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The Holy Spirit in Creation.

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TEXT:—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters."—Gen. i: 2.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made."—John i: 1-4.

It is with the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption that we have chiefly to do. But creation is the basis of redemption; let us, therefore, begin with a study of the work of the Spirit in creation.

We need not attempt to explain the work of the one Paraclete apart from that of the other—the work of the Holy Spirit apart from that of Jesus Christ. This is true of their work for man's salvation; it is also true of their work for man's creation. It goes back to the very beginning, to the laying of the world's foundations for the abode of man.

The divine agents in creation are brought before us in the opening of the Book of Genesis, and in the opening of the Gospel of John. The object of John in his Gospel is to speak of Jesus Christ, the Word of God; and so he refers only to His agency in the work of creation. The object of Moses in Genesis is to tell the whole divine agency in that work; so in his narrative we have the work of the Spirit recognized. But he does not ignore the Word of God; he begins his account of each epoch or each day of creation with the words "And God said." We do not find in Genesis the theological fulness that we do in subsequent writers in the Bible; but we do find in it the elements of all that we subsequently learn or deduce regarding the divine agency in creation.

The purpose of the author of Genesis is to teach us that God is the author of creation, not to inform us as to its processes; and he dealt with the story of creation as he had it.

There was an account of creation of the same general character as that in Genesis, current among the people whom he had to teach, and when Moses was inspired to write this narrative of creation it was with this account that he had to deal. And how would his inspiration teach him to deal with it? To answer this question, we must first answer the question; what was the purpose for which he was inspired? It was to enable him to teach the truth with regard to God, not with regard to the earth—theology nor geology. He was commissioned to teach the Israelites to believe in and serve the one living and true God, and only in what bears on that has he the authority of inspiration.

What, then, is the account which we have of the divine action in creation? First, there is the great primal act—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Then there is the detailed narrative how out of primeval chaos—waste and void—the earth was brought into its present condition suited for man's abode. And in accomplishing this, two agents are mentioned: "The Spirit of God brooding on the surface of the waters," and at each new stage of creative development the Word of God expressed in the words "God said."

The expression with regard to the Spirit is that used of a bird brooding over its eggs. So the Spirit of God brooded over the waste and void mass which the earth then was, and by His divine energy brought out of it the order and life and beauty which now mark it. Each step in the process is given rather as the development of what was there before, than as the beginning of anything new—as though the elements were there and this power working in them, and only needed definite form to be given them. "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass . . . and the earth brought forth grass." "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life." There is thus the Spirit of God present as a constant energy, and there is the Word of God giving form to that energy, and at each new epoch calling new forms into being.

This doctrine of the Spirit working in creation is in no way contradicted by any modern scientific discoveries or by any theology of geology. It is entirely in harmony with them all. But the doctrine of the action of the Word does run counter, at all events, to one theory of geology. While one school maintains that we cannot explain the facts of geology without supposing successive

creative acts such as those indicated in the narrative of Genesis by the words "God said"; another, much more largely followed now-a-days, maintains that all can be accounted for by the same forces that are working now, and have been in operation from the beginning; and that there have been no such acts as fresh creations in the process by which the earth has come to be what it is.

If the account I have sought to give of the teaching of the Bible with regard to God's working in creation be correct, it is opposed to the latter theory. It teaches that there have been what can only be called successive creative acts. But at the same time we must allow that even if man had witnessed each of these acts with his present powers, he might not have been able to discover in them anything more than a natural process.

Let me illustrate this by one event that has come within man's own observation. The history of the seventh day of creation has yet to be written, or rather it is being written now. When summed up it may be put in these words, "God said, Let there be righteousness, and there was righteousness." The words, "God said, Let there be righteousness," would sum up the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ; the words, "and there was righteousness," would sum up the work of the Holy Spirit. But we know how utterly unable many are to see in the person and work of Jesus Christ anything more than the operation of natural causes, how absolutely they deny the supernatural in His case. And if men of science find science and revelation in conflict in a matter well within the range of human observation, we need not be surprised that they should find them in conflict on points beyond that range. While we accept all the facts that science discovers for us, and allow within certain limitations the theories which it bases on them, there are powers and principles behind these facts to which its authority does not extend. The facts of revelation are not opposed to science, they are beyond its sphere.

We might wish to have fuller revelation with regard to the Spirit's work in this. Let us be content with what has been revealed, and rather seek to learn some of the consequences therefrom bearing on that great work of renewal with which we have more practically to do.

If all nature, even material, is the work of the creative spirit, we may conclude that there is a fundamental harmony running through nature. From the dead rock that is at the base of all, through the various forms of vegetable life up to animal life, and from animals to man, there runs a progressive harmony pointing to Him by whose energy it has been wrought out.

Another consequence of this creative work of the Spirit is that the material world will be a type of the spiritual world. The spiritual world was first. The Holy Spirit was from all eternity; and when He accomplished His work in the material world, He did it according to the principles of His own nature. Hence spiritual law rules in the material world. Every law of matter or of material life which we discover is the type of a spiritual law. If we can read the teaching of what we see in nature, we learn truths regarding the Spirit of whom it is the type. This is the source of the teaching in all the parables of our Lord. They are not arbitrary adaptations of certain resemblances; they are expositions of the fundamental harmony between the material and the spiritual, and therefore true expositions of the spiritual teaching of the material universe.

Another consequence is that the material world must be suited for the development of spiritual life. It is prepared by the Holy Spirit for the abode of those in whom He was to dwell. It must therefore be suitable for their life. We have just seen that there is in it means of spiritual instruction; it is also the means of spiritual work. It is only through material means that in this world spirit can work on spirit. Speaking and hearing are such means. They are material actions, but through them the spirit may work, and they are suited for the use of the spirit in man.

But this is all subordinate to the creative work of the Spirit in man. The brief record of the creation of man is, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." What constituted the image of God in man we are not told. We can learn what that image is only from observing it, and from the records which are preserved regarding it; and it is only the ruins of the image that we have to observe; the first records preserved to us regarding him is the record of his fall. The first indication that we have with regard to him is that unlike the lower creation he had the power of working along with the Creator to the attainment of the purpose of his creation; he had freedom of will, a witness to the spiritual element in his nature; but this will be exercised to turn aside from the pur-