

The Catholic Record

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REV. GEORGE R. NORTHEAVER, Editor. Author of "Mistakes of Modern Infidels" THOMAS COFFEY, Publisher.

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London, Saturday, September 11, 1897.

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

The meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Toronto, terminated on Wednesday, the 25th ult., to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The people of Toronto, especially those who take an interest in science, felt themselves honored that the city was chosen as the place of meeting of an Association which includes within its ranks the most eminent scientists of the world in every department of study, and on the other hand the members of the Association itself express themselves as highly pleased with the reception they got, not only from the people of Toronto, but from the most prominent men in the Dominion, from Lord Aberdeen, who is himself a man of learning, to the humblest seeker after scientific knowledge.

We have another instance of a change of view in the general belief of Christians, in the theory of the solar system. It was thought that the earth is a flat surface around which the sun, moon and stars revolve daily.

The antiquity of man on earth is another question which it cannot be said that science has yet satisfactorily settled. Sir John Evans, the President of the British Association, delivered a very able address on Archaeology, in which he maintained that we must give to man a much greater antiquity than is usually attributed to him, and if the evidences which have been referred to really prove the very remote existence of man on earth, the period of his existence must be dated back, not merely for a few years earlier than we are accustomed to do, but for tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of years.

What are we to think of these opinions? For the present we can only say that the evidence of them cannot as yet be considered to be quite satisfactory. Humanly made implements have been found in deposits which are undoubtedly of great antiquity, but there is a possibility that the implements are less ancient than the deposits or soils in which they have been discovered, and the evidences of man's existence being still comparatively few in number in such deposits, it would be premature to assert positively that they are as ancient as the deposits.

Human history does not carry us back so far as the time of the Noachian deluge, and though in Assyria, Egypt, Palestine, etc., there are very early monuments of man found, all indicate that the activity of man began at just about the period when we suppose that the human race would be reasonably settled after the deluge, and even the population of the earth is what it would be if population doubled every one hundred and fifty two and one quarter years, from the time of Noah's sons—which is very nearly what still actually occurs.

If at some future time it be proved beyond doubt that there were intelligent beings on earth many years, or thousands of years, before the date at which we now believe man to have been created, it may be that it shall be necessary for us to suppose that there are somewhere some links wanting in the long lives of the patriarchs who lived before the flood, or some hiatus to be supplied to make the facts agree, but until the proofs be indisputable on the point, it would be useless to speculate further on the matter.

As yet the proofs are not complete, and we must still regard the speculations regarding neolithic, to be what Sir John Evans pronounces to be the case in regard to paleolithic man—not proven.

and placed on earth, but also that the world itself, including the matter of which it is made, was created only a few days before, and that all this is stated in the first chapter of Genesis. Nevertheless more than one thousand five hundred years ago St. Augustine pointed out that Genesis does not make this statement. When the science of geology discovered facts which prove almost to a certainty that the creation of matter at least must have been much more ancient, many people were shocked at the supposed opposition between science and revelation, but there is really no such opposition on this point. It is easy to reconcile the two, if we only understand the first verse of Genesis as meaning that matter was created "in the beginning," long before it was prepared by God for the use of man as described during the six days of creation, in the succeeding verses. There are also several other ways of accounting for the apparent opposition into which it would be too long to enter here.

But does the fact that Christians did not interpret Genesis in the way we have indicated, prove that there is an error in the revelation itself, or that the revelation is defective in its purpose? Certainly not, for we are aware that it was not the object of revelation to teach man geology, but to save his soul, and for this purpose it was a sufficient introduction to put God before us as the infinitely powerful, wise and bountiful Creator of heaven and earth, without informing us exactly concerning the vicissitudes through which the matter of which the universe is composed passed before it was made fit to be the dwelling-place of man.

We have another instance of a change of view in the general belief of Christians, in the theory of the solar system. It was thought that the earth is a flat surface around which the sun, moon and stars revolve daily. This belief has been shown to be erroneous, and it was a priest, Copernicus, who first made the discovery that it is the motion of the earth around its axis which causes the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies. Here, also, it must be now admitted that when men believed that the Scripture teaches the old Ptolemaic system, it was because the Scriptures was not rightly understood in a matter which concerned science, and not the salvation of mankind. But this does not imply any error in revelation.

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If at some future time it be proved beyond doubt that there were intelligent beings on earth many years, or thousands of years, before the date at which we now believe man to have been created, it may be that it shall be necessary for us to suppose that there are somewhere some links wanting in the long lives of the patriarchs who lived before the flood, or some hiatus to be supplied to make the facts agree, but until the proofs be indisputable on the point, it would be useless to speculate further on the matter.

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THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST DENIED.

The Rev. Mr. Robinson, the Established Kirk Presbyterian pastor of Kilmun, Scotland, has been suspended for writing a book in which the Divinity of Christ is denied. There is great diversity of opinion on the propriety of his suspension, as some persons think it imprudent to precipitate discussions on so delicate a subject, while others side positively with the delinquent. Between these two parties Mr. Kilmun has a large support, while probably more than half of the Church upholds the majority of the Presbytery which has condemned him; nevertheless the great support which he receives shows that there is a large proportion among the strictest of Presbyterians who do not consider it necessary for a Christian to believe in the divinity of the Founder of Christianity. It is expected that the fact of Mr. Robinson's suspension will give rise to the fiercest controversy which has yet disturbed the Presbyterian Church, as there appears to be a stronger Latitudinarian element in Scotland than even that which gave its support to Professor Briggs in New York, and Professor Smith in Cincinnati, who were condemned by the American General Assembly on grounds very similar to those on which Mr. Robinson has been suspended. Presbyterianism rejected the authority of the Church in the sixteenth century, and it is unable to assert authority for itself now, as members of the Church claim the same right to exercise their private judgment as their predecessors claimed three hundred years ago when they refused to accept the teachings and obey the decisions of the Catholic Church.

THE "LOGIA" OR SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

The manuscript which was found recently in Egypt, and to which the name "the Logia," or the sayings of Jesus, has been given, is still attracting much attention both from the religious and the secular press.

There have been extant already three well-known manuscripts not only of the gospels, but of the entire New Testament, dating back to the fourth century, to one of which the name of the "Vatican Codex" is given, being in the Vatican library, and which is believed to be one of three hundred copies of the New Testament which were prepared by direction of Constantine the Great for the use of the Christian churches throughout the Roman Empire. The testimony to the genuineness of the sacred volume, however, does not depend upon the existence of these precious volumes; yet they are to be most highly prized because they add weight to the great body of testimony to the facts that our New Testament of to-day is the same which was written by the Apostles and Evangelists, and that it has been handed down to us incorrupt and unchanged.

To the genuineness of the New Testament there is an unbroken chain of witnesses going back to the date when its last book was written by St. John the Evangelist. The writings of St. Clement, of Ignatius the martyr, Polycarp, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, quote all parts of the New Testament so copiously that it could be almost entirely reproduced from their writings even if it had been lost as a distinct work. Of these ancient writers St. Clement lived during the period while the books of the New Testament were being written. Sts. Ignatius and Polycarp were contemporary with St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, Polycarp being also a disciple of the Apostle himself. St. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, and the others whom we have named were men of great weight by reason of their learning and extensive knowledge of ecclesiastical and general literature, and their united testimony to the fact that the gospels and canonical epistles were written by the apostles whose names they bear, and were received by the Church of their time as authentic and inspired, constitutes a demonstrative proof of the authority of the whole New Testament, and there are other testimonies to the same effect, such as the admissions of the various heretical disputants who from the very earliest period attempted to introduce their errors into the Church, and of the Pagan writers, Celsus, Porphyry and Julian the Apostate, who also admit the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, while they endeavor to destroy their authority as truthful and authoritative records.

It is not to be supposed that the New Testament comprises all that was written concerning Christianity during the first three hundred, or even during the first one hundred years of the Christian era. There are, indeed, writings of this early period still extant, some of which were received as being of great authority and weight. We may mention among these the writings of Barnabas, Clement, and Ignatius; but there is no evidence to show that these were ever received by the Church as of equal value with the New Testament, which is and was always held to be the inspired word of God. The Catholic Church, which is the divinely appointed judge of all matters of revelation, has pronounced upon the inspiration of the New and Old Testaments, and as St. Augustine teaches that it is the authority of the Church which moved him to accept the gospels as the word of God, so we say at the present day that we are moved by the same authority to accept the same sacred volume as the basis of our belief in Christian dogmas; but we cannot accept at once every or any other document which may be discovered as having the same authority, even though it may be proved to be very ancient. Its antiquity alone is not sufficient to make us regard it in the same light as the sacred volume, concerning the inspiration of which we have the assurance of a pronouncement of the Church.

It was to be expected that time would reveal some writings of early Christians beside those which we have already long possessed, and this would likely have been the case even if there were not systematic researches conducted on purpose to discover ancient records. Accident itself would from time to time bring such writings to light, but the systematic researches which have been going on for many years, and particularly during the whole of the present century, were almost certain to bring forth some such documents. This expectation has been fulfilled on several occasions, and among the documents thus discovered is the celebrated complete Sinaitic Manuscript of the New Testament which rivals the Vatican codex in antiquity. The Logia of which we make mention at the beginning of this article is not a copy of the New Testament, but professes to be a record of certain sayings of Jesus, every paragraph beginning with the words "Jesus saith." It appears to be certain that this document was written at a very early date, it is supposed sometime between A. D. 150 and 300. Nevertheless it is not at all certain that the sayings given therein are anything more than the private opinion of some devout Christian that Jesus spoke these words, or words like them, which were handed down by tradition. They are written on a small leaf of papyrus which seems to have been part of a book which may have been a collection of real or supposed sayings of our Lord, but on this point we can say nothing except by conjecture.

There are altogether eight sayings attributed to Christ, some of which are identical with words found in the gospels; others have a resemblance, more or less remote, to words which we know were spoken by Christ, but one or two of the sayings, though they may be interpreted in an orthodox sense, and consistently with what we know otherwise to have been His sentiments, yet at first glance they do not seem to convey to us a doctrine which would be conveyed by our Blessed Lord.

As a matter of course, if this document transmitted to us certainly the words of Christ, they should be received with undoubting faith, and with all respect. But coming to us as it does without any guarantee that the words are divine, it can never become a part of the deposit of faith, nor can it be appealed to as having the authority of Holy Writ.

The Logia was discovered with a number of miscellaneous writings at a place some distance south of Cairo, Egypt, where there had been formerly a village called Oxyrrhynchus, but which now bears the name Behnesa, on the west bank of the Bahr Yasuf canal. The most probable opinion is that it was written by some Christian for his own edification or for the edification of his fellow-Christians, and that the sayings were supposed to have come from Christ, but that being handed down merely by word of mouth, they were not in all cases recorded correctly, though some and perhaps all of them were currently attributed in Egypt to Christ, though they were not really His words in every instance. We know that the gospels and the rest of the New Testament, together with the authentic traditions

of the Catholic Church whereby Apostolic teachings and practices have been handed down to us, contain all that we are bound to believe, and that is necessary for salvation, and we have, therefore, no need to expect any new scriptures to be brought to light. In fact, there is excellent reason for the belief that there will be no further manuscripts discovered which will have any claim to be considered as having the authority of the Holy Scriptures, for we have certainly all the books of the New Testament which were generally received by the Christians of the first three centuries as being written by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. There is mention in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians of an epistle which he had written already to the people of Corinth, and writing to the Colossians he states also that there was an epistle to the Laodiceans which he recommends to be read in the Church. But these epistles, if they are not really some of the epistles already known and received, under a different name, are not likely ever to become known, as we are aware by the writings of the early Christians that we have all the books of the New Testament which were in general use in the early Church, and it is not probable that we shall ever know more about these two epistles than we know at present.

THE THEOSOPHICAL PHANTASY.

Mrs. Annie Besant, the present leader of the Theosophical movement, visited Toronto and delivered several lectures on that peculiar system of belief. The lectures are described as having been delivered in remarkably good and mellifluous English. Her articulation is excellent, and her voice full and clear, indicating high culture. Her appearance, too, is in her favor, as she is at once seen to be an intellectual lady; but she was far from fulfilling the conditions necessary to a successful orator. She did not convince those who listened that her theories are true, nor could she persuade her audience to adopt them, except, perhaps, that those who were already believers in Theosophy may have been rendered more enthusiastic because of the presence of one who is regarded as the most prominent advocate of the Theosophical religion—if religion it can be called.

Mrs. Besant's teachings are delivered very dogmatically, as if she believed in them, and perhaps she does. But they are visionary, and there is certainly no evidence that they are true. Who is there in the present utilitarian and logical age who will accept the old and exploded Pythagorean theory that when man dies his soul will go to vivify some other human body, or it may be the body of a lower animal, according to the merits or demerits of the subject?

Such a theory certainly cannot be proved by any valid reasoning, and if it be asserted to be true it should be shown to be a revelation from heaven, which will never be proved to be the case.

It is true that Mrs. Blavatsky, who was the original leader of the Theosophists made some claim to have had miraculous intercourse with spirits who gave her an insight into the things of the spiritual world, but we cannot compare these pretended or imagined visions with the revelations given to us by Christ and His Apostles, which were sanctioned by miracles which could have none but God for their author. The witnesses to these miracles have all the characteristics of sincerity, and the facts they attest, performed in public, and before many who would have detested the fraud if any had existed, were such as prove that the witnesses were not themselves deceived in regard to them. We can have no assurance that this was the case in regard to the revelations which the Theosophical leaders profess to have had. Even if they were themselves sincere, there is much room for doubt whether they were not deceived by the phantastic visions on which their teachings are founded; and there is good reason to believe, also, that they were not perfectly sincere. There were evidences that Mrs. Blavatsky's revelations were deceptions similar to those for which the Spiritists of the present have become famous.

No reasonable being will pretend that Theosophy has such testimony in its favor as would justify its adoption as a system of religion to take the place of Christianity.

We have been told indeed by some of the Theosophical pilgrims who last year paid a visit to the monuments of Egypt, partly in order to find some confirmation of their principles in the

study of the mysteries of the ancient temples of that land, that they could recall the memory of a time when in other bodies they had visited the pyramids and other monuments of Egypt centuries ago, when their souls were dwelling in other bodies.

A reasoning public will not accept these fancies as demonstrated truths. It is much easier and more reasonable to view them as phantasies than realities, even though the visionaries be perfectly sincere in the belief that they can remember what bodies their souls occupied or vivified hundreds or thousands of years ago, we must believe in reason that they who make this pretence are either deceived or are imposing on the good-nature of the public.

A QUEER SECT.

So accustomed have we become to the vagaries of religious enthusiasts that we read with only passing wonder of any new absurdities into which the votaries of any novel religious sect fall, under the belief that they have been inspired by God to commit certain extravagances.

When we find that something new of this kind has happened we are apt to suppose that it is only a result of craziness or weak intellect on the part of those who have committed the extravagance in question, and thus we quickly banish the matter from our minds. But there is something more in such things than we are apt at first to suspect, and they are therefore worthy of more thought and reflection than we are generally disposed to bestow upon them.

When Luther entered upon his movement to establish a new religion on the ruins of the Catholic church, which he hoped to overturn, it was necessary he should put forth new principles whereby to justify his rejection of the authority of the Catholic religion, and so he laid it down as a sure principle in faith that each individual is so illuminated or inspired by the Holy Ghost that he is able to understand and interpret God's revelation for himself, so that no value is to be placed upon the traditions and decisions of the church even when they have the support of the unchanged and unchanging belief of Christendom during all past ages.

This doctrine was readily taken up by enthusiasts in Germany and England, and many Anabaptists in the former and Quakers in the latter country did strange and ridiculous acts while carrying it out to its legitimate consequences, such as appearing on the streets without any clothing to preach to the passers by, and in one instance a Quaker was "inspired" to go to the House of Commons with a drawn sword, declaring that he was inspired by God to kill all the members of Parliament. The fanatic was arrested with some difficulty and thrown into prison, from which he was liberated only when it was deemed safe to set him free.

The frequent occurrence of such events under the rule of individual inspiration led intelligent Protestants to see that it was no safe guide either to faith or morals, and a modification of the rule was accordingly generally adopted, which is still maintained by the great bulk of Protestants. This new theory consists in adding a scriptural basis to the original rule of faith, so that now it is proclaimed that every Christian is authorized to form his religion and code of morals from his personal or private understanding of what is contained in Scripture. This rule really leads to as many absurd consequences as the old one, but they are not usually so palpably ridiculous, and so the rule has managed to hold its ground to the present day; nevertheless, from time to time, there are incongruities arising out of it which are just as absurd as anything which was done of old by the followers of Muncer and George Fox.

The most recent development of this kind of which we are aware occurred at Omaha, Nebraska, on August 10. A new sect known as "The Figgites" has risen in that city, and five of its members, all prominent women of Gretna, were brought before the court in Omaha for disturbing a meeting of Methodists at Spring Grove. While the meeting was going on the five Figgites rushed in and cried out, in loud tones to the minister:

"You are lost with all your congregation. Repent and come with us. You are all possessed of the devil."

A daily paper narrating the event adds: "Then the women began to dance around the place shrieking at the top of their voices. The service was, of course, broken up, and the next day warrants were issued for the

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