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this little book,—the change was not lightly or easily made. "Few have been called upon to pass through a more trying experience. To put the Torah (the Law of Moses) on the critical dissecting table gave him almost as much pain as Abraham felt when he bound his son to the altar. His religious nature rebelled against the process. It was not so much that he feared the inconsistency of change, as that he feared the effect of these views. His spirit bowed with the deepest reverence before the Scriptures. To him they were like a sacred sanctuary."

What, then, were the considerations which drove him so reluctantly into this position? We cannot always answer. No man can himself tell all the forces that bear upon him in a great change of position,—forces sometimes too minute for apprehension, sometimes too dispersed and impalpable. But in one prominent instance, Delitzsch names two leading reasons in this his latest book, the *Messianic Prophecies*. It is of the authorship of Isaiah, and he says: "1. If we hold that Isaiah is the author of xl.–lxvi., we must maintain a phenomenon which otherwise is without a parallel in the prophetic literature, for otherwise it is everywhere peculiar to prophecy that it goes out from the present, and does not transport itself to the future without returning to the ground of its own contemporary history; but Isaiah would live and act here in the exile, and address the exiles through twenty-seven chapters, without coming back from his ideal to his actual present. 2. The recognition of the divinely ordered training and progress of salvation demands the origin of these addresses under the impulses given by the exile. Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel would represent an incomprehensible retrogression if the author of Isaiah xl.–lxvi. were not younger than Jeremiah, younger even than Ezekiel, and did not have the last third of the exile as his historical station."

The Early Narratives of Genesis.

By the Rev. Professor Herbert E. Ryle, M.A., Cambridge.

The national history of Israel may be said to date from the era of the Exodus and the Covenant of Mount Sinai. The beginnings of the Hebrew race are described in the narrative which tells us of the call of Abraham and records the selection of the family with which are identified the names of the three great ancestors of the chosen people.

But the Hebrew narratives, and the traditions from which our Book of Genesis was compiled, went back into ages infinitely more remote. It was natural for the Hebrew historian to preface his record of the origin of the chosen people with a record of the origin of all nations, the origin of the human race, and the origin of the universe. The materials for such a preface were to hand. He has placed them before us in their simplicity and beauty, making selections from his available resources, so as to narrate in succession the Hebrew stories of the cosmogony, the primæval patriarchs, the Deluge, and the formation of the races.

The fact that we have in these eleven chapters a narrative compiled from two or more different sources is now so generally recognised, that there is no need here for any preliminary discussion upon the subject. This only needs to be stated, that the two principal threads of tradition incorporated in the opening section of Genesis are termed by scholars "Jehovistic" and "priestly," according as they correspond respectively to what may be called the "prophetic" and "priestly" treatment of the early religious history of Israel. But besides these larger and more easily recognised sources of information, the compiler obviously makes use of materials of which the archaic character is evident both from the style and from the subject matter.

The Creation of the Universe (i. 1–ii. 4*a*). The matchless introduction to the whole history is taken in all probability from the priestly writings or some similar literary source. Evidence of this is obtained from characteristic words and phrases, and from the smooth, orderly, and somewhat redundant

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style. The time was when this opening passage was regarded as the most ancient piece of writing in the Bible. This can no longer be maintained. The smoothness and fulness of its present literary garb show sufficiently that, however ancient its narrative may be, the form in which it has come down to us does not belong to the earliest stages of Hebrew literature.

The recognition of this fact would in itself be fatal to the acceptance of various forms of traditional opinion respecting the origin of Gen. i. 1–ii. 4, or indeed of the whole section, Gen. i.–xi. We may here notice, in passing, the strange, yet commonly held, view that the story of the creation of the world was supernaturally revealed to Adam, and that from him it was word for word transmitted through the families of Enos and Shem, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, until it was finally received and committed to writing by Moses. This is an instance of the extraordinary delusions to which popular assent has been given in cases where direct evidence has not been forthcoming. Ignorance can always call imagination into play, and support its utterances by appeals to the supernatural. But its Nemesis is inevitable. And, in this instance, when philological science summarily disposed of the old assumption that Hebrew was the primitive language upon which the theory of such an infallible verbal tradition logically rested, the bubble was pricked. There is no longer the necessity to contend against a theory, consisting of a series of hypotheses, that could never be substantiated. There is no longer the necessity to object that we have no right to presuppose an orderly and comprehensive tradition in the earliest ages of humanity, even if we were entitled to assign to the first forefathers of our race intellectual gifts capable of preserving and transmitting such a traditional statement respecting the beginning of things.

The argument from the style of the Hebrew in the beginning of Genesis is almost equally opposed to the other common assumption, that it is the record by Moses of a Divine Revelation to himself respecting the origin of the universe. It cannot be admitted that the style of this passage suggests the beginnings of a Hebrew literature, or has any marked resemblance to those portions which are indubitably archaic. We have no evidence or warrant for the assertion that Moses received Divine Revelation upon this topic. It is an unfortunate and precarious method of interpretation that endeavours to substitute a theory of direct superhuman intervention for the explanation dictated by literary criticism. The latter, because it follows the guidance of analogy in other literature, is not on that account less loyal to the recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are nowhere told that Moses received divine information respecting the beginnings of the universe. And while there are good reasons for not introducing anywhere a theory of direct supernatural agency, where none is recorded in Scripture, there are, among others, two especially good reasons in the case of the opening chapters of Genesis for refusing the application of such a theory.

1. We do not look for instruction upon matters of physical inquiry from revelation in the written Word. God's other gifts to man of learning, perseverance, calculation and the like, have been and are a true source of Revelation. But Scripture supplies no short cuts for the intellect. Where man's intellectual powers may hope to attain to the truth, be it in the region of historical, scientific, or critical study, we have no warrant to expect an anticipation of results through the interposition of supernatural instruction in the letter of Scripture.

Nor is it any sufficient answer that, whereas we should not look for divine instruction upon matters of physical inquiry in the ordinary paths of life, we might reasonably look for it in matters so transcending our capacity as those relating to the creation of the universe. For, on the one hand, we have no right to assume from our present ignorance that the things relating to the formation of the earth and of the planetary system are therefore necessarily beyond human cognisance. The horizon of physical research is constantly widening. We are every year learning more, both of the infinitely remote and of the infinitely vast and minute in time and space. On the other hand, we have no right to assume that, in things distinct from the spiritual and moral life, the letter of Scripture is endowed with omniscience. Scripture is divinely inspired, not to release men from the toil of mental inquiry, but to lead and instruct their souls in the things of "eternal salvation." In regions of thought within the compass of earthly

intuition the books of Scripture reflect the limitations of learning and knowledge which were inseparable from human composition in their own sphere of time and place.

2. The analogy presented by the literature of other nations would lead us to expect that, in the delineation of the formation of the world and of the beginnings of the human race, the simplicity of the narrative would be no guarantee for the scientific accuracy of the story. We cannot exempt Israelite history from the criticism which we should apply to other literature. The Hebrew cosmogony is, for reasons which we shall have to notice further on, conspicuously free from absurdities which detract from the beauty of similar narratives in other literatures. It is not, however, scientifically accurate; nor indeed should we expect it to be, if we were prepared to grant the family likeness of its contents to those of the Assyrian cosmogony. I am well acquainted with numerous, and some of them brilliant, attempts to reconcile, as it is wrongly termed, "religion and science." But no attempt at reconciling Gen. i. with the exacting requirements of modern sciences has ever been known to succeed without entailing a degree of special pleading or forced interpretation to which, in such a question, we should be wise to have no recourse.

In examining the character of this passage (Gen. i.–ii. 4*a*) let us not hesitate to place it upon its proper footing. Its character can only be estimated by comparison with the parallels presented in other literature. Now every nation and race has had its cosmogony or legendary account respecting the origin of the world and the early days of the nation's ancestors. Traditions of this kind are found in every variety. Each variety represents tribal intermixture or the influences of climate and environment. The infancy of races is only capable of understanding abstract ideas by means of simple and pictorial representations. Upon these the genius of each race has left its characteristic impress, sometimes poetical, sometimes whimsical, sometimes philosophical, sometimes religious.

If now we treat the Israelite cosmogony as inseparable in its main features from such representations, what do we find? Let us search and see.

We employ in our search the two divine forces of knowledge—the perfect revelation of things spiritual in the person of Jesus Christ, and the progressive revelation of things material through the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the intellect of mankind. The narrative upon which our search is employed relates to three distinct conceptions, upon the determination of which the current of all religious thought and conduct depends. These are the conceptions of the physical universe, mankind, and the Godhead.

It appears to me that our judgment upon the character of the Israelite cosmogony should be based upon the treatment in Genesis (i.–xi.) of these three fundamental conceptions.

(*a*) The Physical Universe. It would not be difficult to show that the Hebrew cosmogony is closely allied to other early cosmogonies in its imperfect and, as we should term it, unscientific conception, both of the formation of the earth and the heavenly bodies, and of the production of the vegetable and animal world. It is, for instance, only a non-natural interpretation which considers the "days" of Gen. i., in spite of the mention of "evening" and "morning," to be vast periods of time; it is only, again, a non-natural interpretation which explains the formation of the sun and the moon on the "fourth" day as intelligible to modern science, on the assumption that the nebular hypothesis is anticipated. If, as seems to be the only candid line of exegesis, we adopt a genuinely literal interpretation, if we admit the presence of statements incompatible with modern scientific discoveries, we shall, at least, show a resolution to be above all things and at all costs fair. We shall then follow with especial curiosity the points of correspondence in the cosmogony of Genesis with that of the nations closely akin to the Israelites. But we shall also concede that its description of the physical universe is unscientific, as judged by modern standards, and that it shares the limitations of the imperfect knowledge of the time at which it was committed to writing. On the other hand, from the religious point of view, we cannot fail to recognise the pure and elevated conception of the Material Universe which is presented to us in this portion of Genesis. Not self-existent nor divine, as some taught in those days, nor inherently evil and antagonistic to God

and man, as others taught, the Universe is presented to us as coming into being at the will of a Divine Creator, its formation following the stages of an ordered development, its essential character pleasing and good. It is a picture which, if it clashes with exact science, agrees in its highest conceptions with the teaching of the purest philosophy of religion.

(*b*) Mankind. The description of man's origin and nature in the cosmogony of Genesis is of great importance. It is viewed, as it were, from two aspects, the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the divine. So far as his physical origin is touched upon, the narrative is expressed in the simple terms of prehistoric legend, of unscientific pictorial description. We feel that so far as his physical origin and his material structure are concerned, the advances of modern physiological research are more likely to furnish a key to the great mystery than are the pages of Genesis. But when we pass from the consideration of man's physical structure to the consideration of him as one endowed with spiritual powers, moral duties, and intellectual gifts, we are lifted at once into an atmosphere where we find every item of the description is marvellously and perfectly in harmony with the highest religious conception of man revealed to us in the teaching of the Incarnation. We see him made in the image and likeness of God; a living soul derived from the Divine Spirit; gifted with powers of intellect, with freedom of will, with the witness of conscience. It is as if, with the passage from the physical to the spiritual region, we had left the atmosphere of "childish" things and had been exalted to the contemplation of "men" whose citizenship is in heaven.

(*c*) The Godhead. Even more strikingly does this exaltation of conception appear when the subject is wholly spiritual, or almost wholly so, as it is in the description of the Godhead. The only exception here arises from the anthropomorphic language incidental to the presentation of the narrative. But the divine pre-existence, the divine omnipotence, the paramount purpose of love, the infinite hatred of sin, these and other attributes of the divine nature are depicted in the narrative in a degree that immeasurably elevates the traditions of Israel above all similar records in the known literature of other nations.

Does not this summary of an investigation assist us towards a conclusion, which will recognise the combination of the two essential elements in the inspiration of all Holy Scripture, the human form and the spiritual teaching? In these early chapters of Genesis there is present the simple narrative of the cosmogony current in the Hebrew branch of the Semitic race. But this is not all. There is also present the teaching of the Spirit, for the revelation of which the Israelite people were the appointed channel, that it might be known among men. If now the three fundamental conceptions —the world, human nature, and God—be regarded as divided into two groups, the physical (*i.e.* the world and man's physical origin and nature) and the spiritual (*i.e.* man's spiritual origin and the Being of God), we can discern the secular, the childlike, the imperfect teaching of Genesis upon the former group co-existent with, nay, furnishing a vehicle for, the religious, the inspired, the divine teaching of Genesis upon the latter.

We have, then, in the first chapters of Genesis the Hebrew version of a great Semitic epic dealing with the beginning of all things. It has not come down to us in that earliest form in which, we may assume, it was known to the fathers of the Israelite race who "dwelt on the other side of the flood," and "served other gods" (Josh. xxiv. 2). It has not come down to us in that setting of bewildering mythology in which we find the similar and congenital Assyrian tradition embedded. It has come down to us in the form which it has received from the minds of devout Israelites, moved by the Spirit of God, and penetrated with the pure belief in the spiritual Jehovah. The saints and prophets of Israel stripped the old legend of its pagan deformities. Its shape and outline survived. But its spirit was changed, its religious teaching and significance transfigured in the light of the Revelation of the LORD. The popular tradition was not abolished; it was preserved, purified, hallowed, that it might subserve the Divine purpose of transmitting, as in a figure, spiritual teaching upon eternal truths.

We must reserve for a later contribution a reference to the cognate Assyrian cosmogony, and a fuller treatment of "the Days of Creation" than it has been possible to give in the foregoing general remarks.