

the earth no one can determine—a race formed, no one can tell for what purpose, or by what hand. Vast multitudes of beings are suffering and dying for causes which no one can explain ; a generation, in their own journey to the grave, tread over the monuments of extinct generations, and with the memorials of fearful changes and convulsions in the past all around them, of which no one can give an account. Begin your knowledge of the past at the remotest period to which profane history would conduct you, and you are in the midst of chaos, and you cannot advance a step without going into deeper night—a night strikingly resembling that which the oldest poet in the world describes as the abode of the dead.—“The land of darkness and the shadow of death ; a land of darkness as darkness itself ; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.”—Job x. 21, 22. And thus, in reference to the darkness of the past, the history of our race in its bygone periods—beyond the reach of all other guides—the Bible is “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.”

Now there is some interest, at least, in the fact that we have in our possession the most ancient book which was ever written. We should feel some interest in seeing and conversing with a man who had lived on earth during all that time, and had looked on the sun, and stars, and earth, before the time of Hesiod and Homer ; who had lived amidst all the revolutions of past kingdoms and empires ; while proud Assyria spread its conquests and fell ; while Babylon rose and declined ; while Rome carried its arms around the world and sank ; if he had lived on while seasons walked their rounds, and had seen fifty generations buried, and had come to us now, with the ancient costume and manners, to tell us what was in the days of Noah or Abraham. We contemplate with deep interest an “ancient river ;” and no one ever looked upon the Mississippi or the Ganges for the first time without emotion. So of a venerable elm or oak that has stood while many a winter storm has howled through its branches, and while the trees that grew up with it have long since decayed. So with an ancient bulwark or castle ; an ancient monument, or work of art. Whatever stands alone, and has lived on while others have decayed, excites our admiration. The pyramids of Egypt, and the tombs of the kings of Thebes, and the pillar of Pompey, thus attract attention. Any lonely memento of the past has a claim to our regard, and excites an interest which we feel for nothing when surrounded by the objects amidst which it rose. In the wastes of Arabia, between the Nile and Mount Sinai, there stand some half a dozen or more headstones in an ancient burying-place. There is not a town, or city, or house, or tent, or fertile field near. They are the lonely memorials of a far distant generation. All else is gone—the men that placed them there ; the towns where they dwelt ; the mouldering ashes, and the names of those whose last place of sleep they mark. So the Bible stands in the past. All is desolation around it. The books that were written when that was, if there were any,