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# THE GOOD NEWS.

A SEMI-MONTHLY PERIODICAL:

DEVOTED to the RELIGIOUS EDUCATION of the OLD AND YOUNG

## THE WORLD'S OLDEST POEM.

BY THE REV. FREDERIC GREEVES.

The subject before us is the poem which forms part of the sacred writings under the title of the "Book of Job." It does not lie within the limits of my purpose to state the arguments on which rests its claims to be called "The World's Oldest Poem;" it must suffice to say that this unrivalled antiquity is ascribed to it by the well-considered verdict of the most competent authorities. Their account of the book seems briefly to be this—that its hero lived not long after the deluge, at a period older than Abraham, or at least as old; that the story of his trials, and the conversations that ensued, were embalmed in the thoughtful memory of the early patriarchs, and handed down, orally, through several generations; that, finally, they reached the ear of Moses during his shepherd life in Midian; and that, struck by their beauty and worth, and moved, moreover, by the Holy Ghost, who brought all things needful to his remembrance, he transcribed and corrected the record, adding to it all those details which form the beginning and end of the book. While this account of the origin of the poem before us is, to our judgment, the best supported, it is, to our taste, the most inviting. There seems a peculiar propriety, that written inspiration should be inaugurated by gathering up the fragments, both in poetry and prose, of all that was most valuable in the traditional memory of an older dispensation; and thus, at the dying embers of patriarchal lore, kindle,

by God's grace, "A CANDLE THAT SHALL NEVER BE PUT OUT."

If the date thus assigned to the book of Job is correct, it may truly claim unapproachable precedence among the world's great poems. From a rough calculation, made in accordance with the most popular systems of chronology, it appears that it took its present form 500 years before the writing of the Psalms of David; 750 years before Isaiah's prophecy; about the same period, probably, before the date of Homer; 1450 years before the birth of Virgil; and more than 2800 years before the appearance of Chaucer, whom we are accustomed to regard as the venerable father of English song.

The antiquity of the book of Job being assumed, our purpose is to vindicate its claim to be a poem—and one of the sublimest and most beautiful poems that is to be found in any language. That it is not generally considered so, or, at all events, not generally regarded with the interest and admiration due to it on this ground, can scarcely be alleged as an argument against its claim, because it rarely happens that the highest class of poetry is most read or most admired. The great bards of the world have commonly been treated much as men are accustomed to treat the peacock, whom, superficially, they admire, but take no pains to hear his voice. It would be matter of curious calculation how many of the professed admirers of Milton ever