

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW

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REVIEW SECTION

I.—MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING THE PRESENT ATTITUDE OF SCIENCE TOWARD RELIGION

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THERE is a widespread feeling, fostered by books on "The Conflict of Science and Religion," and by the tone of much of our current journalism, that there is an essential antagonism between science and Christianity, and that the bulk of our scientific men are "skeptics" and disbelievers in supernatural revelation. It is not to be denied that there is some ground for this impression. The statement is often made by unbelievers themselves that the best scientific thought is on their side. A quarter of a century ago there was, in Germany and in Great Britain, an outburst of aggressive materialism which made it appear as if science were heading steadily toward unbelief. Popular scientific teachers like Huxley and Tyn dall were avowedly hostile to revealed religion; Darwin could latterly only be ranked as an agnostic. Agnosticism was the watchword of the philosophy of Mr. Spencer; and Mr. Darwin's theory was openly belauded as giving the death-blow to teleology (design). These currents, it may safely be said, are no longer the dominant ones, but much of

their influence still remains. Even at their strongest, however, they were far from being as powerful as many imagine; and we do not believe it to be true that at any time, and much less to-day, the best scientific thought is in estrangement from Christian faith.

The fixed idea of many is that, as the result of scientific culture, a steady drift is taking place in the minds of thinking men from faith to skepticism. It will be shown that the statements made on this subject are grossly exaggerated; but there is another phenomenon which does not always receive the attention it deserves. In an address at Northfield, in August, the present writer pointed out that, while we hear much of the drift from faith to skepticism, we hear comparatively little of another movement as constantly going on—*the drift from skepticism to faith*. Yet the one is as real and every whit as influential as the other. The address referred to has been reproduced in several papers; it need not, therefore, be here dwelt on. But a few points may profitably be recalled, and

there is in this verse an allusion to an old and simple form of keeping accounts, and that when an account had been settled, the creditor *doubled over* the leaf upon which the account was charged, as evidence that it was *discharged*, then all is easy and self-consistent. A proper translation of the last clause would be: "she hath received at the Lord's hand a cancellation of all her sins." The Lord's own hand has doubled down the page upon which her sins were recorded against her. That makes the passage clear and self-consistent. Never in God's government has a sinner been punished twice as much as he deserved. It would be poor comfort and very bad theology to tell any sinner that God had punished him twice as much as he deserved. Nor would it be a very pleasant message to bring to him that the Lord, after he had punished him all that he deserved, and more too, still made public announcement that he went forth *pardoned!* Surely that would seem to him to be only adding insult to injury.

GENESIS I. AND ASTRONOMY.

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Does Gen. i. 14-17 affirm that the heavenly bodies were brought into existence on the fourth day? The trend of opinion in certain quarters is fairly indicated by the following from Dillmann:

"On the one hand, astronomy raises the objection that the creation of the star worlds is made to follow only after the plant-covered earth had been called into existence. To place it before the establishing of the heavens and the earth, therefore before chapter i. 6, or even before chapter i. 2, and to assume that in chapter i. 14 *ff.* the reference can only be to those heavenly bodies becoming visible from the earth, is forbidden alike by the wording of the text and by the notorious want of acquaintance with the true nature of those bodies which is characteristic of antiquity."*

We have here in a nutshell the argument of those who answer the above question in the affirmative. It is based, first, upon the language of the passage itself, and, second, upon the ignorance as to the true nature of the heavenly bodies and their origin with reference to the earth, which prevailed at the time this Genesis narrative was written.

But looking at the origin of these two arguments, it can scarcely be doubted that the one stated second in reality came first in Dr. Dill-

mann's thinking. In other words, had Gen. i. proceeded from one confessedly familiar with La Place's theory, no one, I think, would regard its language as necessarily in conflict with that theory. It might be regarded as careless language, or as ambiguous. But few would be disposed to affirm that it was necessarily contradictory of La Place's speculation. If this be true, then it is an initial weakness in Dillmann's interpretation of the language of Gen. i. 14 *ff.*, that it lies under the grave suspicion of being practically determined by considerations lying outside of the record itself.

As we have just seen, he assumes that the writer of Genesis shared the crude notions of the origin of the physical universe current in his day. This may have been the case. Indeed, the presumption is that it was the case. But presumption is not proof. Why should we bother ourselves with the writer's language, if, prior to our examination of it, a mere presumption is sufficient to determine what he must have said. Certainly a genuine historical interpretation lends no countenance to such procrustean *a priori*ism as this would be. Further, facts warn us to beware of building too much even upon what appears to be so reasonable a presumption as the one relied upon by Dr. Dillmann. Let it be noted then:

1. That there is positive evidence that the writer of Gen. i. did not share the views of his contemporaries in regard to a number of points pertaining to the physical universe. It is, to be sure, quite common to affirm a close parallel between the cosmogony in Gen. i. and the Babylonian cosmogony, for instance. If one is disposed to accept this statement upon authority he can find very good authority for so doing. But if he undertakes to establish for himself the existence of such a parallel, he will find that it will task his ingenuity not a little.

2. That Dr. Dillmann himself admits—and in this he is in accord with almost all scholars—that the conceptions of God entertained by the Genesis writer were *toto calo* different from those of his contemporaries. To what this difference was due is not material. Its existence is sufficient to assure us that it is as unsafe as it will be unreasonable to assume, without some evidence, that his views in regard to the relative dates at which the earth and the heavenly bodies came into existence were identical with views of his contemporaries.

3. That finally, it is in evidence that other

* "Comm. on Gen.," vol. i., p. 45.

Scripture writers, living approximately at the same time and occupying substantially the same viewpoint as the writer of this narrative, demonstrably entertained conceptions of the physical universe, at least of the world upon which we live, totally at variance with the conceptions of their own day. This is notably true in the case of the writer of Job xxvi. 7, who "thought of the earth as upheld by God, poised in empty space."* Such a conception was as foreign to the notions of antiquity as would have been the idea that the heavenly bodies were brought into existence prior to the earth. Indeed, the writer of Job xxxviii. 4-7 presupposes the existence of the stars at the time of the founding of the earth.† In the absence of positive evidence who is authorized in saying, that the views of the writer of Gen. i. were more in harmony with those prevailing outside of his own immediate circle, than with those prevailing within that circle? Nor will it break the force of what had been said should one affirm that the statements in Job are the imaginings of a poet. Whether the imaginings of a poet or not, they warn us against too readily assuming that the idea of the heavenly bodies having existed prior to the earth, could not have entered the mind of one living at the time and in the mental environment of the writer of Gen. i.

I think, then, that we may fairly say that there is great danger of allowing this presumption an undue weight in our interpretation of Gen. i. 14 ff. What we ought to endeavor to do is to let the passage speak for itself as far as possible. It will not be going too far to say that, unless the language of the passage *demand*s the view that the author regarded the heavenly bodies as having been brought into existence subsequent to the earth, we ought not to feel at liberty to put that construction upon it. In other words, *if his language will admit* of the view that he regarded the heavenly bodies as having been in existence prior to the time that our earth took its present form, then the facts cited above will permit us to accept this as the intended meaning of his words—that is, so far as it entered consciously into his intention to pass upon this point.

It is worth while to pause upon this last statement, for it is entirely possible that the writer of Gen. i. 14 ff. was not consciously

concerned to say whether the heavenly bodies existed prior to the earth or not. He was not writing an astronomy. He was not specifically concerned to answer the question, Did the heavenly bodies exist prior to the earth or not? Had he been, we would have been warranted in expecting an unequivocal explicitness in his statements. If he was not, the absence of such explicitness is not only not surprising, but what we might reasonably expect. If he was not, then the most that can be demanded in fairness is that his language will admit of the view that the heavenly bodies existed prior to the existence of the earth. It may be that in his own thinking he did place the creation of the heavenly bodies subsequent to that of the earth. But, so long as the language that he used will fairly bear another construction, it would obviously be going beyond our knowledge to say that *he did so think*, and assuredly we would be unwarranted in affirming *that he did so say*.

So much by way of securing an unbiased examination of the statements of Gen. i. 14 ff. It will be well at this point also to note the exact issue. It is: What was the precise nature of the work of the fourth day? Was it the bringing of the heavenly bodies into existence, or was it the bringing of them into manifestation in the visible firmament and fixing their functions with reference to the earth? Is the language used susceptible of the latter meaning, or does it demand the former to the exclusion of the latter?

Dr. Driver, who deals with this passage at considerable length, and with his usual clarity and vigor,* maintains the latter of the last two alternatives. I wish that space permitted giving his discussion in full and in his own words. The positions he takes are:

1. That 'asa (אָסָא) means "made," "formed," and not, as some have alleged, "appointed." His contention here may be conceded, tho his reasoning is by no means cogent.†

* *Expositor*, Third Series, vol. iii.

† For instance he fails to take account of such obvious facts as

(a) that 'asa (אָסָא), v. 16, and *nathan* (נָתַן), v. 17, in the sense of "appoint," are synonyms;

(b) that the parenthesis (v. 16 a), which developed naturally enough on the writer's hands, is a sufficient explanation of why he does not mention the function to which the heavenly bodies were assigned immediately after the word 'asa (אָסָא), and despite this interjected clause, v. 16 is a general statement of the functions of the heavenly bodies;

* Dillmann, "Comm. on Gen.," p. 48.

† *Ibid.*, p. 47.

2. "The expression in verse 14, 'Let there be luminaries . . .' implies that, in the conception of the writer, luminaries had not previously existed." This point, if well taken, would, of course, be conclusive. It will come up for examination a little later, in connection with Dr. Dillmann's argument.

3. "The hypothesis of the sun and moon being assigned to their places after an abundant vegetation had appeared upon the earth is opposed to the entire scheme of the solar system, as disclosed by science." Evidently Dr. Driver does not intend to say here that "an abundant vegetation" could not have appeared on the earth until after the sun and moon had become visible in "the expanse of the heavens." His real thought comes out a little farther on in the same paragraph, when he says:

"If the different bodies constituting the solar system were formed by the gradual condensation of diffused matter, it is incredible, and indeed impossible, that one member of the system, viz. the earth, should have consolidated, and have so far cooled as for seas to exist and vegetation to appear, *while the substance of the sun itself was still in at least a partially diffuse condition.*"*

Doubtless this is as correct as it is irrelevant. Who credits to the author of Genesis the idea which Dr. Driver here pronounces "incredible" and "impossible"? No one, I suppose. Certainly not those who affirm that what Gen. i. 14 *ff.* states is that the heavenly bodies appeared in the terrestrial heavens on the fourth day. As they read the record, what verse 14 describes is only the bringing to manifestation of the heavenly bodies in the terrestrial firmament, not the bringing of these bodies themselves into existence. The real question, therefore, is: Does the language under consideration demand the meaning that the heavenly bodies were brought into existence on the fourth day? Or will it bear the meaning that, whenever brought into existence, they were not brought to manifestation "in the expanse of the heavens," and set in "the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night and to divide the light from the darkness," until during the period called in the narrative "a fourth day"? The narrative will be in conflict with astronomy only on the

supposition that it declares that the heavenly bodies were brought into being after the earth was covered with vegetation. This, then, is the point to which Dr. Driver should have directed his proofs.

Dr. Dillmann presents his arguments compactly, but with his accustomed force and acuteness. He says:

"That these luminous bodies should have been previously made or prepared, and on the fourth day only completed, and regulated in respect of their relation to the earth, is opposed to the text, as comparison of the *וְהַי* of v. 3 and 6, and the absence of the article before *נְאֻרוֹת* show" (see p. 45).*

What Dillmann says about the absence of the article is certainly acute. For those who, with Dillmann, regard this narrative as to all intents and purposes a speculation wrought out in the writer's mind, it will have a certain force. But even from this viewpoint it is by no means conclusive. Are we to suppose that the writer was bound to unfold his speculation with so minute a regard to details as this would imply? To have done so would have been fatal to rhetorical effect. Further, a writer who possessed sufficient self-control to pursue "creation back only to the development out of chaos, without expressing himself with regard to its origin," † might easily have refrained from going off into a detailed history of the origin of sun, moon, and stars, and have contented himself with noting when they came into direct relation to the earth, the body with which he has mainly to do. Frankly, Dillmann is too acute. He forgets apparently what he himself has told us, namely, that "in his whole work" the writer of Genesis "represents himself as a historian, . . . not as a poet," and still less, we may add, as a modern speculative philosopher. "What he reports he held also to have happened, or found it reported as having happened." ‡ Why things happened as they did and when they did, he nowhere stops to explain.

Our investigation, therefore, narrows itself down to this: Is the only tolerable translation of the first clause of verse 14 that of Dillmann, viz., "Let luminaries come into existence in the firmament of the heavens"? Or will it without forcing bear the rendering, "Let luminaries become [*i.e.*, come into manifesta-

(c) and, finally, that v. 17, introduced by *nathan* (נָתַן), the synonym of *awa* (וָאָה), is simply a more specific statement of their function.

* *Expositor, ut sup.*

* "Comm. on Gen.," p. 71.

† Dillmann, "Comm. on Gen.," vol. I., p. 69.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

tion and into action] in the firmament of the heavens"? Dillmann relies upon the force of the verb *yehi* ('יהי) in verses 3 and 6 to establish his view. Will it do it?

For one thing the use of *yehi* ('יהי) in verse 3 is not parallel to its use in verse 14. In the latter case it is immediately followed by an adverbial phrase of location. The importance attached by the writer to this phrase is evident from the fact that he repeats it in verse 17. There is no such phrase in verse 3. Between verses 6 and 14, however, there is a real parallel. But it will mislead, if we fail to notice that "the expanse in the midst of the waters," of verse 6, was something that could not come into existence without coming also into manifestation. It could not have had existence previously and only have come to manifestation during the period called "a second day." But this, of course, does not hold of the heavenly bodies. Astronomy itself tells us that they existed prior to their becoming manifest in the expanse or firmament of the heavens.

The following, then, is a fair statement of the result of our investigation. On the one hand, if the language of verses 14-17 does not forbid the view that the heavenly bodies were brought into existence on the fourth day, *neither does it demand it*. And, on the other hand, if the language of these verses does not demand the view that the heavenly bodies had "been previously made or prepared, and on the fourth day only completed and regu-

lated in respect of their relation to the earth," *neither does it forbid it*. Further, I think that fairness will not fail to recognize the fact that the recurrent phrase "in the expanse of the heavens," and the phrases both in verses 16 and 17 descriptive of the functions of the heavenly bodies, leave small room to doubt that what the writer meant to emphasize, as the distinctive feature of the period called "a fourth day," was not the bringing into existence of the heavenly bodies, but their appearance in the terrestrial firmament, and the fixing of their functions in relation to the earth. That God made them he unquestionably, tho rather indirectly, affirms; but neither directly nor indirectly does he affirm that *God made them during the period that he calls "a fourth day."*

The treatment that this passage has received, at the hands of even such eminent interpreters as Drs. Dillmann and Driver, is only another illustration of the very great danger that exists to-day of coming to the Scriptures with a procrustean doctrine of historical interpretation, and sacrificing the ideas of the Scripture writers to this idol. It is only those who feel bound to limit the teachings of Gen. i. by the views of the universe more or less current in antiquity, and to interpret them in the light of the views of evolutionary development more or less current to-day, who will find it necessary, or even reasonable, to affirm a conflict between the language of Gen. i. 14 ff. and astronomy.

PASTORAL SECTION

THE PRAYER-MEETING SERVICE

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DECEMBER 6-12.—TURNING DARK THINGS TO BRIGHT.

And it shall turn to you for a testimony.—
Luke xxi. 13.

IN one of the last days of His ministry, some of His disciples called the attention of Jesus to the gorgeous temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts. Then Jesus, forecasting the future so thunderous with retribution, declares: "Behold the days shall come in which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Precisely fulfilled was this

prophecy of Jesus, forty years thereafter, in the terrible capture and destruction of Jerusalem under the Roman Titus. Then Jesus goes on to make further prophecy of the storm, turmoil, persecution which shall accompany that vast and epochal destruction:

"Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into