

THE BOOK OF JOB.

Letter to a Friend who had sent me a copy of Dr. Aked's
Book on Job.

January 20th, 1914.

I greatly appreciate your kindness in sending me a copy of Dr. Aked's work on the Book of Job. Though I cannot agree with him I have greatly enjoyed it. His is indeed to me a novel interpretation. This little book gives me a very close idea of what that "Divine" thinks of the subject, and of course, preacher-like, he works around until he finds "Glory to God" in the story, however illogical the conclusion is.

I have always before heard "divines" claim that all of the Bible was the word and work of God, but Dr. Aked finds that the Book of Job is only a poem, written by a genius.

To my mind there is nothing in the Bible, no special part of it, that is so ⁱⁿconsistent with the generally accepted ecclesiastic "plan" as the Book of Job. It injects into the Bible as read by our fathers an element of discord in the "plan." As read by Aked that discord is largely removed, but that reading cannot and will not be accepted.

If that story is told as the relation of a fact----and I can see no good reason to take it otherwise than that way, just as we do the rest of the Bible--- it makes God ridiculous. No God of whom I can conceive would do the petty, mean, onery things that story says He did.

We begin, as the story does, with the fact that "Job was a good man and eschewed evil". He therefore had a right by simple and elemental fairness, to be treated according to his merit. But

we are told in other language, but in substance, that because the Devil bragged God turned poor old Job over to the machinations of "Old Scratch", and permitted that good man to be afflicted almost to the breaking point. All this for no merited punishment and without reward to Job; for no object except that He might win a kind of wager he did not need, that He could not wish, and which did no good to or for any one.

This puts both God and the Devil on the same plane as two boys, one with a chip on his shoulder daring the other to knock it off. That was a pretty undignified attitude for the Devil to say nothing of the Great Master of the Universe, and also to say nothing of the outrage on Job.

God did not have to prove that Job was true; He didn't have to prove anything. He knew what Job was in his innermost nature; His omniscience---which He must have to be God---gave him absolutely accurate knowledge on that; His omnipotence gave Him absolute power over the situation. Why should He care what the Devil thought or said? What the Devil said was of no consequence. It is inconceivable that God should have done such a thing; it is contrary to all rational ideas of God. If it be a fact that He did that, that fact negates Godship. A real sure-enough God would have tweaked the Devil's nose for the impertinence.

Is the Book of Job an Allegory or Poem?

I see no ground for any ecclesiastic to claim that anything in the Bible is put there in a Pickwickian sense. The Bible is true or not true, as a whole, if it is the Word of God. If true, it was given man as a guide for him, ~~many~~ ^{man}; it is a guide book, a code of laws, not a poem. God was perfectly able to say in plain

understandable language what He intended. When He got down to business He said "Thou shalt not steal, etc." That is direct, plain and to the point. What nonsense it would have been to put that into a "poem". No one could be sure about a thing with so masked a meaning that men fought over it, like bob-tailed Tom cats, all down the ages. Yet that is what those "Men of the Cloth" indirectly assert He did, not only with the story of Job but with most of the Bible. We must accept the Bible as a whole, just as written, if we believe it to be "The Word of God". We have no logical right to cut any part of it out, or twist it, or reason it away. We must take it by its four corners, swallow the Garden of Eden story, snake, apples and all, the Fiery Furnace, and if it says Jonah swallowed the whale, why Jonah did swallow the whale. If one does otherwise he convicts God of talking "through His hat". And those things---those stories--- we can't rationally swallow unless we give ourselves over to the thing the ecclesiastics call the "spiritual self", which is nothing but a blind, unthinking, emotional hunch, or the theologian's ship hits a rock.

If God had intended the Book of Job as a poem, He could have avoided all this fang-and-claw disputation as to what it is, by simply writing at the top, "The Book of Job, A Poem". I can't see why God, with infinite power to clerify, should leave "His Word" dark, incomprehensible and mysterious--so much so that men are not sure of what He was driving at.

Of course all this applies with more or less force to the whole Bible. No human has ever understood it as a whole; they, most of them, say they do, but we know they do not. At least when there are so many diverse readings of it, only one (if one) can be

right, since right is a fixed fact and not a comparative or constructive matter.

But is the Book of Job a poem?

One has just as much right to say that the "Ten Commandments" is a poem or an allegory. If one may thus turn one of God's writings inside out and outside in, we have the same right to do the like with all parts of it.

When then do we stand on solid rock?

If it be a poem, it is still quite as valueless to us as it is considered as actual fact. A poem is valuable in a moral aspect only as it teaches justice, mercy, constancy, fair-play and kindred qualities. The one prominent idea in the Book of Job teaches the reverse, since it portrays God as violating all those things. And this is true considering it as a narrative of fact or as a poem. I cannot, for my life, see wherein the standing of God on His head, ^{as} ~~as~~ to all those qualities in a poem, teaches anything worth a nickle.

Take the Book of Job either as fact or fancy, it cuts the tap-root of ecclesiasticism. The latter rests on faith; swallow whether you believe it or not; while agnosticism breaths through every fiber of the Book of Job. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, etc." Is not that the very essence of agnosticism? That system says, all that is too profound a mystery, too high, deep and wide for this poor brain to comprehend ~~it~~ as a whole; belief, yea or nay, is based on so little actual knowledge that it is valueless. "The wind bloweth where it listeth". We know not whence it comes, why, or whither it goes; its infinity balks and baffles us. We have to give it up. I don't think God has much of an opinion of him who is afraid to give it up ^{but} ~~and~~ swallows it-----

Job

as some old dead-and-dust fellow of thousands of years ago advised him to.

How Dr. Aked or any other man can find where God gets any "glory" out of His doings in the matter of Job, puzzles me. In the first place, that God gets glory or desires glory out of anything on this earth, is absurd. Glory is a comparative matter; it rests on distinction between competitors; competition or distinction as between God and any man is unthinkable. God is God; alone, all in all. He would play with such a thing as with thistle down. As well say I get glory by making a mud-pie as to say God gets glory from any of His created things.

Whatever made man made a botched job. When we consider our limitations, our pains and aches, our blunders, our inherent nonsense, when we see the millions dragging out a few years of sordid and sodden existence, we are forced to admit that. Glory in that? He could just as easily have made man a perfect thing; ~~He~~ might, in a ^{well} ~~limping~~ sense, have derived satisfaction from so doing, but "glory" never.

Dr. Aked draws a picture of God, after He has treated Job so scurvily, holding a conversation with His victim, but He says nothing of moment beyond some bragging on Himself. He did not even act the gentleman and apologize to poor old Job for the wrong He had knowingly and causelessly inflicted. Any half decent man of today would have acted better. That was not God.

Again Dr. Aked speaks of "the poem" having been written by a "genius". I thought preachers at least, ^{believed that} ~~thought~~ God wrote all the Bible, or dictated it or had it done, which all comes to the same thing. The Dr. certainly did not mean to call God a "genius". That would even ² ~~dis~~solemnize the subject. He meant

evidently to say to us that some man, some mere man, man born of woman, man made of the dust of the earth, but a man grandly greater than the mass of men, wrote it. That implies a denial that God had anything to do with it any more than He has to do with one of Hearst's editorials, and the clear logic of that is to saw the limb off between himself and the tree---for if God did not write the Book of Job, how can we know He wrote any of the Bible?

To sum it all up, all this dissertating, all the high sounding trumpeting of the "Cloth", this posing and assuming, is as foolish as a pup barking at a knot-hole. No man knows anything about it and guessing or theorizing, "argufying" and ~~printing~~ "putting out" are all as foolish as folly's very essence.

The only thing we can do, in reason, is in the language of Spencer, to indulge a "reverential acquiescence in our utter ignorance of what is the truth"; be white with life's duties as it is given us to see them, extend help to the living and hope to the dead. We cannot know anything of the Beyond while in this life; why try to?

James W. Oates.