first will have only what is 'absolutely it' and the second are content with a 'near enough.' You hear some people say such and such is 'near enough,' or 'What's half an inch here or there?' or 'A penny more or less doesn't matter.' But that's where they are wrong. 'Near enough' is not near enough. It might as well be miles away.

There are two reasons such people usually give why 'near enough' will do, and I want to show you that both are false.

1. The first reason they give is that '*near enough*' *is easier* than 'absolutely it.' It may seem easier at the moment not to measure your tuck, but it saves you unpicking it and sewing it over again. It may seem easier not to add up your column of pence twice, but it will be less easy to recount the whole sum—pounds, shillings, *and* pence. It may be easier to go on building a wall and adding brick to brick without constantly stopping to use your plumb-line to see that it is straight up and down, but it is much more troublesome to have to

pull down the wall and rebuild it because it is leaning over by the time you reach the top. Exactness is a saving, not a waste, of time, and the 'absolutely its' are always first in the end.

2. The second reason which the 'near enoughs' give is that *it really doesn't matter*. Doesn't it? Carelessness always matters. It is dangerous for yourself, and it is dangerous for other people.

A workman who was making a saddle put in a piece of inferior work, but he thought it would pass and did not trouble to make it right. That saddle was ridden in the Zulu War by the Prince Imperial. During a battle the prince was surrounded by the wild tribesmen and had to fight for dear life. He had a good horse under him, his friends were coming to his rescue, and it was merely a case of holding on till they arrived, but suddenly his saddle gave way and he was thrown to the ground. In a moment the Zulus were upon him, and he was wounded to death. The heir to the throne of France lost his life because a careless saddler thought 'near enough' would do in making a saddle.

Here is another story. Some years ago the United States of America were passing a Bill about the articles that should be admitted into the country free of duty. Amongst the goods named were foreign fruit-plants, with a hyphen between 'fruit' and 'plants.' That meant that any growing fruit-plants for transplanting might come in without paying duty. The clerk who was copying the Bill missed out the hyphen and stuck in a comma instead, making the words read 'fruit, plants,' etc. What do you think happened? For a whole year, until Congress could remedy the blunder, all oranges, lemons, bananas, grapes, and other foreign fruits came in duty free, and the American Government lost about half a million pounds sterling. That was a pretty costly comma—wasn't it?

Boys and girls, don't believe the 'near enoughs.' They are wrong every time. Make up your mind to-day that you will be an 'absolutely it'—for your own sake, because it is the only honest way; for other people's sake, because it is the only safe way; most of all for Christ's sake, because it is His way.

The Bookshelf by the Fire.

By the Rev. George Jackson, B.A., Professor of Pastoral Theology, Didsbury College, Manchester.

VIII.

Sir Thomas Browne's 'Religio Medici.'

I have remarked before in these chapters on the strange remoteness from the din and confusion which filled all the highways of seventeenth-century life of some of those on whose names to-day we love most to dwell. George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, Izaak Walton—what have they to do with the fierce heats of the council-hall, or the fiercer frays of the battlefield? And now to these is to be added the name of Sir Thomas Browne, the good physician of Norwich. He was born in the year of the Gunpowder Plot, and he lived to within a few years of the Revolution (1605–1682); he himself was loyalist in his sympathies, and Norfolk, which was his home for nearly half a century, was ardently Puritan; and yet, as Dr. Alexander Whyte says, you might read every word of Sir Thomas Browne's writings and never discover that a sword had been unsheathed or a shot fired in England, all the time he was living and writing there. Yet, after all, perhaps, the silence is not so strange. In the seventeenth century East Anglia lay in a siding of English life. The very supremacy of Puritanism would tend to an easy toleration of unpopular views in a famous citizen. And as for Browne himself, there were a hundred things—his patients, his books, his curios—which interested him vastly more than the noisy wrangling of Cavalier and Roundhead.

I.

The story of a life so secluded and uneventful is quickly told. Indeed, there is so little to tell