

[R1608 : page 9]

THE BOOK OF GENESIS. ITS ACCOUNT OF CREATION.

THE book of Genesis opens with the grandest theme that ever occupied the thoughts of created intelligences; the Work of God, in bringing into being the material universe, and peopling it with organic, conscious life. The style and manner of treatment are in harmony with the grandeur of the theme. In few and powerful strokes, the progressive stages of the work are pictured to the mind, on a scale of magnificence unparalleled in writings human or divine.

It is much to be regretted that these characteristic traits of the account of the Creation, shadowing forth its impenetrable mysteries in broad and general outlines, should have been overlooked in its interpretation. This sublime [R1608 : page 10] Epic of Creation, with its boldly figurative imagery, and poetic grandeur of conception and expression, has been subjected to a style of interpretation, suited only to a plain and literal record of the ordinary occurrences of life. Hence, not only its true spirit, but its profound teachings, have been misconceived and misinterpreted; and its exhibition of the mysteries of creative power, which science traces in its own observation of Nature, have been confounded with popular misapprehensions, irreconcilable with the well-known facts of science.

A reconciliation of the Biblical account with the facts of Geological science has been attempted on a false theory; namely, that the several stages in the earth's formation took place in an assumed interval of time between the first and second verses; an interval of vast and indefinite length, unnoticed by the sacred writer. During this interval, the successive processes in the formation of the earth was completed, and the successive orders of vegetable and animal life, the remains of which are found imbedded in its strata, were brought into existence and perished; that the account of the present state of things

on the earth's surface begins with the description in the second verse, representing the chaotic condition of its surface after the last of its great internal convulsions; and what follows, in verses 3-31, occurred in six natural days of twenty-four hours.

The objections to this theory are:

1. There is no foundation for it in the sacred writer's statement. He gives no intimation of such an interval. It is thrust in, where there is no indication that it was present to his mind, and no reason for it in the connection.

2. It assumes that the sacred writer has not given us an account of the Creator's work, but only of a part of it; that for unknown ages the earth was peopled with vegetable and animal life, of which no record is made.

3. It is without support in the facts ascertained by science. Scientific investigation shows that no such convulsion, as is assumed in this theory, occurred at the period preceding the creation of man.

Hence the latest advocates of this theory are driven to the assumption, that what is revealed in verses 3-31 has reference only to a small area of western Asia; being nothing more than the reconstruction of that little segment of the earth's surface, broken up and thrown into confusion by an internal convulsion, and the creation there of the new orders of vegetable and animal life that now occupy the globe.

On this supposition, the earth had already enjoyed the full light of the sun for ages, before the work of the first day (verse 3) began. Even then all around this little tract, the earth was in a blaze of light; but over this tract dense mists shut out the rays of the sun. God said: "Let there be light!" The mists grew thinner, letting in sufficient light for the time, though not enough to disclose the forms of the heavenly orbs, which were not seen there till the fourth day, though visible everywhere else.

Then follow, in rapid succession of single days, the formation of continents and seas, the clothing of the earth with vegetation, and the peopling of it with the various classes of irrational animals, and finally with Man.

The infinite God has not revealed his work of creation on such a scale as this; and its proportions are better suited to the conception of the timid interpreter, stumbling at minute difficulties and seeking to evade them, than to the grand and fearless exposition of his work from God's own hand.

4. It is an unworthy conception of the Creator and of his work. Why was the work of creation extended through six natural days, when a single divine volition would have brought the whole universe into being, with all its apparatus for the support of life, and its myriads of living beings? Its extension through six successive periods, of whatever duration, can be explained only by the operation of those secondary causes, which the structure of the earth itself proves to have been active in its formation, requiring ages for their accomplishment.

It is now established, beyond question, that the earth we inhabit was brought into existence many ages before man was created. During these ages it was in process of formation, [R1608 : page 11] and was gradually prepared, under the divine direction, for its future occupation by man. In those vast periods, succeeding each other in long procession, it was fitted up for his abode by accumulations of mineral wealth within its bosom. These processes required ages for their completion, as represented in the sacred narrative, and recorded by the divine hand in the successive strata enveloping the earth, and marking the progressive stages of its formation.*

*"Every great feature in the structure of the planet corresponds with the order of the events narrated in the sacred history." – *Prof. Silliman, Outline of Geological Lectures*, appended to *Bakewell's Geology*, p.67, note. "This history furnished a record important alike

to philosophy and religion; and we find in the planet itself the proof that the record is true" (p.30).

[R1609 : page 11]

The writer has no claim to speak as a geologist, and does not profess to do so. He takes the teachings of geology as given us by eminent masters of the science, entitled to speak on its behalf. But, speaking as an interpreter of God's Word, and taking their representation of their own science, he sees no discordance between the two records, which the same divine Author has given us in his Word and in his works. The former, when rightly interpreted, is in perfect accord with the latter, when truly exhibited. And geologists themselves assert that the Word of God, so interpreted, is in harmony with the teachings of their science. This alone is sufficient to satisfy the candid and conscientious inquirer. But they assert, also, that the divine Word explains the divine work, while the divine work confirms the divine Word. Moreover, no human philosophy could have discovered, or conjectured, what is here revealed.* The divine record was made when science had not yet penetrated the mysteries of Nature; when the earth's record of its own history was still buried deep in its enveloping strata, and had been read by no human eye. As, therefore, no one witnessed the scenes described, or had read the "testimony of the rocks," the written account, if true, as science admits it to be, must have been of superhuman origin.

*"No human mind was witness of the events; and no such mind in the early age of the world, unless gifted with superhuman intelligence, could have contrived such a scheme; – would have placed the creation of the sun, the source of light to the earth, so long after the creation of light, even on the *fourth* day, and, what is equally singular, between the creation of plants and that of animals, when so important to both; and none could have reached to the depths of philosophy exhibited in the whole plan." – *Dana, Manual of Geology*, art. Cosmogony, p.743.

The successive stages in the account of the Creation are as follows: –

1. The act of bringing matter into being. Its condition as "waste and empty," and subjection to the divine influence imparting to it its active properties. Production of light, as the first effect of this imparted action.+

+Styled *cosmical* in distinction from *solar* light.

2. Separation of the fluid mass into waters above and waters below.

3. Separation of land and water on the earth. Vegetation, beginning with its lowest orders.

4. Sun, moon and stars.

5. Animal life, beginning with inhabitants of the waters, the lowest in the scale, and winged species on the land.

6. Terrestrial animals, in ascending grades. Man, and his dominion over all.++

++"In this succession," says Prof. Dana (*Manual of Geology*, as above, p.745), "we observe not merely an order of events, like that deduced from science; there is a system in the arrangement, and a far-reaching prophecy, to which philosophy could not have attained, however instructed."

These periods of creative activity, and the cessation that followed, were presented to the mind of the sacred writer under the familiar symbolism of the six days of labor and the seventh of rest. This was a natural and intelligible application of it; the word *day*, the simplest and most familiar measure of time, being used in all languages for any period of duration, of greater or less extent; and it is specially appropriate in such a style of representation as we find in this chapter.

The six days of labor, and the seventh of rest, having been adopted as the symbolism under which these sublime mysteries are revealed, whatever properly belongs to it, and [R1609 : page 12] is essential to its full expression, is pertinent to the writer's object. Each *period* being represented by a "day," its beginning and end are described in terms proper to represent a day: "there was evening and there was morning." This was necessary, in order to preserve the symbolic representation.

It should be observed that the sacred writer, throughout this account, represents things under forms of expression most easily apprehended by the common mind. The narrative was given to instruct, and not to perplex and confound, the common reader, as it would have done if expressed in scientific forms, adapted to a higher stage of culture than the Bible requires, or could properly presuppose, in its readers.

Such a view of the sacred narrative exalts our conception of the divine Architect, and of his work. He who inhabits eternity has no need to be in a hurry. With him, a thousand years are as one day. It was not till ages of preparation had passed away, that his purposes found their entire fulfilment, and his work its completed unity, in the creation of man.

According to the distinguished teachers of science – Professors Silliman, Guyot and Dana – the account of the creation recognizes two great eras, an *inorganic* and an *organic*, consisting of three days each; each era opening with the appearance of light, that of the first being cosmical, that of the second solar for the special uses of the earth.*

***I. Inorganic era:**

1st Day. – LIGHT cosmical.

2nd Day. – The earth divided from the fluid around, or individualized.

3rd Day. – 1. Outlining of the land and water.

2. Creation of vegetation.

II. Organic era:

4th Day. – LIGHT from the sun.

5th Day. – Creation of the lower order of animals.

6th Day. – **1.** Creation of Mammals. **2.** Creation of Man."

– *Dana, Manual of Geology*, p.745.

It need not be supposed that the sacred writer read in these wonderful revelations all the mysteries which they contain, or that they were seen by those to whom the revelations were first addressed. It was not necessary that he or they should be made wise in physical learning beyond the wants of their time; and the symbolism itself conveyed all the instruction they needed.

– T. J. CONANT.
