

[This sermon was scanned and proofed by Michael Madden, an elder of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, Australia, who has an interest in 19th century church history.]

NATURAL SCIENCE AND THEOLOGICAL SCIENCE.

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by

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[Extract from, J. W. Burgon, *Inspiration and Interpretation: Seven Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford: with preliminary remarks, being an answer to a volume entitled, "Essays and Reviews."* Sermon II, pp. 22-52.]

Through faith we understand that the worlds were made by the word of God. Hebrews xi, 3

ST. PAUL, in a famous and familiar chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, having declared "what Faith is," proceeds, (as the heading of the chapter expresses it), to note "the worthy fruits thereof in the Fathers of old time." The Book of Genesis was obviously in his hands, or in his heart, while he wrote: for he appeals to the transactions there recorded, in the very order, and often in the very words, of Moses. The HOLY GHOST, I say, directs our attention to what is contained in the ivth,—vth,—vith,—xiith,—xviith,—xxiind,—xxviith,—xlviith,—and lth chapters of Genesis. But He begins with a yet earlier chapter. *He begins with the first.* Abel,—Enoch,—Noah,—Abraham,—Sarah,—Isaac,—Jacob,—Joseph;—these stand forward as samples of God's faithful ones. But with them, the HOLY GHOST proposes to associate *us*. Moreover, He gives us the place of honour. Before mentioning one of their acts of Faith, He mentions one of *ours*. We come first,—then they. And the particular field in which we shine out so conspicuously,—the special province which is assigned to *us*—that portion of the inspired Narrative wherein *you and I* are supposed to shew a degree of undoubting faith which entitles us to rank with those "Fathers of old time,"—is found to be the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. "Through Faith we understand that the worlds were made by the Word of God." An honourable place, and an honourable function truly! I would to God that it might be as gratifying to every one of the congregation, as it is to the preacher, to discover that this is the special stand-point which has been reserved for him and for them.

Since, however, it is impossible to forget that we have sometimes seen heads, which are supposed to be very much indeed in advance of the age, shaken ominously at the very chapter which the text bequeaths and commends to the special acceptance of you and me,—I propose that, in the very briefest manner, we now review the contents of that chapter; in order that we may discover what is the special absurdity, or impossibility, or improbability, or by whatever other name the thing is to be called,—which makes it quite out of the question that you or I should undertake the act of Faith here assigned us.

I read then, that “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the Earth”—by which I understand, that, at some remote period,—which may or may not baffle human Arithmetic¹,—it was the pleasure of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost,—*three* Persons, coeternal and coequal,—*one* God,—out of nothing, to create the entire Universe. “All things that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him (Col. i. 16.);” and they were created out of nothing. The word in the original does not indeed necessarily imply as much: but since there is *no* word in Hebrew (any more than there is in Greek, Latin, or English,) peculiarly expressive of the notion of creating out of nothing, it need not excite our surprise that Moses does not employ such a word to describe what God did “in the beginning.”—*Then* it was, in the grey of that far distant morning I mean, that all those glittering orbs which sow the vault of Heaven with brightness and with beauty, flashed into sudden being. “Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone: Thou hast made Heaven, the Heaven of Heavens, *with all their host* (Neh. ix. 6.).” Suns, the centres of systems, many of them so distant from this globe of ours, that sun and system scarce shew so bright as a single lesser star: suns, I say, with their marvellous equipage of attendant bodies,—our sun among the rest, with all those wandering fires which speed their unwearied courses round it: suns, and planets with their moons, bathed once and for ever in the fountain of that Light which God inhabited from all Eternity, then marshalled themselves in mysterious order, according to “the counsel of His will (Eph. i. 11.):” yea, and with their furniture, unimagined and unimaginable, went careering through the untrodden realms of space, each on its several errand of glory, because of obedience to its Maker’s sovereign Law (Hooker’s Eccl. Pol., B. I. c. iii.). “By the Word of the Lord,” (as it is written,) “were the Heavens made; and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth!” (Ps. xxxiii. 6.)

Now, it is reserved to the geologist,—(Nature’s High-priest!)—to guess at the condition of this Earth of ours throughout all the long period of unchronicled ages which immediately succeeded the birthday of Time. It is for *him* to guess at the successive changes which this globe of ours underwent; and the progressive cycles of Creation of which it was the theatre; and the many strange races of creatures which, one after another, moved upon its surface,—walking the dry, or inhabiting the moist. *He* shall guess; and *I* will sit at his feet and listen, with unfeigned gratitude, wonder, and delight, while he reports to me his guesses: (for the really great man is eager to assure me that they are no more.)—But when his tale of perplexity is ended, and the last 6,000 years of this world’s History have to be discussed, the geologist’s function is at an end. I bid him, in God’s Name, be silent; for now it is God that speaketh. If any question be moved as to how *that actual system of things to which Man belongs*, began,—I bid him come down, and take the learner’s place; for now *I* mean to assume his vacant chair. This time, there shall at least be no guess-work. God is now the Speaker: and what God revealeth unto me, that I promise faithfully to report to *him*.

¹ The whole period from the beginning of the primary fossiliferous strata to the present day, must be great beyond calculation, and only bear comparison with the astronomical cycles, as might naturally be expected, the earth being without doubt of the same antiquity with the other bodies of the solar system.”—Mrs. Somerville’s *Physical Geography*.

There was a time, then,—and it was certainly less than 6,000 years ago,—when “the Earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” What catastrophe it was which had caused that the fountains of the abyss should be broken up, and the solid Earth submerged, I am not concerned to explain:—nor how it had come to pass that from a world of seas and continents, it had become a watery ball, wrapped about with superincumbent vapour:—nor how the blessed sunlight had suffered dire eclipse;—so that the Earth revolved in a horror of great darkness. *My faith* however is not troubled,—nor even perplexed,—by the strangeness of these things. Shall I think it a mere matter of course that one little flaw in a pipe shall, in a second of time, transform the orderly well-compacted seats of a goodly Church to one unsightly mass of shapeless and disordered ruin;² and shall I pretend to stand aghast at the strangeness of a similar overthrow of this Earth’s furniture at the mere fiat of the Most High? Behold, “He meas-ureth the waters in the hollow of His Hand, and weigheth the mountains in scales?” (Is. xl. 12.) What if the Creator of the earth and the sea shall bid them of a sudden change places? Think you that they would hesitate to obey Him? Or what if He “cal-leth for the waters of the Sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the Earth?” (Amos v. 8 and ix. 6)—Then further, if I believe, (as I do believe,) that when the Jews crucified the Lord of Glory “there was darkness over all the land” from the sixth hour unto the ninth (St. Matth. xxvii. 45.);—nay, that when “Moses stretched forth his hand toward Heaven, there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt,” even darkness which might be felt, for three whole days (Exod. x. 21-23.):—more than *that*; if I believe, (as I do believe,) the solemn prediction of my Lord, that at the consummation of all things, “The Sun shall be darkened, and the Moon shall not give her light, and the Stars shall fall from Heaven (St. Matth. xxiv. 29.):”—shall it move me to incredulity, if God tells me, that six thousand years ago it was His Divine pleasure that the same phenomenon should prevail for a season? Surely,—(I say to myself,)—surely this is lie “which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which shaketh the Earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. *Which commandeth the Sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the Stars!*” (Job ix. 5-7.)

1. But it was now God’s pleasure to bring Beauty out of Chaos, and to establish a fresh order of things upon the surface of our Earth. And, as the first step thereto, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The Hebrew phrase implies no less than the tremulous brooding as of a bird,—causing the dreary waste to heave and swell with coming life. “And God said, Let there be Light. And there was Light.” “He spake and it was done.” (Ps. xxxiii. 9.) From Himself, who is “the true Light,” (not from the Sun, which,—like the rest of the orbs of Heaven,—is but a lamp of His kindling);—from Himself, I say, a ray of Light went forth; and *that* is why he was pleased to praise it. Look through the chapter, and you will find that it is the only one of His creatures of which it is specially said that “God saw that it was good.” (Gen. i. 4.) . . . Thus, one hemisphere was illumined,—whereby “God divided the light from the darkness;” and when the Earth had completed a single revolution, there had been a Day and there had been a Night,—so named by the Word of God: “and the evening and the morning were the first Day.”³... Do

² Alluding to a catastrophe which had recently occurred at St. Mary’s Church, and which necessitated considerable repairs; in consequence of which, the first four of these Sermons were preached in the Cathedral.

³ “Can any one sensible of the value of words suppose,” (asks Mr. Goodwin,) “that nothing more is here described, or intended to be described, than *the partial clearing away of a fog?*” (*Essays and Reviews*, pp.

you see any impossibility so far? I, certainly, see none. It does not seem to me absurd that “the Light of the world.” (St. John ix. 5, &c.) “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto,” (1 Tim. vi. 16.) should cause “the light to shine out of darkness.” (2 Cor. iv. 6.) We shall perhaps come upon the absurdity by and by. Let us hasten forward.

2. “And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” The Hebrew word (an expansion), and the context, shew plainly enough what is meant. The atmosphere was now created,—whereupon the watery particles either subsided into sea, or rose aloft in the form of clouds. “And the evening and the morning were the second Day,”—which is the only day of which it is not said that God saw that it was good.

3. “And God said, Let the waters under the Heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear.” Then it was that these continents were upheaved,—other than those which had been continents before; and the sea sank into the cavities which had been ordained for its reception. *Then*, “God saw that it was good.” The sentence of approval which had been withheld from the work of yesterday, because that work, (namely, of dividing the waters from the waters,) was incomplete,—is freely bestowed to-day. And it may have been to teach us that no incomplete work is “good,” in God’s sight.—Next, the Creator called into being every extant form of vegetable life. So that, instead of a world of waters, which was all that was to be seen yesterday,—not only cliffs, and mountains, and bays,—but green hills, and fertile valleys, and grassy meadows had come to view,—with lakes, and rivers, and fountains, and falls of water. Again it is written, concerning Earth’s green furniture, “God saw that it was good.” “And the evening and the morning were the third Day.”

4. “And God said, Let there be Lights in the firmament of the Heaven to divide the day from the night: and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.” And so it was. Sun, moon, and stars, came to view”⁴; and this globe of ours, no longer illumined, as, for three days, it had been, rejoiced in the sun’s genial light by day,—and by night in the splendours of the paler planet. And thus was also gained an easy measure for marking time,—the succession of months and years, as well as of days. “And God saw that it was good.” “And the evening and the morning were the fourth Day.”

5. “And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life.” Thus the inhabitants of the sea and of the air were called into existence; and it was from the sea that God seems to have commanded that they should derive their being. He saw that it was good, and he blessed the fish and the winged fowl; “and the evening and the morning were the fifth Day.”

6. It remained only to provide for the dry land its occupants; and the Earth was accordingly commanded to bring forth the living creature after his kind,—beast and cattle and

227-8,) No one,—we answer. But to the question, we venture to rejoin another, To whom does this philosopher suppose his pleasantry likely to prove injurious? Is he making Moses ridiculous, or—himself?

⁴ “Whether the writer regarded them as already existing, and only waiting to have a proper place assigned them, may be open to question.” (*E. and R.*, p. 221.) We accept the alternative given us by Mr. Goodwin.

creeping thing. Unlike that first Creation which was of all things out of nothing, the work of the six days was a creation of new things out of old.—To the Creation of Man, His crowning work, God is declared to have come with deliberation; as well as to have announced His purpose with significant solemnity of allusion. “Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle.” “And the Lord God formed Man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Man became a living soul.”—Transformed to the Garden of God’s planting in Eden, to dress it and to keep it, (for inactivity is no part of bliss!)—and brought into solemn covenant with God,—to Adam, God brings the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, of set purpose that God may “see what he will call them:” a wondrous tribute, truly, to the perfection of understanding in which Man had been created!... “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a Man leave his Father and his Mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.”... Man’s creation was the crowning wonder, to which all else had, in a manner, tended Truly when we think of him,—newly made in God’s image,—surveying this world, yet fresh with the dew of its birth, and beautiful as it came from the Hands of its Makers—it seems scarcely the language of poetry that then “the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job xxxviii. 7.)

I have preferred thus to complete the history of Man’s Creation; which presents us with the primal institution of all,—that, namely, of Marriage.—“On the seventh Day, God, rested from all His work which He had made; and blessed the seventh Day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work.”—This then is the other great primordial institution; more ancient than the Fall,—the Law of the Sabbath;—which in the sacred record is brought into such august prominence. And never do we ponder over that record, without apprehension at what may be the possible results of relaxing the stringency of enactments which would seem to be, to our nature, as the very twin pillars of the Temple,—its establishment and its strength. (Alluding to 1 Kings vii. 21.)

Now, on a review of all this wondrous History, I profess myself at a loss to see what special note of impracticability it presents that I should hesitate to embrace it, in the plain natural sense of the words, with both the arms of my heart. That it is not such an account of the manner of the Creation as you or I should have ourselves invented, or anticipated, or on questionable testimony have felt disposed to accept,—is very little to the purpose. Apart from Revelation, we could really have known nothing at all about the works of the Days of the first Great Week. Ejaculations therefore concerning the strangeness of the record, and cavils at the phraseology in which it is propounded, are simply irrelevant.

There exists however a vague suspicion after all that the beginning of Genesis is a vision, or an allegory, or a parable,—or anything you please, except true History. It is hard to imagine why. If there be a book in the whole Bible which purports to be a plain historical narrative of actual events, that book is the book of Genesis. In nine-tenths of its details, it

is as human, and as matter of fact, as any book of Biography or History that ever was penned. Why the first page of it is to be torn out, treated as a myth or an allegory, and in short explained away,—I am utterly at a loss to discover. There is no difference in the style. Long since has the theory that Genesis is composed of distinguishable fragments, been exploded.⁵ There is no pretence for calling this first chapter poetry, and treating it by a distinct set of canons. It is a pure *Revelation*, I admit: but I have yet to learn why the revelation of things intelligible, where the method of speech is not such as to challenge a figurative interpretation, is not to be taken literally: unless indeed it has been discovered that a narrative must of necessity be fabulous if the transactions referred to are unusually remote and extraordinary. The events recorded are unique in their character,—true. But this happens from the very necessity of the ease. The creation of a world, to the inhabitants of that world is a unique event.

But we are assured that some of the statements in this first chapter of Genesis are palpably untrue;—as when it is said that the Sun, Moon, and Stars were created on the fourth Day,—which, it is urged, is a physical impossibility: for what forces else sustained, and kept this world a sphere? The phenomena of Geology again prove to demonstration, it is said, that the structure of the earth is infinitely more ancient than the Mosaic record states: and also that there must have been Light, and sunshine too, at that remote epoch,—which fostered each various form of animal and vegetable life.—Further, we are assured that it is unphilosophical to speak of the creation of Light before the creation of the Sun.—Then, the simplicity of the language is objected to:—“the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night:”—“dividing the light from the darkness:”—“waters above the firmament:” and so forth. The very ascription of speech to God, gives offence.—Again, some raw conceit of the advanced state of the human intellect rejects with scorn the notion of Adam oracularly bestowing names on God’s creatures. Finally, the creation of Eve, moulded by God from the side of the protoplast, is declared to savour so plainly of the mythical, allegorical, or figurative; that the narrative must be allowed to be altogether unworthy of such wits as ours.

But we have seen that the creation of Sun, Moon, and Stars is not assigned to the fourth day—but to “the beginning.”—The antiquity of this Earth we affirm to be a circumstance left wholly untouched by the Mosaic record: or, if touched, it is rather confirmed; for, before beginning to describe the work of the first Day, Moses describes the state of “the Earth” by two Hebrew words of most rare occurrence,⁶ which denote that it had become waste and empty: while “the deep” is spoken of as being already in existence.—There is nothing at all unphilosophical in speaking of Light as existing apart from the Sun. Rather would it be unphilosophical to speak of the Sun as the source and centre of Light.—I see nothing more childish again in the mention of “the greater and the lesser light,” than in the talk of “sun-rise” and “sun-set,”—which is to this hour the language of the Observa-

⁵ The test of *Elohim* and *Jehovah* has been, by the Germans themselves, given up; “and for this plain reason,—that in many parts of Genesis, [e.g. ch. xxviii. 16-22: xxxi.: xxxix., &c.] it is utterly untenable; the names being so intermingled as to admit of no such division.” See the Appendix (C) to the Rev. Henry John Rose’s Hulsean Lectures for 1833,—p. 283.

⁶ Besides in Gen. i. 2, the expression (*tohu bohu*) recurs in Jer. iv. 23 and Is. xxxiv. 11,—both times with clear reference to the earlier place. Jeremiah in fact *quotes* Genesis.

tory.—As for attributing speech to God, I am content to remind you of Hooker’s explanation of the design of Moses therein, throughout the present Chapter. “Was this only his intent,” (he asks,) “to signify the infinite greatness of God’s power by the easiness of His accomplishing such effects without travail, pain, or labour? Surely it seemeth that Moses had herein besides this a further purpose; namely, first to teach that God did not work as a necessary, but a voluntary agent, intending beforehand and decreeing with Himself that which did outwardly proceed from Him; secondly, to shew that God did then institute a Law natural to be observed by Creatures, and therefore according to the manner of laws, the institution thereof is described, as being established by solemn injunction. His commanding those things to be which are, and to be in such sort as they are, to keep that tenure and course which they do, importeth the establishment of Nature’s Law. And as it cometh to pass in a kingdom rightly ordered, that after a Law is once published it presently takes effect far and wide all states framing themselves thereunto; even so let us think that it fareth in the natural course of the world. Since the time that God did first proclaim the edicts of His Law upon it, Heaven and Earth have hearkened unto His voice, and their labour hath been to do His wills.⁷—“He spake the word, and they were made: He commanded and they were created. He hath made them fast for ever and ever. *He hath given them a law which shall not be broken.*” (Ps. cxlviii. 5, 6.)

Whether or no South overestimated Adam’s knowledge, I will not pretend to decide: but I am convinced the truth lies more with him than with certain modern wits, when he says concerning our first Father:—“He came into the world a philosopher; which sufficiently cleared by his writing the nature of things upon their names ...His understanding could almost pierce into future contingents; his conjectures improving even to prophecy, or the certainties of prediction. Till his Fall, he was ignorant of nothing but sin ... There was then no struggling with memory, no straining for invention. His faculties were ready upon the first summons... We may collect the excellency of the understanding then, by the glorious remainders of it now: and guess at the stateliness of the building by the magnificence of its ruins ... And certainly that rest needs have been very glorious, the decays of which are so admirable. He that is comely when old and decrepit, surely was very beautiful when he was young! An Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam; and Athens but the rudiments of Paradise.”⁸

And lastly, as for so much of the Divine narrative as concerns the Creation of the first human pair, I am content to remind you of a circumstance which in addressing believers ought to be of overwhelming weight: namely, that our Saviour and His Apostles, again and again, refer to the narrative before us in a manner which precludes the notion of its being anything but severest History. Our SAVIOUR CHRIST even resyllables the words spoken by the Protoplast in Paradise; and therein finds a sanction for the indissoluble nature of the marriage bond.⁹

I take leave to add that even the respectful attempt to make Genesis accommodate itself to the supposed requirements of Geology, by boldly assuming that the days of Creation

⁷ Eccl. Pol., B. I. c. iii. § 2.

⁸ South’s Sermons, (Serm. II.)

⁹ See St. Matth. xix. 4 to 6,—where Gen. i. 27 as well as Gen. ii. 24, are quoted by our SAVIOUR.

were each a thousand years long,—seems inadmissible. Even were such an hypothesis allowed, nothing would be gained: for *Geology* does not by any means require us to believe that after a thousand years of misty light, there came a thousand years of ocean deposit: and again, a thousand years of moist and dry, during which vegetable life alone prevailed: and then a thousand years of sun, moon, and stars. The very notion seems absurd¹⁰—But, what is more to the purpose, such an interpretation seems to stultify the whole narrative. A week is described. *Days* are spoken of,—each made up of *an evening and a morning*. God’s cessation from the work of Creation on the Seventh Day is emphatically adduced as the reason of the Fourth Commandment,—the mysterious precedent for our observance of one day of rest at the end of every six days of toil,—“*for in six days*” (it is declared,) “the Lord made Heaven and Earth.” (Exod. xx. 11.) You may not play tricks with language plain as this, and elongate a week until it shall more than embrace the span of all recorded Time.

Neither am I able to see what would be gained by proposing to prolong the Days of Creation indefinitely, so as to consider them as representing vast and unequal periods; (though I am far from presuming to speak of any pious conjecture with disrespect.)

My inveterate objection to this scheme is again twofold. (1) The best-ascertained requirements of Geology are *not satisfied* by a *sixfold* division of phenomena corresponding with what is recorded in Genesis of the Six Days of Creation. (2) This method does even greater violence to the letter of the inspired narrative than the scheme of reconciliation last hinted at.

I dare not believe that what has been spoken will altogether meet the requirements of minds of a certain stamp. A gentleman, who certainly has the advantage of appearing in good company, has lately favoured the world with the information that the first chapter of Genesis is the uninspired speculation of a Hebrew astronomer, who was bent on giving “the best and most probable account that could be then given of God’s universes.”¹¹ The Hebrew writer asserts indeed “solemnly and unhesitatingly that for which he must have known that he had no authority;”¹² but we need not therefore “attribute to him wilful misrepresentation, or consciousness of asserting that which he knew not to be true.”¹³ If this “early speculator” “asserted as facts what he knew in reality only as probabilities,” it was because he was not harassed by the scruples which result “from our modern habits of thought, and from the modesty of assertion which the spirit of true science has taught us.”¹⁴ The history of this important discovery and of others of a similar nature, (which, by the way, are one and all announced with the same “modesty of assertion” as what goes

¹⁰ “Holding,” (says Hugh Miller,) “that the six days of the Mosaic account were not natural days, but lengthened periods, I find myself called on, as a geologist, to account for but three out of the six. Of the period during which light was created; of the period during which a firmament was made to separate the waters from the waters; or of the period during which the two great lights of the earth, with the other heavenly bodies, became visible from the Earth’s surface;—we need expect to find no record in the rocks.”—*Testimony*, &c., p. 134.—This is ingenious, and is piously meant. But the first three days remain to be accounted for by somebody, all the same. If the last three days represent “lengthened periods,” so, I suppose, do the first three.

¹¹ *Essays and Reviews*, p. 252.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Id.* p. 253.

¹⁴ *Id.* p. 252.

before,) would appear to be this.—Natural science has lately woke up from her long slumber of well nigh sixty ages; and with that immodesty for which youth and inexperience have ever been proverbial, she is impatient to measure her crude theories against the sure revelation of God's Word. Where the two differ, she assumes that of course the inspired Oracles are wrong, and her own wild guesses right. She is even indecent in her eagerness to invalidate the testimony of that Book which has been the confidence and stay of God's Servants in all ages. On any evidence, or on none, she is prepared to hurl to the winds the august record of Creation. Inconveniently enough for the enemies of God's Word, every advance in Geological Science does but serve to corroborate the record that the Creation of *Man* is not to be referred to a remoter period than some six thousand years ago. But of this important fact we hear but little. On the other hand, no trumpet is thought loud enough to bruit about a suspicion that Man may be a creature of yet remoter date. Thus, fragments of burnt brick found fifty feet below the surface of the banks of the Nile, were hailed as establishing Man's existence in Egypt more than 13,000 years; until it was unhappily remembered that *burnt* brick in Egypt belongs to the period of the Roman dominion.—More recently, implements of chipped flint found, with some bones, in a bed of gravel, have been eagerly appealed to as a sufficient indication that the Creation of Man is to be referred to a period at least 10,000 years more remote than is fixed by the Chronology of the Bible . . . brick and flint! a precious fulcrum, truly, for a theory which is to upset the World!

But I shall be told,—with that patronizing air of conscious intellectual superiority which a certain class of gentlemen habitually assume on such occasions,—that I mistake the case completely: that no wish is entertained in any quarter to invalidate the truth of Revelation, or to shake Men's confidence in the Bible as the Word of God: that it has been the way of narrow-minded bigots in all ages, and is so in this, to raise an outcry of the Bible being in danger, and so to rouse the prejudices of mankind: that the error lies in claiming for the Bible an office which it nowhere claims for itself, and which it was never meant to fulfil: that the harmony between the Bible and Nature is complete, but that it is not such a harmony as is sometimes imagined: that the Bible is not a scientific book, and was never meant to teach Natural Science: that it was designed to inculcate moral goodness, and is clearly full of unscientific statements, which it is the office of Science to correct; and, if need be, to remove. All this, and much beside, I shall be told. Such fallacious platitudes have been put forth by men who are neither Divines nor Philosophers, *ad nauseam*, within the last forty or fifty years.

Now, in reply, we have a few words to say. The profession of faithfulness we hail with pleasure: the imputation of imbecility we accept with unconcern. But when gentlemen tell us that the Bible was never meant to teach Science; and that wherever its statements are opposed to the clear inductions of reason, they must give way; and so forth, we take the liberty of retaliating their charge. We inform them that *they* really mistake the case entirely. When they go on to tell us that they believe in the truth of the Bible as sincerely as ourselves: that its harmonics are complete, but not such as we imagine; and so forth;—we venture to add that they really know not what they assert. In plain language, they talk nonsense. Of a simple unbeliever we know at least what to think. But what is to be

thought of persons who disbelieve just whatever they dislike, and yet profess to be just as hearty believers as you or I?

That the Mosaic record of Creation has been thought at variance with certain deductions of modern observation, is not surprising: seeing that the deductions of each fresh period have been at variance with the deductions of that which went before; and seeing that the theory of one existing school is inconsistent with the theory of another.—That the Bible is not, in any sense, *a scientific treatise* again, is simply a truism: (who ever supposed that it was?). Moses writes “the history of the Human Race as regards Sin and Salvation: not a cosmical survey of all the successive phenomena of the globe.”¹⁵ Further, that he employs popular phraseology when speaking of natural phenomena, is a statement altogether undeniable. But such remarks are a gross fallacy, and a mere deceit, if it be meant that the statements in the Bible partake of the imperfection of knowledge incident to a rude and primitive state of society. To revive an old illustration,—is a philosopher therefore a child, because, in addressing children, he uses language adapted to their age and capacity? God speaks in the First Chapter of Genesis,—*hath* spoken for three and thirty hundred years,—as unto children: but there is no risk therefore that in what He saith, He either hath deceived, or will deceive mankind.

You are never to forget the great fundamental position, that the Bible claims to be the Word of God; and that *God’s Word can never contradict or be contradicted by God’s works*. We therefore reject, in limine, all insinuations about the “unscientific” character of the Bible. A scientific man does not cease to be scientific because he does not choose always to express himself scientifically. Again, a man of universal Science does not forfeit his scientific reputation, if, in the course of a *moral* or *religious* argument, his allusions to *natural* phenomena are expressed in the ordinary language of mankind. Even so, Almighty God, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” (Col. ii. 3.)—speaking to us by the mouth of His holy Prophets, never, that I am aware, teaches them to speak a strictly scientific language,—*except when the Science of Theology is being discoursed of*. On other occasions, He suffers their language to be like yours or mine. “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon:” (Josh. x. 12.)—“The clouds drop down the dew” (Prov. iii. 20.)—“The wind bloweth where it listeth.” (St. John iii. 8.)—Not so when *Theology* is the subject. *Then* the language becomes scientific. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” (St. John iii. 5.)—“Take, eat, This is My Body.” (St. Matth. xxvi. 26)—“Before Abraham was, I am” (St. John viii. 58.)—“I and the FATHER are One.” (St. John x. 30.)

But there is this great difference between the cases supposed. A man of universal scientific attainment will be less strong in one subject than another: and in the course of his *Geological* allusions, if *Mechanical* Science be his forte,—in the course of his *Mechanical* allusions, if *Mathematical* Science be his proper department,—he may easily err. Above all, the limits of the knowledge of unassisted Man must infallibly be those of the age in which he lives. But, with the Ancient of Days, it is not so. *He* at least cannot err. Nothing that man has ever discovered by laborious induction was not known to Him from the beginning: nothing that *He* hath ever commissioned His servants to deliver, will be

¹⁵ Pattison’s *The Earth and the World*, p. 99.

found inconsistent with the anterior facts of History. “He that made the eye, shall He not see?” (Ps. xciv. 9.) The records of Creation then *cannot* be incorrect. The course of Man’s history *must* be that which, speaking by the mouth of His Prophets, God hath described.

“I never said the contrary,” is the reply. “All I say is that you interpret the records of Creation wrongly: and that you are disposed to lay greater stress on the historical accuracy of the Bible than the narrative will bear.”

O but, sir, whoever you may be who censure me thus, let me in all kindness warn you of the pit, at the very edge whereof you stand!

Far be it from such a one as the preacher to assume that he so apprehends the First Chapter of Genesis, that if an Angel were to turn interpreter, he might not convince me of more than one misapprehension in matters of detail. But of this, at least, I am *quite* certain; that when I find it recorded that God took counsel about Man’s Creation: and made him in “His own image,” and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” whereby man became “a living soul:” and further, when I find it stated that Adam bestowed names upon all creatures: and spake oracularly of his spouse:—I am *certain*, I say, when I read such things, that God intended me to believe that Man was created with a Godlike understanding, and with the perfect fruition of the primeval speech. Further, I boldly assert that he who could prove the contradictory, would make the Bible, even as a Theological Book, nothing worth to you and me.

The same must be said of the Bible chronology. And here I will adopt the words of one who is justly entitled to be listened to in this place; and who must at least be allowed to be a competent judge of the matter, for he made Chronology his province. Mr. Clinton says:—“Those who imagine themselves at liberty to enlarge the time [which elapsed from the Creation to the Deluge, and from the Deluge to the birth of Abraham,] to an indefinite amount,—mistake the nature of the question. The uncertainty here is not an uncertainty arising from want of testimony: (like that which occurs in the early chronology of Greece, and of many other countries; when the times are uncertain because no evidence is preserved.) ... The uncertainty here is of a peculiar character, belonging to this particular case. The evidence exists, but in a double form; and we have to decide which is the authentic and genuine copy. But if the one is rejected, the other is established:” the difference between the two being exactly 1,250 years.—Men are free to *reject* the evidence, to be sure; but we defy them to *explain it away*. The chronological details of the Bible are as emphatically set down as anything can be; and,—(with the exception of a few particulars, chiefly in the Book of Kings, which are to the record what misprints are to a printed book,)—they are entirely consistent; and hang perfectly well together. Let us not be told, then, that we entertain groundless apprehensions for the authority of God’s Word when we hear it proposed to refer the Creation of Man to a period of unheard-of antiquity. Destroy my confidence in the Bible as an historical record, and you destroy my confidence in it altogether; for by far the largest part of the Bible is an historical record. If the Creation of Man,—the longevity of the Patriarchs,—the account of the Deluge;—if

these be not true histories, what is to be said of the lives of Abraham, of Jacob, of Joseph, of Moses, of Joshua, of David,—of our SAVIOUR CHRIST HIMSELF ?

But there is a scornful spirit abroad which is not content to allegorize the earlier pages of the Bible,—to scoff at the story of the Flood, to reject the out-lines of Scripture chronology;—but which would dispute the most emphatic details of Revelation itself. Consistent, this method is, at all events. Let it have the miserable praise which is so richly its due. To logical consistency, it may at least lay claim. It refuses to stop anywhere: as why should it stop? Faith is denied her office, because Reason fails to see the reasonableness of Faith: and accordingly, unbelief enters in with a flood-tide. Miracles, for example, are now to be classed, (we learn) among “the difficulties” of Christianity.¹⁶ It was to have been expected. (*Who* foresees not what must be the fate of such “difficulties” as these?) And will you tell me that you may reject the miraculous transactions recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and yet retain the narrative which contains them? That were indeed absurd! Will you then reject one miracle and retain another? Impossible! You can make no reservation, even in favour of the Incarnation of our Lord,—the most adorable of all miracles, as it is the very key-stone of our Christian hope. Either, with the best and wisest of all ages, you must believe the whole of Holy Scripture; or, with the narrow-minded infidel, you must disbelieve the whole. There is no middle course open to you.

Do we then undervalue the discoveries of Natural Science; or view with jealousy the progress she has of late been making? God forbid! With unfeigned joy we welcome her honest triumphs, as so many fresh evidences of the wisdom, the power, the goodness of God. “Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy works!” (Ps. xcii. 4.) The very guesses of Geology are precious. What are they but noble endeavours to unfold a page anterior to the first page of the Bible; or rather, to discover what secrets are locked up in the first verse of it? But when, instead of being a faithful Servant, Natural Science affects the airs of an imperious Mistress,—what can she hope to incur at the hands of Theology, but displeasure and contempt? She forgets her proper place, and overlooks her lawful function. She prates about the laws of Nature in the presence of Him who, when He created the Universe, invented those very laws, and impressed them on His irrational creatures.—Does it never humble her to reflect that it was but yesterday she detected the fundamental Law of Gravitation? Does she never blush with shame to consider that for well nigh six thousand years men have been inquisitively walking this Earth’s surface; and yet, that, one hundred years ago, the prevalent notions concerning fossil remains, and the Earth’s structure, were such as now-a-days would be pronounced incredibly ridiculous and absurd?

To conclude. The very phraseology with which men have presumed to approach this entire question, is insolent and unphilosophical. The popular phraseology of the day, I say, hardly covers, so as to conceal, a lie. We constantly find SCIENCE and THEOLOGY opposed to one another: just as if Theology were not a Science! History forsooth, with all her inaccuracy of observation, is a Science: and Geology, with all her weak guesses, is a Science: and comparative Anatomy, with nothing but her laborious inductions to boast of, is a Science: but Theology,—which is based on the express revelation of the Eternal,—is

¹⁶ On this subject, the reader is referred to Serm. VII.

some other thing! What do you mean to tell us that Theology is, but the very queen of Sciences? Would Aristotle have bestowed on Ethic the epithet *architektonikê*, think you, had he known of that *theios logos*, which his friend,—“not blind by choice, but destined not to see,”¹⁷—felt after yet found not? that “more excellent way,” which you and I, by God’s great mercy, possess? Go to! For popular purposes, if you will, let, the word “Science” stand for the knowledge of the phenomena of Nature; somewhat as, in this place, the word stands for the theory of Morals, and some of the Phenomena of Mind: and so, let SCIENCE be contrasted with THEOLOGY, without offence taken, because none is intended. But let it never be forgotten that Theology is *the* great Science of all,—the only Science which really deserves the name. What have other sciences to boast of which Theology has not? Antiquity,—such as no other can, in any sense, lay claim to: a Literature,—which is absolutely without a rival: a Terminology,—which reflects the very image of all the ages: Professors,—of loftier wit, from the days of Athanasius and Augustin down to the days of our own Hooker and Butlers—men of higher mark, intellectually and morally,—than adorn the annals of any other Science since the World began: above all things, a subject-matter, which is the grandest imagination can conceive; and a foundation, which has all the breadth, and length, and depth and height (Eph. iii. 18.), which the Hands of God Himself could give it.

For subject-matter, what Science will you compare with this? All the others in the world will not bring a man to the knowledge of GOD and of CHRIST! They will not inform him of the will of GOD, although they may teach him to observe His Works. “The Heavens declare the glory of God,”—but, as Lord Bacon remarked long since, we do not read that they declare His will. Neither do the other sciences of necessity lead to any belief at all in the God of Revelation.¹⁸

And, for that whereon they are built, what Science again will you compare with this? Let the pretender to Geological skill,—(I say not the true Geologist, for he never offends!)—let the conceited sciolist, I say, go dream a little longer ever those implements of chipped flint which have called him into such noisy activity,—and discover, as he *will* discover, that the assumed inference from the gravel and the bones is fallacious after all.¹⁹—Let the Historian go spell a little longer over that moth-eaten record of dynasties which never were, by means of which he proposes to set right the clock of Time.²⁰ Let the Naturalist walk round the stuffed or bleached wonders of his museum, and guess again.²¹ Theological Science not so! *Her* evidence is sure for her Rule is God’s Word. No laborious Induction here,—fallacious because imperfect; imperfect because human: but a direct message from the presence-chamber of the Lord of Heaven and Earth,—decisive because inspired; infallible because Divine. The express Revelation of the Eternal is that whereon Theological Science builds her fabric of imperishable Truth: *that* fabric which, while other modes change, shift, and at last become superseded, shines out,—yea, and to the very end

¹⁷ Cowper.

¹⁸ This paragraph is mostly copied from a Sermon (MS.) preached before the University by the late Professor Hussey, Oct. 12, 1856.

¹⁹ Professor Phillips refers me to a paper by Mr. Prestwich in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, 1859, vol. x. No. 85, p. 58. Also in the *Transactions of the R. S.* for 1860, p. 308.

²⁰ I allude to the supposed disclosures of Egyptian monuments.

²¹ I allude to a recent work on the Origin of Species.

of Time will shine out,—unconscious of decay, incapable of improvement, far, far beyond the reach of fashion: a thing unchanged, because in its very nature unchangeable”!²²

O sirs,—we are constrained to be brief in this place. The field must perforce be narrowed; and so, for this time, it must suffice to have warned you against the men who resort to the armoury of Natural Science for weapons wherewith to assail God’s Truth. Regard them as the enemies of your peace; and learn to reject their specious, yet most inconsequential reasonings, with the scorn which is properly their due. Contempt and scorn God implanted in us, precisely that we might bestow them on reasonings worthless in their texture, and foul in their object, as these; which teach distrust of the earlier pages of God’s Word, on the pretence that they are contradicted by the evidence of God’s Works. Learn to abhor that spurious liberality which is liberal only with what is *not its own*; and which reminds one of nothing so much as the conduct of leprous persons who are said to be for ever seeking to communicate and extend their own unhappy taint to others. I allude to that sham liberality which under pretence of extending the common standing ground of Christian men, is in reality attenuating it until it proves incapable of bearing the weight of a single soul. There is room on the Rock for all; but it is only on the Rock that we are safe. To speak without a figure,—He who surrenders the first page of his Bible, surrenders all. He knows not where to stop. Nay, you and I cannot in any way *afford* to surrender the beginning of Genesis; simply because upon the tenth of what is there recorded depends the whole scheme of Man’s salvation,—the need of that “second Man” which is “the Lord from Heaven.” (1 Cor. xv. 47.) It is not too much to say that the beginning of Genesis is the foundation on which all the rest of the Bible is built. (Ibid. xv. 22, &c.) We may not go over to those who would mutilate the Book of Life, or evacuate any part of its message. It is they, on the contrary, who must come over to us.—Much has it been the fashion of these last days, (I cannot imagine why,) to vaunt the character and the Gospel of St. John, “the disciple of Love,” as he is called; as if it were secretly thought that there is a latitudinarianism in Love which would wink at Doctrinal obliquity; whereas St. John is the *Evangelist of Dogma*; and if there be anything in the world which is *jealous*, that thing is *Love*. Indifference to Truth, and laxity of Belief, are the growing characteristics of the age. But you will find that St. John has about four or five times as much about TRUTH as all the other three Evangelists; while *the act* of Faith receives as frequent mention in his writings alone as in all the rest of the New Testament Canon put together.²³

Let me end, as the manner of preachers is, by gathering out of what has been spoken one brief practical consideration.—This whole visible frame of things wherein we play our part, is hastening to decay. Everything we behold,—ourselves included,—carries with it the prophecy of its own speedy dissolution.—What, amid the wreck of worlds, will be our confidence? ... It is an inquiry worth making, in these the days of health, and rigour, and security, and peace. O my soul, (learn to ask yourselves,)—O my soul, when the

²² The reader is requested to read what Bishop Pearson has most eloquently written on this subject. It will be found in the Appendix (B).

²³ Pistis does not occur once in St. John’s Gospel: pisteuô (which is found about thirty-five times, in all, in the first three Gospels,) occurs about one hundred times, in the Gospel of St. John alone.

Heavens shall depart, and the Earth reel before the Second Advent of its Maker;—when the Sun puts on mourning, and the very powers of Heaven are shaken;—what shall be our confidence,—our hope,—in that tremendous day? Whither shall we betake ourselves, amid the overthrow of universal Nature, but to the sure mercies of Him who “in the beginning created the Heaven and the Earth?”—To those strong Hands, we intend, (God helping us!) with unswerving confidence to commend our fainting spirits²⁴ *Him*, then, in life let us learn to reverence, on whom in death we propose so implicitly to lean! And we only know Him in, and through, and by His WORD. Nor can we in any surer way show Him reverence or dishonour, than by the manner in which we receive His message,—yea, by the spirit in which we unfold this, the first page of it,—where stands recorded that primaeval act of Almighty power which is the ground of all our confidence,—the very warrant for our own security “Blessed” of a truth, in that day, will he be, “that hath the God of Jacob for his help, and whose hope is in the Lord his God:—*who made the Heaven and the Earth,—the Sea and all that therein is:—who keepeth His promise for ever!*”²⁵

²⁴ St. Luke xxiii. 46, (quoting Ps. xxxi. 5:) words which are alluded to in 1 St. Pet. iv. 19.

²⁵ Ps. cxlvi. 5,—words quoted by the early Church of Jerusalem, Acts iv. 24.