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THE POINT OF VIEW IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS

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A NOTABLE motion-picture is that of the blooming of a rose. A tiny bud appears on the screen. It begins to swell, the leaflets part, one after another the sepals and petals unfold, the flower expands, a blush suffuses it, and the full-blown rose is displayed. A similar phenomenon, on a magnificent scale, is exhibited in the cinema of creation. The first chapter of Genesis is a motion-word-picture in which the majestic progress of unmeasured aeons is displayed in six reels which may be viewed in as many minutes.

A picture, to make a true impression, must be viewed at the correct angle, that is, from the direction in which the camera was placed. To look upon the screen from a seat far at one side occasions distortion. Much misapprehension has resulted from viewing this picture of creation from a standpoint far removed from that of the age in which it was produced. When the writer of this document contemplated the heavens and the earth he had his feet on the solid ground and beheld the world with which he was familiar, with the skies arching overhead; but modern interpreters have very naturally assumed a modern standpoint from which the heavens are viewed as a vast space in which worlds and systems revolve and the earth appears as a globe hanging upon nothing. A motion-picture, even when viewed at an angle, may, by a mental allowance, be made to correspond to the figures and objects represented; but it is better to avoid the distortion by getting in front of the screen. It is also true that even a distorted view of this chapter reveals some notable coincidences between it and the series of geological landscapes with which we may illustrate the story of the rocks.

These coincidences have been pointed out by many eminent scientists and exegetes. The scientific view as pre-

sented by them is very informing; but the interpretation of the Bible narrative to bring it into accord with this view seems, at certain points, to be unwarrantedly forced.

A succinct outline of such a modernized scheme of the days of creation may be found in the earlier editions of Dana's Manual of Geology. His arrangement is as follows:

1. THE INORGANIC ERA.

1st Day.—LIGHT cosmical.
2d Day.—The earth divided from the fluid around it, or individualized.
3rd Day.— { 1. Outlining of the land and water.
2. Creation of vegetation.

2. THE ORGANIC ERA.

4th Day.—LIGHT from the sun.
5th Day.—Creation of the lower orders of animals.
6th Day.— { 1. Creation of Mammals.
2. Creation of Man.

This is the order of events according to science as interpreted by the great geologist James D. Dana. There is no mistaking a general trend parallel with the account in Genesis. Yet at certain points there appears to be decided divergence. For example, the scripture does not say that the light was cosmical. On the contrary the mention of Day and Night implies that it was terrestrial. On the second day he has the earth "divided from the fluid around it." But the Bible has it that the waters were divided from the waters.

Dana's view is practically based on that of Arnold Guyot as seen in his fascinating volume entitled, Creation, or the Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science. This he summarizes at the close of the volume in parallel columns, as follows, in part:

ERA OF MATTER

THE BIBLE	SCIENCE
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.	Matter is not self-existent.
And the earth was desolate and emptiness; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.	Primitive state of matter. Gas indefinitely diffused.
First Day. And God said, Let Light be, and Light Was. And God separated the light from the darkness.	*First Activity of Matter.* Gravity. Chemical action. Concentration of diffused matter into one or more nebulae, appearing as *luminous* spots in the *dark* space of heaven.
Second Day. And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters.	*Division.* The primitive nebula is divided into smaller nebulous masses.
And God made the expanse, and separated the waters under the expanse from the waters above the expanse.	Formation of the lower, visible, starry world.
Third Day. And God said, Let the water under the heavens be gathered to one place and let the dry land appear.	*Concentration.* The nebulous masses concentrate into stars. Our sun becomes a nebulous star. Formation of the mineral mass of the earth, etc.

In this scheme "the waters" over which the Spirit brooded become "gas indefinitely diffused," and Day and Night are identified as "*luminous* spots in the *dark* space of heaven." Guyot's story of the genesis and development of the earth is intensely interesting, but it is difficult even for one favorably inclined to rest satisfied with the apparent forcing of scripture into parallel with it.

These instances will suffice to illustrate the point at issue, for they are typical of the straits to which able and scholarly men are reduced in attempts to fit the simple story of God's preparing the world for man to the elaborate cosmical theories of modern science. The Bible was not written especially for eminent scientists, but for common men and women, and I wish to show that if we would rightly interpret this chapter we must abandon the cosmical viewpoint and be content to stand with the writer on the ground and view the scenes through his eyes. Let me also remark that if we are to gain views from science that may legitimately be compared with those from the

Bible they too must be seen from the same standpoint and must therefore be, not cosmogonic *charts*, but geologic *landscapes*.

What now was the precise mental attitude of this writer —the attitude one must assume if he would rightly interpret his production? We have already noted that he stood in thought on the human level. With this we must place the fact that he records a series of phenomena, not what was occurring in the arcana of nature, but what was *displayed* in a series of visible events: the light shining out of darkness; the dry land, hitherto concealed beneath the waters, now revealed by their retreat; the heavenly bodies, not delayed in their creation until the fourth day, but culminating in display at that time, aquatic life becoming notably visible in great sea monsters and in swarms of living creatures along the shore. It is distinctly asserted, and reiterated, that God created all things. This fact underlies the entire chapter; but the story of the work has directly to do, not with the series of creations but with the series of visible events issuing from them. It purports to depict what might have been seen could an observer have looked out on the world during the process.

We may now define the standpoint of the Biblical narrative of creation as that of A SPECTATOR, IDEALLY PRESENT AT THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH, DURING GOD'S CREATIVE WORK IN PREPARING THE WORLD FOR MAN, AND NOTING THE VISIBLE STAGES OF ITS PROGRESS.

Having now assumed for ourselves the viewpoint of the producer of the picture we turn to the film itself. And first there is flashed on the screen this sentence:

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

It is usual to regard this verse as giving account of the creation of matter as the raw material of the universe. It is, however, not merely the record of an initial event but a summary of the story that follows. The relation of the first verse to the second is not merely that of succession in time but that of general and particular. It is as if he said, "God made all things, and, in the case of

the earth, He proceeded as follows." The first of the series of views is accordingly on the darkened earth. We are not given to understand that this was the original condition but that there was a time when the world in which we live was wrapped in impenetrable darkness. Could a spectator have been present he might, however, have heard the surging of a mighty deep and have become conscious of a brooding Presence. "And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Now comes the first movement in the progress. "And God said, let there be light; and there was light." It is at this precise point that it is most important and also most difficult to hold fast to the true point of view. So fascinating is the construction put upon this sublime passage by modern science that it is only by the utmost effort that a modern man can retain the mental attitude which must have characterized the writer of this ancient document. In poetry, we have Milton in the beautiful passage from Paradise Lost:

> "Let there be light, said God, and forthwith light,
> Ethereal first of things, quintessence pure,
> Sprung from the deep, and from her native east
> To journey through the aery gloom began,
> Sphered in a radiant cloud."

From science comes the sublime conception of the first molecular activity in newly created matter, resulting in light. As Professor Dana used to put it, "A flash of light throughout the universe would therefore be the first announcement of the work begun." In music, we have the startling effect in the oratorio of the Creation, when, after an orchestral representation of chaos, and a quiet recitative and chorus depicting the dark waters with the Spirit of God brooding over them, there comes the divine word, "Let there be light." And then, from orchestra and chorus, like a burst of glory, springs a mighty chord at the word, "And there was LIGHT!" Now all this is very dramatic. It is thrilling. And it may also be true, as

some eminent scientists hold, that such a striking event was the prelude to the grand anthem of creation. But the point now is that there is no allusion to such a cosmic occurrence in the first chapter of Genesis. What God is said to have created is not dead matter but "heavens and earth." The first mention of light is over a dark ocean which bears no resemblance to a cosmic chaos.

There seems to be a perverse tendency to treat this passage as if it read, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and God said, Let there be light.* If the text read thus it would justify the common interpretation, viz., And God said, Let light *come into existence,* and Light *came into existence.* But the text does *not* read thus. The fiat is not coupled with the creation. It is uttered amid the darkness of a world already in existence. The Hebrew word rendered *there was* does not necessarily imply a beginning. It is quite commonly rendered, *and it came to pass,* referring to events rather than to origins. That the light in question was terrestrial rather than cosmic seems indeed to be certified by the fact that it ushered in the succession of day and night. To see clearly a picture on the screen, especially if it be dim, one must exclude all outside light. If we resolutely shut out from our minds all ideas derived from modern speculation, and fix our eyes on the text alone, we shall see, in this first picture, not a burst of glory, but a faint illumination, stealing into the darkness of this world, at first too dim to reveal anything but itself—a light that soon fades but reappears, and then continues to alternate with the darkness in earthly day and night.

One cannot view this picture thus from the standpoint of the producer of it without being forcibly reminded that according to the teachings of science there was a time in the evolution of the globe when precisely such an event must have occurred. The nebular hypothesis from which this deduction is made has indeed been brought into question, but only as regards the earlier stages of theoretical nebulosity. It is, however, quite generally agreed that, whatever may have been its origin, and whether gaseous and incandescent or not at the outset, the earth at some

time passed through a highly heated but opaque stage, and that, above the surface, was a very deep atmosphere in which was suspended, in dense clouds, all of the water now filling the ocean bed. As cooling proceeded, part of this fell in copious showers and formed a universal ocean, but there remained in clouds more dense than any we now know, sufficient to exclude from the surface the light of the sun. The time must have come when one day a dim, uncertain light struggled through the murky mass. To a supposed observer it would shortly fade, but as the earth turned on its axis it would reappear. Thus, according to the teachings of science, was inaugurated at the surface of the earth, the succession of day and night.

Now turn off the scientific light and glance again at the screen. "And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day." The identity of the two pictures is unmistakable. And not only this, but in the scientific as well as in the Biblical view this is the stage at which the cooling globe first presents features which we recognize as belonging to the world as we now know it. The story of the habitable globe as recorded by science and by Genesis begins at precisely the same point.

Before viewing the next picture let me call attention to the margin of the Revised Version at the word *firmament.* This word is a relic of the old Latin rendering *firmamentum,* something solid. The margin reads, Heb. *expanse.* That is, something spread out. In quoting, I therefore use the word *expanse* as more accurately expressing the meaning of the original.

On a misty day at sea there is no distinct horizon line. Sea and sky seem to blend. Much more is this true in time of storm. How thoroughly intermingled then must have been the waters below and the waters above when the constant downpour of rain was sent back from the

superheated earth in hissing steam and the fierce primeval waves seemed to

"assault
Heaven's height and with the center mix the pole."

In the lapse of ages there came a time when in the gradual lifting of the clouds and the clearing of the air, there began to appear a faint line which from day to day was drawn more firmly until one day it swept the complete circle of the horizon and cut apart the sea and sky. This is the vision presented to the scientific imagination; and it is this that follows in the Biblical word-picture. "And God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse, and divided the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse: and it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day."

As the cooling of the planet proceeded the earth shrank and its crust crumpled like the skin of a baked apple. The waters then retired into the hollows and future mountains began to lift their tops out of the waves. Geologists tell us that could an observer have stood on one of these lone rocks in the wide waste of waters during the following ages he would have seen continents and islands gradually emerge as the waters retreated. The scattered pools of the receding waters then flowed together and formed one ocean separated by the continents into its seven seas. It requires no comment to identify this with the next Biblical representation. "And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas; and God saw that it was good."

It seems probable from the present relation of plants and animals that the first life on the globe was in the vegetable kingdom. But whether such was the fact is not relevant to this discussion because the Biblical account refers to the *visible display* of life which naturally would occur long after its origin. And as to such a grand dis-

play of life as would first have attracted the attention of an observer watching the progress of creation there is, from a scientific standpoint, no doubt that it was chiefly on land and predominantly in the form of vegetation. Deposits of graphite, of anthracite and of potash, derived from vegetation, indicate an exuberant plant life even in the very early stages of land history.

It scarcely need be said that, in the Biblical account, the word *grass* is not used in the botanical sense, but means simply small herbage. Thus even the lilies may be spoken of as the grass of the field. And as to "fruit-trees bearing fruit," Dana, in his Geology, says, speaking of the Carboniferous age, "Besides the remains of the trunks of conifers, various fruits are found in the carboniferous beds." In other words, the Bible does not affirm that there were timothy, clover, apples, pears and plums, but that there were small herbs, and trees that bore fruits appropriate to that early age of the world.

The next stage in the creative progress calls for special attention. It is quite customary to speak of the work of the fourth day as if it were a single event, the first shining of the heavenly bodies upon the earth. If this were all, the event had already taken place. Light, as indicated by the display of plant life, had for ages been shining upon the earth. It had even broken fitfully through the clouds in temporary bursts of direct sunlight. But the outcome of this day of creation was not the mere shining of the luminaries on the earth. It involved also (1) their becoming regulators of the seasons, and (2) their being so "set" in the firmament as to make it the illuminated dial of a celestial timepiece. They were to be "for signs and for seasons and for days and years." The *regulative* function could be but imperfectly performed in the earlier stages of the earth's evolution. The dense cloud masses had a blurring effect on the changes of the seasons. Vegetation that does not require marked seasonal diversity must have flourished long before spring, summer, autumn, and winter were sharply defined. And when such definition had matured it marked a notable

stage of progress; for it was accompanied by a change in the order of vegetation.

In order that the luminaries might accurately perform their *optical* functions a number of conditions must be fulfilled:—

1. Clouds and mists must leave the sky for intervals of sufficient length and frequency to permit accurate observations.

2. The earth's photosphere must fade away. In its earlier stages the "earth was transmuted into a vast galvanic pile, emitting constant streams of electricity, which, reaching the ethereal space at the boundary of the thick atmosphere, became luminous."

3. Light must arrive from distant worlds; for the stars, as well as the sun and moon, are involved in the case. Celestial distances are inconceivably great, and light, though extremely rapid in its flight, is not instantaneous. Even in our time astronomers occasionally report light from new stars that had been shining for many years whose light has but recently reached the earth.

4. The atmosphere must become matured as an optical medium. This requires more than mere clearing the sky of clouds. Some of the factors affecting the optical condition of the air are as follows: refraction, especially when the light passes through strata of different density; prevalence of the aurora; presence of fine particles of dust, smoke, or frost-crystals. In the earlier ages these factors had greater effect than at present, owing to the extremes of temperature, excessive electrical and volcanic activity, and the presence in the atmosphere of gases now quite eliminated from it.

It is evident from these facts that the juncture at which the heavenly bodies became illuminated figures on the dial of the celestial timepiece could not well be assigned to a definite date. The phenomena are of too great complexity and the culmination too much a matter of degrees extending over a vast period of time. But if the question is asked, "At what relative point in his report would a supposed observer most appropriately give an account of

such culmination?" the answer, from a scientific standpoint is not far to seek.

There is a great dividing line, or rather zone, recognized by all geologists, between the Paleozoic or ancient age and the Mesozoic or middle age of the earth's geologic history. It was a time of transition strongly marked by flexures of the earth's crust which tended powerfully to fix the forms of the continents, by an almost complete revolution in the life of the globe, and particularly by pronounced atmospheric changes. In the three-volume Geology by Professors Chamberlin and Salisbury an excursus of fifteen pages on atmospheric changes is introduced in connection with this transition period. And the writer of the scenario of the creation has chosen precisely this relative position for the reel that displays through the clarified air, the illuminate figures on the dial of the celestial timepiece.

In following the visible stages of the world's progress through the eyes of the scientist, we next behold a new and striking display of life. It occurs along the shores of the ocean and in the lakes and estuaries which at this time overspread vast areas of the continents. And here "on some wide muddy Mesozoic shore" might a supposed observer have held his station whence he could behold events on both sea and land. He would have seen that "reptiles were preëminent in each of the three elements—in place of whales in the water, of beasts of prey and herbivores on the land, and of birds in the air. It was the meridian of the reptile world." The waters swarmed with abundant life. Aquatic or amphibious animals there were of enormous size, such as the iguanodon, thirty feet long and of great bulk, and huge ungainly saurians that seemed to come up out of the waters like the frogs of Egypt. There were not only swimming but also flying reptiles, such as the pterodactyl, a creature with a spread of bat-like wings six or seven feet across, besides other flying forms with reptile characteristics but having feathers like birds.

Such a bold and novel display of life, swarming up out of the waters, and even rising into the air, could not fail

to impress a beholder as marking a principal stage in the progress of God's creative work. And so it follows in the motion-word-picture, "And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of heaven. And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that moveth wherewith the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind: and God saw that it was good."

As we pass from the Mesozoic or middle age into the Cenozoic age, the last grand division of geologic time, we come upon a most amazing development of animal life. Says Professor Chamberlin in the *Geology of Wisconsin*, "A signal feature of the dawn of the modern era was the passage of life dominance from the sea to the land. In the earlier ages, marine life held undisputed preëminence. In the latest, the scepter of power and superiority of organization has passed to the land." This was accompanied by a change almost as marked as that which followed the Paleozoic or ancient era. Besides the change in the life of the globe extensive additions were made to the continents. Mammals, which are the characteristic animals of the land, had been represented by some few and smaller species. Now they come into their own, and enormous "beasts of the earth" roam the plains or crash through the forests. Gigantic elephants of nearly twice the bulk of the largest animals that now exist in Ceylon and Africa roamed in herds. There were wild oxen of colossal size, gigantic wild horses and boars, leopards, tigers, and hyenas, besides a multitude of lesser quadrupeds. Prehistoric cemeteries of these land monsters have been found in Siberia, Alaska, the Bone Lick of Kentucky, and in a bituminous lake near Los Angeles. We are somewhat familiar with these great beasts by means of those enormous skeletons which astonish the beholder in museums of natural history. Their advent marked very decisively the stage of God's work immediately preceding the advent of man. And so they come trooping on in the word-picture, "And God said, Let the earth bring forth living crea-

tures after their kind, cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after their kind: and it was so."

It is not affirmed that in the fifth period animal life was confined to the waters, nor that there were no land animals preceding the sixth period; but it is scientifically true that the first grand display of animal life was in the waters, and that it was followed by a correspondingly notable display on the land. This fact is certified by the descriptive names of the two ages, the reptilian and the mammalian.

Now follows the crowning work of creation, more wonderful than any that has gone before. The scientific theory of evolution traces the ascent of man from the lowest expression of animal life in far-off ages through progressive intervening forms. It is not necessary in this connection to pronounce concerning this theory, since the Biblical story leaves entirely out of the account all reference to the method of God's work. It simply affirms that He created man, but does not say whether He did it instantaneously or by an age-long process. It is often assumed that creation must be an instantaneous act. This is not the fact. It is just as true that God created us as that He created Adam and Eve. But quite apart from any theory of origin, it is the general, if not unanimous verdict of scientific men that the human race has descended from a single pair. The advent upon the earth of these first properly human beings was therefore, from the scientific, as well as from the Biblical standpoint, an event of greater and higher significance than the most stupendous physical display that preceded it.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness * * * And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them * * * and there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

I have said that attempts to harmonize the Biblical account of creation with the entire scope of the nebular hypothesis are quite generally regarded as futile because they lead to a forcing of scientific interpretation on the one hand, and exegesis on the other. But it appears that

by simply changing our standpoint from that of the modern scientist to that of the ancient writer we obtain a reasonable interpretation which involves no such forcing to bring it into accord with present state of human knowledge. This verifies the main contention of this paper, that THE POINT OF VIEW FROM WHICH TO INTERPRET THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS IS, THAT OF A SPECTATOR, IDEALLY PRESENT AT THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH, DURING GOD'S CREATIVE WORK IN PREPARING THE WORLD FOR MAN, AND NOTING THE VISIBLE STAGES OF ITS PROGRESS.

This point of view has been assumed, with varying degrees of definiteness, by other writers, but so far as I know, none of these has clearly and fully defined it and made it the governing principle of interpretation through a detailed analysis of the chapter. It is here claimed that when so defined and consistently applied it not only obviates the forced interpretations which have vitiated otherwise admirable efforts at comparing Genesis and geology, but also establishes a corollary that is as important as the main proposition and which indeed makes it worth while to demonstrate that proposition, viz., THERE ARE IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS NINE ASPECTS OR CULMINATIONS, PICTURED AS THEY APPEAR TO BE RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF NATURE, AND IN THE SAME ORDER.

These nine items are as follows:—

1. Darkness over a universal ocean.
2. Light and the beginning of day and night at the human level.
3. An expanse opened between sea and cloud.
4. Outlining of oceans and continents.
5. Display of plant life on the land.
6. Sun, moon and stars become regulators of the seasons and terrestrial timekeepers.
7. Display of animal life in sea and air.
8. Display of animal life on land.
9. Advent of man.

The correspondence of these nine motion-word-pictures with the autographic record of the Creator, written in the rocks and deciphered by scientific research, is a fact of tremendous significance. It cannot be set aside by saying that the Bible is intended to teach religion, not science. Religion and science are not in separate water-tight compartments. Truth is one; and facts must be reckoned with in whatever realm they may be found.