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### DIVINITY.

From Dr. Clarke's Commentary.  
MOSES.

On the character of Moses, as an HISTORIAN and PHILOSOPHER (for in his legislative character he does not yet appear) much might be said, did the nature of this work admit. But as brevity has been every where studied, and minute details rarely admitted, and only where absolutely necessary, the candid reader will excuse any deficiencies of this kind which he may have already noticed.

Of the accuracy and impartiality of Moses as an historian, many examples are given in the notes, with such observations and reflections as the subjects themselves suggested: and the succeeding books will afford many opportunities for farther remarks on these topics.

The character of Moses as a philosopher and chronologist, has undergone the severest scrutiny. A class of philosophers, professedly infidels, have assailed the Mosaic account of the formation of the universe, and that of the general deluge, with such repeated attacks, as sufficiently proved, that, in their apprehension, the pillars of their system must be shaken into ruin, if those accounts could not be proved to be false. Traditions, supporting different accounts from those in the sacred history, have been borrowed from the most barbarous, as well as the most civilized nations, in order to bear on this argument. These, backed by various geologic observations, made in extensive travels, experiments on the formation of different strata or beds of earth, either by inundations or volcanic eruptions, have been all condensed into one apparently strong but strange argument, intended to overthrow the Mosaic account of the creation. The argument may be stated thus: "The account given by Moses of the time when God commenced his creative acts, is too recent; for according to his Genesis, six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the formation of the universe; whereas a variety of phenomena prove, that the earth itself must have existed, if not from eternity, yet at least fourteen, if not twenty thousand years." This I call a strange argument, because it is well known, that all the ancient nations in the world, the Jews excepted, have, to secure their honour and respectability, assigned to themselves a duration of the most unprobable length; and have multiplied months, weeks, and even days into years, in order to support their pretensions to the most remote antiquity. The millions of years which have been assumed by the Chinese and the Hindoos, have been ridiculed for their manifest absurdity, even by those philosophers who have brought the contrary charge against the Mosaic account! So notorious are the pretensions to remote ancestry, and remote times in every false and fabricated system, of family pedigree, and national antiquity, as to produce doubt at the very first view of their subjects, and to cause the impartial enquirer after truth, to take every step with extreme caution, knowing that in going over such accounts, he every where treads on a kind of enchanted ground.

When, in the midst of these, a writer is found, who, without saying a word of the systems of other nations, professes to give a simple account of the creation and peopling of the earth, and to shew the very conspicuous part that his own people acted among the various nations of the world, and who assigns to the earth and to its inhabitants, a duration comparatively but as of yesterday, he comes forward with such a variety of claims to be heard, read, and considered; as no other writer can pretend to. And as he departs from the universal custom of all writers on similar subjects, in assigning a comparatively recent date, not only to his own nation, but to the universe itself, he must have been actuated by motives essentially different from those which have governed all other ancient historians and chronologists.

The generally acknowledged extravagant and absurdity of all the chronological systems of ancient

times, the great simplicity and harmony of that of Moses, its facts evidently borrowed by others, though disgraced by the fables they have intermixed with them, and the very late invention of arts and sciences, all tend to prove, at the very first view, that the Mosaic account, which assigns the shortest duration to the earth, is the most ancient, and the most likely to be true. But all this reasoning has been supposed to be annihilated, by an argument brought against the Mosaic account of the creation, by Mr. Patrick Brydone, F. R. S. drawn from the evidence of different eruptions of Mount Atna.—The reader may find this in his "Tour through Sicily and Malta," Letter vii. where, speaking of his acquaintance with the Canonico Recupero at Catania, who was then employed in writing a natural history of Mount Atna, he says; "Near to a vault which is now thirty feet below ground, and has probably been a burying place, there is a draw-well, where there are several strata of lavas (i. e. the liquid matter formed of stones, &c. which is discharged from the mountain in its eruptions) with earth to a considerable thickness over each stratum. Recupero has made use of this as an argument to prove the great antiquity of the eruptions of this mountain. For if it requires two thousand years and upwards to form but a scanty soil on the surface of a lava, there must have been more than that space of time, between each of the eruptions which have formed these strata. But what shall we say of a pit they sunk near to Jaci, of a great depth? They pierced through seven distinct lavas, one under the other, the surfaces of which were parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth. Now, says he, the eruption which formed the lowest of these lavas, if we may be allowed to reason from analogy, must have flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago! Recupero tells me, he is exceedingly embarrassed by these discoveries, in writing the history of the mountain.—That Moses hangs like a dead weight upon him, and blunts all his zeal for enquiry; for that he really has not the conscience to make his mountain so young, as that prophet makes the world.

"The Bishop, who is strenuously orthodox—for it is an excellent see—has already warned him to be upon his guard: and not to pretend to be a better natural historian than Moses; nor to presume to urge any thing, that may in the smallest degree be deemed contradictory to his sacred authority."

Though Mr. Brydone produces this as a sneer against revelation, bishops, and orthodoxy, yet the sequel will prove, that it was good advice, and that the Bishop was much better instructed than either Recupero or Brydone; and that it would have been much to their credit, had they taken his advice.

I have given, however, this argument at length; and even in the insidious dress of Mr. Brydone, whose faith in Divine Revelation, appears to have been upon a par with that of Signior Recupero, both being builded nearly on the same foundation, to shew from the answer, how slight the strongest arguments are, produced from insulated facts, by prejudice and partiality, when brought to the test of sober, candid philosophical investigation, aided by increased knowledge of the phenomena of nature. "In answer to this argument," says bishop Watson (Letters to Gibbon) "it might be urged—that the time necessary for converting lavas into fertile fields, must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations with respect to elevation and depression, or their being exposed to winds, rains, and other circumstances: as for instance, the quantity of ashes deposited over them, after they had cooled, &c. &c. just as the time in which heaps of iron slag, which resembles lava, are covered with verdure, is different, at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the canon (Recupero) himself, since the crevices in the strata are often full of rich good soil, and pretty large trees growing upon them. But should not all this be

thought sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is grounded on more certain facts.

"Atna and Vesuvius resemble each other in the causes which produce their eruptions, in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain. This being admitted which, no philosopher will deny, the Canon's (Recupero's) analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can prove an instance of seven different lavas, with inter-jacent strata of vegetable earth, which have flown from mount Vesuvius within the space, not of fifteen thousand, but of somewhat less than one thousand seven hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for that purpose.

"The eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompei, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew, in his letter to Tacitus; this event happened A. D. 79, but we are informed by unquestionable authority (Remarks on the nature of the soil of Naples and its vicinity, by Sir William Hamilton, Philos. Transact. vol. lxi. p. 7.) that the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum, is not the produce of one eruption only, for there are evident marks that the matter of six eruptions had taken its course over that which lies immediately over the town, and as the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava, or burnt matter with veins of good soil between them." "You perceive," says the bishop, "with what ease, a little attention and increase of knowledge, may remove a great difficulty; but had we been able to say nothing in explanation of this phenomenon, we should not have acted a very rational part, in making our ignorance the foundation of our infidelity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion." In this, as well as in all other cases, the foundation stands sure, being deeply and legibly impressed with God's seal. See also Dr. Gualtero's Lectures on the Pentateuch.

The Mosaic account of the universality of the deluge, has been tried by the most rigid tests also, and the result has been in the view of every candid person, highly creditable to the sacred historian. Every appearance in nature, in the structure and composition of the surface and different strata of the earth, has borne an unequivocal and decided testimony to the truth of the book of Genesis; so that at present, there is, on this subject, scarcely any material difference of opinion among the most profound philosophers, and most accurate geologists.

On the geology and astronomy of the book of Genesis, much has been written both by the enemies and friends of revelation; but as Moses has said but very little on these subjects, and nothing in a systematic way, it is unfair to invent a system, pretentiously collected out of his words, and thus make him accountable for what he never wrote. There are systems of this kind, the preconceived fictions of their authors, for which they have sought support and credit by tortured meanings extracted from a few Hebrew roots; and then dignified them with the title of The Mosaic system of the universe. Thus has afforded infidelity a handle which it has been careful to turn to its own advantage. On the first chapter of Genesis, I have given a general view of the solar system, without pretending that I had found it there: I have also ventured to apply the comparatively recent doctrine of Caloric to the Mosaic account of the creation of light, previous to the formation of the Sun, and have supported it with several arguments as appeared to me to render it at least probable; but I have not pledged Moses to any of my explanations, being fully convinced, that it was necessarily foreign from his design to enter into philosophic details of any kind, as it was his grand object, as has been already remarked, to give a history