

## GENESIS—11.

It is well known that within the last quarter of a century the book of Genesis has had to bear the chief brunt of the unsparing onslaught made upon the Bible as a professed revelation of the will of God. The reason of this is not remote from sight. The extreme antiquity of the book places its subject matter and its peculiar forms of representing things out of the reach of the varied light of contemporary history for verification. The brevity with which great and small events are narrated, and the but partial unfinished statements made, concerning persons, places and consequences of actions, impart to the *tout ensemble* of the history much of the dubious appearance which an unique and many sided building would assume, if we caught sight of it for the first time through the glooming. Moreover, the book professes to render an authentic account of the occurrence of certain important physical events in the history of the formation of the earth and its inhabitants, thus in ages long anterior to science entering upon a province with respect to which science now claims to speak with unchallengeable authority. And to a limited order of minds there appears to be in Genesis something unusually singular in the relations which the Divine Being is there represented as sustaining to His creatures ; and even an incongruity between some of the earlier transactions and those conceptions of the becoming dignity of the Supreme and of the order of nature as now seen in physical and social life which modern culture produces and necessitates. Hence the more candid and venturesome of this class of students have not hesitated to ask the question, whether this first literary production is to be interpreted as though it were a useful compendium of sacred tradition fashioned by an able penman into the shape of interesting myths, with a valuable kernel of moral truth at the core, or is to be accepted as a plain and trustworthy narrative of accomplished facts. The skill with which the mythologists of Greece have been shown to be clever poetic embodiments of ancient wisdom with just a trifling amount of historical fact, serving as a living heart, has naturally prompted some to apply the same method of interpretation to the earliest Jewish records. The reputed success of Niebuhr in dealing with certain romantic accounts of early Roman history, relegating them to the pictorial fancy of prehistoric times, while admitting in them a *substratum of fact*, and the unmerciful attacks of recent explorers into the genesis of the British Nation upon our most treasured stories, have strengthened the belief in minds of a secular cast that what is thus most probably true of the antiquities of other nations, is also true of the antiquities of the Jews ; while the widely diffused *dogma* of one class of scientists, that the uniform order in nature which we know to prevail in our day has, and must always have, prevailed in former days, makes even true believers, who have not the heart or brain to tear to pieces the fallacies of these orders of reasoning, uneasy in their acceptance of the book of Genesis as something to be interpreted on principles absolutely *sui generis* and yet, on that very account, most reasonable and impregnable. It is to be feared that there are not a few holy men who do not derive from the study of the book of Genesis the benefit it was designed to con-