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## The Ghost.

SERMON BY REV. JAMES CARMICHAEL, D.D., OF STRANOE, ONT.

TEXT—JOB IV. 17. "Then a spirit passed before my face, the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes, there was silence and I heard a voice saying, shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" etc.

Eliphaz is the first to reply to the sad wail of sorrow and woe that burst from the bleeding heart of Job. He was, probably, the eldest and the most respected of the three friends. He was also by far the most dignified and courteous in his style of address. He came from Temon, a land famous for its wisdom and wise sayings. He is now, seemingly, an old man, older than Job's father, and feels called upon to offer a remonstrance to the wail of frantic grief which Job had uttered. He commenced in a calm and kindly spirit. He cherished no bitter feelings toward the sorely afflicted patriarch. He had come to visit him with the best of motives, to console with aim and to comfort him. It was only little by little, as their spirits were kindled in the heat of controversy, that the three friends launched out into bitter reproaches against Job. Men when aroused in keen debate will speak bitter words, which in their calmer and quieter moments they would never have uttered.

Eliphaz began with a humble apology for speaking at all. If we essay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking? He tells Job to remember how he had strengthened others in their affliction, and that he ought not now to show weakness himself. As a good and righteous man he should not despond nor repine under calamity. He who had so often upheld the falling and strengthened the feeble, should not now break out in murmuring and complaining against God. This is the point that staggers Eliphaz. If Job is a good man, why is he so greatly afflicted? If he is a righteous man why is he so sorely punished? It is contrary to all his experience; to all his observation; to all his notions of God, and his moral government. To his mind sin and punishment are always linked together as cause and effect. As the seed is so will the harvest be. They that plough wickedness and sow iniquity reap the same. The ungodly are destroyed by the blast of God, and consumed by the breath of His nostrils. This is the main doctrine which he and his friends defend. Misery implies guilt. Where there is heavy affliction there must be great sin, or great hypocrisy. Job's sufferings are very great, and hence his wickedness must have been correspondingly great. The innocent are never suffered to perish after this manner. The righteous are never suddenly cut off by some tremendous calamity. It is around this doctrine that the war is waged throughout the book. Great suffering implies great sin. Job is a great sufferer, therefore he must have been a great sinner. There is much in this first speech of Eliphaz that could not but grate harshly on the bleeding soul of Job. There is a limit to human endurance. It was scarcely possible to bear up under misery like his, without a word of complaint. The sobs and groans and lamentations wrung from him by unparalleled afflictions should not have been so harshly judged by his friends. There was too little tenderness, too little kindly sympathy in this address to minister any comfort or any consolation to such a mourner as Job. And then Eliphaz was wrong in the way in which he represented sin and sufferings as joined together in the moral government of God. You cannot explain every case of affliction by saying that it is the result of some foregoing sin. He brings no harsh or doubtful charge against Job. He expresses no suspicion, and apparently entertains none of the depth and reality of his piety. He lays no accusation upon him but such as is common to all who are sharers of our degenerate nature. All are impure in the sight of God, and, as a natural consequence, they are involved in calamities, sufferings, sorrows. But Eliphaz leaves altogether out of his account the great truth that sufferings are a discipline, a training, and that they shall be compensated by a far more exceeding reward. Man, he says, suffers because he is a sinner. But a man may also suffer because he is a saint, that he may manifest more fully his saintly character, that he may be ripened still more in holiness, and that his final recompense may be proportionately increased. The torch must at times be roughly shaken that it may blaze the more brightly. The sandal tree must be riven by the axe that its fragrance may fill all the garden. The fine gold must be put into the furnace that it may come out purified seven times. Suffering to Eliphaz was ever a punishment and nothing more. It was a judgment for sin, an infliction of the divine displeasure. It never entered his mind that it might also be a token of love, a means of grace, a blessing in disguise. He knew not that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth, and that to God's people the light afflictions here worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Still farther to maintain his position, and confirm the doctrine which he laid down, that great suffering implies great guilt, he relates a vision which he had from the spirit world. In the quiet of the night watches, in the stillness and silence of the midnight hours, the veil was slowly lifted, and a spirit stood before him. His thoughts were occupied with themes that were too high for him. It may have been in his own country, or it may have been since he came to see Job that he had this revelation from the spirit land. It may have been while pondering the great problem which the case of Job presented that this vision took shape before his mind. It came accompanied with terrors. Most of us have had, at some time or other of our lives, a terror of ghosts. And why should we be afraid of spirits and communications from the spirit world?

Man stands where he thinks he can pick flaws in the Divine government and find fault with the way in which God orders the affairs of His kingdom. God laughs at all his puny reasoning. Man is imperfect, God is infinitely perfect. There is an immeasurable distance between the holiness of the best man and the infinitely holy God. Man's purity is but creature purity. On the eternal mind the least stain of evil never casts its dimming shadow. Man is short sighted, God is the infinitely wise God. The purity of the heavens, the holiness of angels and of men is never equal to the absolute holiness of God. With bowed head, with humble and contrite heart, with unsaddled feet, fall down before the King eternal, immortal and invisible, the everlasting God, the Maker of heaven and earth. And from this near approach to God look toward yourself. How vast the interval! From the highest heaven to the lowest depths! From the great white throne to those who dwell in houses of clay, how vast, how awful the distance! Rising from the small circle of interests that surround thee, canst thou take in the awful sweep of the unslumbering Providence of God? Canst thou sit in judgment upon it? Canst thou suggest changes? And is this all the light, the comfort, the joy the Ghost could give us? Could it do nothing more than crush us with an awful sense of the littleness of man and the exceeding greatness and glory of God. Surely it is good for the soul in its profound depth of sorrow, to rise to the thought of the majesty, the holiness, the justice and eternity of God. In your hours of agony and woe, you must "remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." When your heart is over-whelmed within you, pray God to lead you to the Rock that is higher than you. Some men build painted houses of their own purity and holiness and perfection, and think themselves safe within their flimsy walls. The storms of the wrath of the great and dreadful God will one day sweep them all away for ever and ever. God himself can alone become the home of the soul, submit to him and you are safe. Flee to His everlasting arms and you will dwell securely. Dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, nothing can hurt you. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shall thou trust, His faithfulness shall be thy shield and buckler. Submit to God. His hand is on the helm, and He will guide your tiny barque down life's stream, till it reaches the ocean of His everlasting love. Submit to God and he will bear you safely through all the troubles and trials, the crosses and afflictions



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of this mortal life, till your feet tread the golden pavement of the better country. This is all the spectacle could say when it appeared. It threw light on none of the great questions which perplexed the speakers in the Book of Job. It pointed upward to God's holiness and sovereign power, and downward to the littleness and imperfection of man.

And so in our days of sorrow, we too might wish to draw aside the veil for a very little, and have some message from within it. We stand before it with longing soul and trembling heart. And if that curtain should slowly rise and the Ghost should appear before our startled vision now, what could we say to it; how could we question it? Would you ask it, is there a God? Look to the heaven's above you, and to the earth beneath, and you may read your answer there. Is this God kind, and loving, and good; is He my Father? The piece of bread the mother gives her little boy may tell you that. The bountiful provision made for all your wants answers your question as fully as any spirit from the spirit land could do. Are you a sinner? Look into your own soul, look on the world around you, look into the Word of God, and you find your answer. Will God pardon sin? A voice from heaven says, the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseeth from all sin. Would you ask the Ghost about the future, whether it shall bring you joy or sorrow, prosperity or adversity? Take hold of the guiding hand of God, and in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your steps. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Would you ask the Ghost about the friends that have gone before? A voice from heaven says "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." No, we will not draw aside the veil that curtains the beautiful abodes of the holy and blessed dead. We resign ourselves to your absence for a season till we see you walking in your air of glory, and drink it in as our native atmosphere too.

A thinking man is in a fair way to be a wise and good man.