

and meditated on the secrets of salvation? But now he is hurled from his eminence: all that is lovely in life is suddenly taken away: he sits before them a loathsome sufferer. For seven long days and nights there sate the friends, and pondered the miserable ruin in their hearts: Eliphaz, the seer, to whom heaven revealed itself in night visions; Bildad, deeply versed in the ancient traditional lore; and Zophar, with his stern and sublime morality. To all was presented the same dilemma, Can God be just if this man be not a sinner?

Thus, without exception, all seem to have been ensnared in the trap that was not, directly at least, laid for them. The wind of Job's destruction has proved too strong for their faith. All is darkness, doubt, or apostacy. Everywhere they accuse God falsely, or contend for him deceitfully. Satan seems to have gained his point with every one *except the silent sufferer*. He rises far above their weakness!

"As some tall cliff, that rears its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,

Eternal sunshine settles on its head"—

So towered among his fellows the patriarch of our story! So sublime his declaration, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

In the dialogue which ensues between Job and his friends, which forms the greater portion of the book, they assert, with continually-increasing vehemence, that suffering, such as his, only happens to the guilty; and, at first mildly, afterwards with harsh severity, they urge him to confess the secret enormity he had practised: he, in return, declares, that after searching self-examination, he is conscious of no such sin as they attribute to him; and argues that universal experience proves that there is no such unvarying rule of Providence as they suppose, but that prosperity and adversity happen to good and evil, to righteous and wicked, indiscriminately. So far as the arguments of the friends go, Job's answer was conclusive; and they had nothing to reply. But lest Job should remain unconvinced of the flaw in his own reasoning, the young Elihu is permitted to break in, and correct his mistaken view. His argument amounts to this—whenever God visits us with

affliction, it is certainly for our good, and therefore, never should we blame him. Moreover, our innocence or guilt is not of small importance to our worldly happiness; for, though we see it not now, God will not fail to recompense both. To this Job makes no reply. With the candour of an enlightened mind he has perceived his error, and he will not attempt to defend it. Finally, the Lord Himself answered Job out of the whirlwind; and awe-struck by the Divine appearance which he had invoked, and by the offer of God Himself to plead in Person on those very points on which he had declared himself unsatisfied; by a train of queries abrupt and majestic, and of descriptions grand and divine, Job is brought to see his utter insignificance before Him, whose Providence he had doubted; and, owning that it is impossible for short-sighted mortals to know the principles of Divine action, to submit himself with heartfelt resignation to the will of God. He is taught, not indeed the lesson he most desires, but the lesson he most needs. He learns, not to trace the workings of Providence, but to trust the event; and, this lesson once learned, the trials are removed. He who sat as a "refiner and purifier of silver," by whose kind permission the furnace had been "heated one seven times hotter than" is wont, now beheld His own glorious image reflected in His creature; a copy of the submission of Him, who also was made "perfect through sufferings." Immediately He removes him out of the fire, and restores him to double his former state.

Such, briefly, is the story of "the patience of Job;" at the merits of which, as a poem, we are now to look. It is distinctly to be remembered, that when the book of Job is described as a poem, and called, after the example of many critics, a sacred drama, no doubt is entertained that all its facts actually occurred, and that its discourses were really uttered, as recorded by living men. But this does not at all prevent its being poetry. It is quite a mistake to suppose that a poem must be exclusively the work of the imagination. As fact is often stranger than fiction, so there is more true poetry actually around us than the loftiest work of fancy has disclosed. There is poetry in the works of nature, and poetry in the wrestlings of life;