

GENESIS—II. (*Continued*)

The difficulties which are supposed to meet the modern student in the book of Genesis may be placed under two heads:—those pertaining to the recorded acts of creation and ordination of the course of nature, and those pertaining to the recorded interposition of God in human affairs. Taking then first the recorded act^s of creation and of specific ordination of the course of nature, let us see on what principles and by what methods these may be interpreted so as to accord with sound rational views of things, and, also, be in accord with what would be held to be conclusive in a scientific treatment of a subject. It will suffice if we take in succession the creation of the world, the formation of man and the longevity of the antediluvians. The questions relating to interposition in human affairs may be left to another paper.

I.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD. This is confined to the first chapter, and therefore evidently is to be regarded as a preliminary record subservient to the history of mankind on the earth. It must be obvious to any one who reflects on the subject that, in whatever way the earth was prepared to receive the human family—whether by a long tedious process of formation and convulsion issuing in a period of comparative rest and beauty, or by a succession of swift acts from the hand of God direct—no man could possibly write an account of it that should be exact in detail. For, to say nothing of the voluminous knowledge required to record the precise history of the geologic eras,—the chemical changes, modifications in the forms and aggregates of matter, and final position of each vapour, plant and animal in the great totality implied in a correct account of a spontaneous creation extending over six literal days,—these alone would occupy in description more than the entire space found in the pages of the Bible. Such a consideration, therefore, excludes the thought that the intention of the writer of Genesis was to give an exact account of what transpired; while the circumstance that anything like a philosophic statement of what took place before man appeared would be of no practical utility to the comparatively untaught Jews in Egypt for whom Moses wrote, lends strength to this conclusion. As a consequence, it is as unphilosophic for the students of palæontology and geology to test the narrative by the light of their respective sciences, as it is for the unwise contemners of science to claim for the productions of Moses the accuracy of a literal statement of fact. It being, then, from the very nature of the case certain that the account in the first chapter is correct and true only approximately, the question of its interpretation is at once removed from those dangerous shoals on which so many have made shipwreck of faith and hope. And when we look elsewhere for a safe ground on which to anchor our religious consistency of belief, we must find the desired safety in the answer to be given to the enquiry, "What was the design of Moses in writing this chapter and what were the capacities of the people to whom the document was in the first instance confided?" There would be an outcry from the entire literary world, were a critic to judge of an introductory chapter in a book designed for moral instruction by a standard applicable only to works bearing exclusively on the information of the intellect in respect to a particular department of science; and equally severe would be the condemnation of the pen that should seek to damage a book intended to meet the mental condition of British peasants, because its style and mode of presenting certain facts did not possess the completeness and precision suited to the members of the Royal Society. Now, when we pay regard to the general tenor of the Bible, and notice how it, from beginning to end, seeks to bring home to the mind and heart of man the thought of