

He Thought Himself God

Story of a Modern Job, Who Unlike the Bible Character, Denied God and Was Rewarded

He cried aloud, "There is no God"
"I am God." He was exalted. Strength
filled the veins of the cripple. He flung
back the bed covers and stood erect
for the first time.



The story of a God-fearing man upon whom the church roof fell as he prayed and paralyzed him, the doctors said, for life. He prayed and his child was born dead, his daughter was raped, his son lynched, and finally his wife deserted him. Frost, drought, flood killed his crops. Then he rebelled against his God.

He lay quite still in the dark room, his black sullen face turned to the wall. The rain beat hard against the pane. Thunder rolled in the sky. Lightning played wildly. There was no human sound save his breathing.

He thought on his wife. He could hear again her choked utterance:

"Don't keep a-looking at me, Big Boy, dar's hell a-burnin' in dem black eyes. I'm going down de road to pa's. If my own dear mammy wuz a he'pless cripple, I wouldn't come no-wheres near her, and her blaspheming! De heavenly Father is a-speakin' in de t'under, and you is a answerin' you don't believe in God!"

His clenched hands battered against the wall. He had asked his God with intelligence, "What have I done to deserve this fate?"

and his God had not answered him, but heaped pain upon pain through his paralysis, the raping of his daughter, the lynching of his avenging son and now this desertion by his wife when he questioned the mysterious ways of her Maker.

He had gone on to reason that a God was a Peace, a Light, a Haven, an Answerer of Prayer. In no way was the God of his fathers similar. Therefore, since he could not change himself, he must change his God. If he had an immortal soul to save, it was in danger of destruction through his devotion to a graven image.

It was then his wife had fled. Tears crept over the lids of his eyes. He saw himself as a boy sitting on a front pew with his bosomy mother and his brothers and sisters, listening to his father's tremendous flood of beautiful illiterate metaphors,

By DOROTHY WEST

God saves the sufferer by suffering and by adversity gets them to listen.—Job 36:15.

and loving the God he likened to a lion in the wilderness, a stark tree staunch against the wind, a steady shining star.

He had risen to give his treble testimony, avowing his faith, his little heart swelling in pride. But he could not actualize any benefits. He was healthy because a minister has six long days to tend a farm. He was happy in his ignorant belief that a good Negro lived to piously die.

He was 16 before he happened on any knowledge of self-improvement.

Why do wicked men live on, live to be old and strong? Their hours are safe from fear; God's rod never strikes them.

Their bulls breed without fail, their cows calve safely.

They see their families flourishing . . . their children flock out to the fields, boys and girls dancing merrily. They live a prosperous life and die in peace.

Why should we serve the Almighty?

What is the good of praying to Him?

Does God draw any difference in men?

—Job 21:7-22.

He had been contentedly plodding after young Master, carrying his heavy books to and from the state college, in the interim helping a little on the farm, but mostly lying flat in the long grass, a torn hat shading his expressionless face from the sun.

But at 16, sitting up with young master while he labored late over his lessons, with awakening absorption he would attend to the recitation of wisdom. Thus, inevitably, unrest attacked him. He, who had been an animal, became a thinking man.

He began a poignant praying for some avenue to knowledge and tramped eight miles each day to a little inadequate Negro school, where he sat between a boy of ten and a man of fifty. He went a fortnight, and then Lucinda told him she was going to bear a child. So he married her. Ironically the baby was born dead.

He set his face toward the North, and prayed God for guidance, but the delicate dying babies were an endless chain that bound him. Only an amorous daughter survived a son.

He prayed God that his tiny field would yield and increase that he might start to save for the schooling of his son. Frost killed the first crop, drought the second, the third year of his praying brought a flood.

He went alone to his father's old church to gently question his God, and the rotting roof fell in on him. The country surgeon told him he would never walk again.

The weary years piled up with the added weight of ceaseless poverty and pain. He lost his daughter and his

son. Now he had lost his wife. And in this moment of his final loss, he felt slip from him the last shred of his faith.

He cried aloud: "There is no God!" The lightning did not strike him dead. He shouted wildly: "I am God!"

He was exalted. A tremor tore the length of his body. Strength filled his veins. With a fierce gesture he flung back the sheet, and swung his legs over the side of the bed, and stood erect on his feet.

His brain cooled. He took one sure step, then another, and stood quite still, aghast and penitent.

"God," he prayed, "forgive my unbelief."

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