

**THE POEM OF THE  
BOOK OF JOB DONE  
INTO ENGLISH VERSE**

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The Poem of the Book of Job Done into English Verse by The Earl of Winchilsea

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**THE EARL OF WINCHILSEA**

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INTO ENGLISH VERSE**



St. Pie. O. T. Job. English. Total. Verse.

THE  
POEM OF THE BOOK OF JOB

DONE

INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

BY

THE EARL OF WINCHILSEA,  
(LATE VISCOUNT MAIDSTONE)

OF THE  
COUNTY OF  
CALIFORNIA

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"The pencil of the Holy Ghost has labour'd more in describing the afflictions of Job than the fables of Solomon."—BACON'S ESSAYS.

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## P R E F A C E .

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No man who ever gave it a thought, has doubted that the Book of Job is an Eastern poem of unexampled magnificence ; still less will any one doubt it who has endeavoured to restore it to its original state.

Grand in subject, simple and unembarrassed in action, replete with glowing pictures of Eastern life, it represents with authority, that which all the greatest poems of antiquity have shadowed forth in doubt and obscurity, viz. : the contest between the Powers of Good and Evil for the possession of man. This argument lies at the root of the *Prometheus Bound* ; the Nemesis of the House of Atreus ; and the evil star of *Œdipus*. The ancients did not fail to perceive that the best men were often victims of a train of calamities which, personally, they do not appear to have merited ; but in endeavouring to solve this problem, they wandered into

every phase of fable and conjecture; and ended, in fact, by confessing that the matter was too hard for them.

There never yet was a nation of atheists; or, perhaps, an individual that in his heart believed what his tongue might utter—viz., “that the world and all within it are the result of chance.” The wonders of nature, the capacity of man for knowledge, the recurrence of day and night, the regularity of seed-time and harvest, the beautiful and apparent order of the universe, intimating though it may the presence of a disturbing Cause, are too marvellous and complete in themselves to admit of such a solution. Yet, the wisest men have been the most puzzled to explain the sight of their eyes, and to erect a satisfactory system which should supply at once the rule and the exception; accounting for the coexistence of a sustaining and disturbing cause in nature, and reconciling the divinity of man's soul, with his infirmities and his crimes. How fruitless and grotesque in many instances these efforts have been, it is needless to relate; but it may be safely remarked that few of the wildest legends of the Red Indian, or Central African, are equal in absurdity to the theories of the refined Greek and imaginative Brahmin. At the first view of the Homeric poem,



the want of a solid basis on which to rear the supernatural cannot fail to strike every observer. Homer (be he one or many) was far too great a master to ignore the continual interference of a Supreme Power in the concerns of the world, and the daily life of men. He accounted for its action after his kind, and his genius has shown us a court of Gods, distinguished only by a little more power, and a little less probity, from the heroes they patronized. The inevitable result of this picture must have been to diminish the respect of his hearers for the deities whose freaks, friendships, and infirmities he has satirized so rudely. With all his anger and faults, Achilles is a more gallant knight and a more respectable character than Ares; and the world would have had reason to rejoice if Hector could have changed places with the Olympian Zeus. This weak point, then, in his materials meets Homer at every turn; and, intimately blended as his history is with supernatural action, he totally fails in giving dignity to the intercourse between Gods and men. His Gods are greater and wiser than men, simply because it suits him to tell us that they *are*, not because he exhibits their superiority either by precept or example. In short, the progress of the story

tacitly disproves his own conclusion, and leaves him, no doubt, aware of the fact.

In the poem of the Book of Job, however, we are met by no such difficulty. The author speaks with authority; and marvellous as the tale is, it is intelligible to the meanest understanding, and betrays in itself no contradiction. It presents the Almighty in a new and astonishing relation with man; but still just, inscrutable, and omnipotent. Grant his machinery to Homer, and the result is still poor, uncertain, and disappointing; but grant the machinery of the Book of Job, and the action of the poem is not only sublime, but reasonable and consistent. The special difference between these two works, then, is this:—The one gains, the other loses, whenever the supernatural is introduced. Job's three friends are beset with the same difficulties which bewildered the Greek poets and philosophers. They obstinately refuse to admit that a man can reap otherwise than he sows; and persist in declaring that Job must have committed some great and secret crime, which had brought down upon him such signal punishment. The patriarch, on the contrary, strong in his own innocence, takes a much higher view of man's condition, and the ways of the Almighty. He can understand that it may

be "good for him to be afflicted," even without a cause, and acknowledges that God is just in all his ways, at the same time that he resolutely denies the truth of the charges brought against him. In this respect Job's views are much in advance of his age, and he is rewarded accordingly. Even under the Jewish dispensation, temporal prosperity was held to be the test of virtue, and calamity the badge of vice. It was reserved for the Christian dispensation to explain how this rule could be true in many instances, but fail of universal application; and that could only be done by introducing man to another life hereafter, which should restore the balance, and make up for the inequalities and shortcomings of this. The plot of the poem is simple, but majestic; and there is no situation in the whole range of poetry comparable to the introductory scene, where Satan is represented as tempting his Maker, and cunningly devising for a good man the severest trials to which a mere mortal was ever subjected.

The manners and customs of the East are introduced in splendid profusion; and allusions to natural objects are thrown in, with a richness and propriety that embraces almost every phase of illustration, and leaves little for any successor to accomplish. It is difficult to