

CHAPTER IV.

OF CREATION

SECTION I.—It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

EXPOSITION

By the word creation we are to understand the production and formation of all things. I use two words, because creation is twofold,—primary and secondary, or immediate and mediate. By the former, is meant the production of something out of nothing; by the latter, the formation of things out of pre-existing matter, but matter naturally indisposed for such productions, and which never could by any power of second causes have been brought into such a form. This section teaches us:—

1. That the world had a beginning. This will now be considered one of the most obvious truths that can be stated, but it is one that required to be confirmed by divine revelation. That the world existed from eternity was generally maintained by the ancient heathen philosophers. Some of them held, that not only the matter of which the world is framed existed from eternity, but that it subsisted in that beautiful form in which we behold it. Others admitted that the heavens and the earth had a beginning in respect of their present form, but maintained the eternity of the matter of which they are composed. That the world had a beginning is the uniform doctrine of the Scriptures.—Gen. i. 1; Ps. xc. 2. This is implied in the phrases, “before the foundation of the world,” “before the world began.”—Eph. i. 4; 2 Tim. i. 9.

According to the generally received chronology, the Mosaic creation took place 4004 years before the birth of Christ. If, indeed, the accounts of the Egyptians, Hindus, and Chinese, were to be credited, we should believe that the universe has existed, in its present form, for many millions of years; but these accounts have been satisfactorily proved to be false. And as a strong presumption that the world has not yet existed 6000 years, it has been often remarked that the invention of arts, and the erection of the earliest empires, are of no great antiquity, and can be traced back to their origin.

2. That creation is the work of God. Often does God claim this work as one of the peculiar glories of his Deity, to the exclusion of all others.—Is. xliv. 24, xlv. 12. The work of creation, however, is common to all the three persons of

the Trinity. It is ascribed to the Father,—1 Cor. viii. 6; to the Son,—John i. 3; to the Holy Ghost.—Gen. i. 2; Job xxvi. 13. All the three persons are one God. We must not, therefore, suppose that in creation the Father is the principal agent, and the Son and the Holy Ghost inferior agents, or mere instruments. In all external works of Deity, each of the persons of the Godhead equally concur.

3. That creation extends to "the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible." This is expressly declared in many passages of Scripture: "God made the world, and all things therein."—Acts xvii. 24. "By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible."—Col. i. 16. This certainly includes angels. We have no reason to think that their creation preceded the period of the Mosaic creation; and they are generally supposed to have been created on the first day.

4. That the world and all things therein, were created "in the space of six days." This, also, is the express language of Scripture: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is."—Ex. xx. 11. The modern discoveries of geologists have led them to assign an earlier origin to the materials of which our globe is composed than the period of the six days, commonly known by the name of the Mosaic creation; and various theories have been adopted in order to reconcile the geological and Mosaic records. Some have held that all the changes which have taken place in the materials of the earth occurred either during the six days of the Mosaic creation, or since that period; but, it is urged, that the facts which geology establishes prove this view to be utterly untenable. Others have held that a day of creation was not a natural day, composed of twenty-four hours, but a period of an indefinite length. To this it has been objected, that the sacred historian, as if to guard against such a latitude of interpretation, distinctly and pointedly declares of all the days, that each of them had its "evening and morning,"—thus, it should seem, expressly excluding any interpretation which does not imply a natural day. Others hold that the materials of our globe were in existence, and under the active operation of creative powers, for an indefinite period before the creation of man, and that the inspired record, while it gives us no information respecting the pre-existing condition of the earth, leaves ample room for a belief that it did pre-exist, if from any other source traces of this should be discovered by human research. The first verse of the 1st chapter of Genesis, in their opinion, merely asserts that the matter of which the universe is composed was produced out of nothing by the power of the Almighty, but leaves the time altogether indefinite. The subsequent verses of that chapter give an account of the successive process by which the Eternal, in the space of six days, reduced the pre-existing matter to its present form, and gave being to the plants and animals now in existence. This explanation, which leaves room for a long succession of geological events before the creation of the existing races, seems now to be the generally received mode of reconciling geological discoveries with the Mosaic account of the creation.

5. That all things were created very good. Everything was good; for it was agreeable to the model which the great Architect had formed in his infinite mind from everlasting; it answered exactly the end of its creation, and was adapted to the purpose for which it was designed.

6. That God made all things for the manifestation of his own glory. "The Lord hath made all things for himself," for the manifestation of his infinite perfections; and all his works proclaim his almighty power, his unbounded goodness, and his unsearchable wisdom. His glory shines in every part of the material universe; but it would shined in vain, if there had been no creature to contemplate it with an eye of intelligence, and celebrate the praises of the omnipotent Creator. Man, therefore, was introduced into the habitation which had been prepared for him, and of his creation the next section gives an account.

SECTION II.—After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Besides this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

EXPOSITION

Man was formed after God had made all other creatures; and this strongly marks the dignity of his character, and the exuberant bounty of his Creator. Before he was brought into existence, the earth, which was designed for his temporary residence, was completely prepared, and amply furnished for his reception. God created man, male and female,—one man and one woman,—man out of the dust of the ground, and woman out of a rib taken from man's side. It should seem that of the rest of the creatures God made many couples, but of man he made only one; and from this Christ brings an argument against divorce.—Mal. ii. 15; Matt. xix. 4, 6. Man is a compound existence, made up of two great parts, a soul and a body. His body, though formed of mean materials, is a piece of exquisite workmanship; but his soul is the noblest part of his nature. By his soul he is allied to God and angels; by his body, to the beasts that perish, and to the dust under his feet.

Man was originally created after the image of God. This could not consist in a participation of the divine essence; for that is incommunicable to any

creature. Neither did it consist in his external form; for God, having no bodily parts could not be represented by any material resemblance. The image of God consisted partly in the spirituality of the soul of man. God is a spirit,—an immaterial and immortal being. The soul of man also is a spirit, though infinitely inferior to the Father of spirits. Thus, in immateriality and immortality the soul of man bears a resemblance to God. The image of God in man likewise consisted in the dominion assigned to him over the creatures, in respect of which he was the representative and vicegerent of God upon earth. God is the blessed and only potentate, and he gave to man a delegated sovereignty over the inferior creatures. He was constituted the ruler of this lower world, and all the creatures were inspired with respect for him, and submitted to his government. But the image of God in man principally consisted in his conformity to the moral perfections of God, or in the complete rectitude of his nature. From two passages in the New Testament, it appears that the image of God, after which man was at first created, and to which he is restored by the Holy Spirit, consists in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.—Eph. iv. 24; Col. iii. 10. Man had knowledge in his understanding, righteousness in his will, and holiness in his affections. His understanding was illuminated with all necessary knowledge. He knew God and his will; he knew himself, his relations to God, his duty to him, and his dependence upon him. That he had also an extensive and accurate knowledge of natural objects, may be inferred from his giving distinctive names to the inferior creatures when they passed in review before him. His will was in conformity to the will of God. As he knew his duty, so he was fully disposed to the performance of it. And his affections were holy and pure; they were placed upon proper objects, and exercised in a regular manner. There was then no need that the moral law should be written on tables of stone, for it was engraved on the heart of man in fair and legible characters. He had likewise sufficient ability to fulfil it; but his will was entirely free to act according to his original light and holy inclinations, or to turn aside to evil. Besides the natural law written on the hearts of our first parents, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition, with the penalty annexed, will come under our notice in a subsequent chapter; and at present we only remark, that while our first parents retained their original integrity, and obeyed the positive command which God had imposed upon them, they were supremely happy. The garden in which they were placed furnished them with every external comfort; they were called to engage in easy and delightful employments; they were exempted from the least degree of languor and of pain; they knew no guilt; they felt no shame; they were strangers to fear; and no angry passions disturbed their souls. But their happiness chiefly consisted in the favour of God, and in the intimate fellowship with him to which they were admitted. What an illustrious creature was man when he came from the hand of his Maker! But how sadly changed now! "God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."