

THE WORLD'S OLDEST POEM.

BY THE REV. FREDERIC GREEVES.

Concluded.

But the Book of Job is to be regarded as a Poem, not only from its employment of sublime and beautiful imagery, but also because *it lays bare, with matchless power, the depths of strength and tenderness that lie hidden in the human heart.*

How wonderfully is this done in the character and history of Job! He is introduced to us at first with nothing remarkable about him—rich and prosperous—just to his neighbours, benevolent to the poor, loving to his children, faithful to his God. But in all this there is nothing remarkable: it was the case of hundreds in his day; it is the case of thousands in our own: and had all this continued, he would have gone down to a nameless grave, and a few generations after, his very memory would have been erased. Suddenly sorrow comes and touches him. In a moment he is transfigured. No new power is imparted to him, but those already in him are brought into activity. Immediately he rises into a hero: his grandeur becomes colossal; he projects the shadow of his trial, and the light of his triumph over forty centuries. He acquires a name that will endure as long as earth endures. And so true is all this to the most secret principles of our nature, that even now after a hundred generations have successively trodden on his dust, and laid down to sleep beside him, our own hearts, and the hearts of all who read the story, beat in perfect harmony with the stricken, but most human, heart of the Patriarch of Uz!

This man is a man: his heart beats, every pulse of it, in perfect unison with mine; and yet what a hero the man is!—Look at his tenderness! We see this more in his silence, than in all his speech. One of the tenderest and most touching things in all Literature is this most eloquent and pathetic silence of Job about his children. Ten of them are gone; and through the whole of his complaints, he never mentions them. "What!" you say, "do you call that tenderness; not to speak of his children? one would have expected him to name them first of all." Glad we are to

hear you say so, though it is a great mistake; because it shows this is a kind of sorrow you have never known. If your character can be perfected without it, God grant you never may! But let us tell you to help you to understand Job, that it is the shallow stream that murmurs; deep waters are silent: that when real sorrow comes, it falls upon the heart as heavy as an avalanche and as cold; no tears then, no complainings: the heart smitten and withered, like that of Job, is as the stricken deer, whose only remaining wish is to penetrate the depths of the tangled forest, hide the pang from every human eye, and die in peace. Lest you should accuse us of explaining the silence of Job unfairly, (as you very likely will if you measure his sorrow by any you have known,) we will quote the opinion of Tennyson, expressed in his poem "In Memoriam," one of the most beautiful poems that has appeared in our day.

"The lesser griefs that may be said,
That breathe a thousand tender vows,
Are but as servants in a house
Where lies the master newly dead;
Who speak their feeling as it is,
And weep the fullness from their mind:
'It will be hard,' they say, 'to find
Another service such as this.'
My lighter moods are like to these,
Which out of words a comfort win;
But there are other griefs within,
And tears that at the fountain freeze;
For by the hearth the children sit
Cold in that atmosphere of death,
And scarce endure to draw their breath,
Or like to noiseless phantoms flit:
But open converse is there none,
So much the vital spirits sink
To see the vacant chair, and think.
'How good! how kind! and he is gone!'"

Such is the Poet Laureate's beautiful appreciation of the silence of profound sorrow. And in this silence on the part of Job, no less than in all his utterances, we see the tenderness of the man's heart. And this tenderness is a part of heroism. A great heart is always a tender one. And such was the heart of Job!

And then look at the man's strength.—Two proofs suggest themselves of this: his determined opposition to his mistaken friends; his firm trust in his God. His friends try to shake him out of confidence