

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW SCIENCES.

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V.—THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN.

While discussing the antiquity of man in the last paper, passing reference was made to the fifth and eleventh chapters of Genesis as giving the generations from Adam to Abraham, with figures that seemed to furnish the data for a possible chronology of the early world. It was found, however, that owing to the more or less artificial structure of all Biblical genealogies, they could be used for that purpose only with considerable hesitation and reserve. Any system of chronology based upon them must be held only tentatively and subject to correction from other sources of information.

Altogether apart from the question of chronology, however, these two genealogies present a scientific difficulty of another kind, which has hardly received the attention it deserves, in the extraordinarily long lives which are attributed to the patriarchs representing the successive generations. Roughly speaking, they are assigned ten times the average duration of human life at the present time. This is particularly true of those who flourished before the deluge. After that event they gradually diminish, as we come down to historical times, until they reach ages which are normal in our experience. The statements are made in all sobriety, without any surprise, as if it were a matter of course, and the figures are given with great minuteness of detail, as if the writer felt perfectly sure of his facts, and expected them to be received without question.

Now, it would certainly be going too far to say that science has proved such longevity, under any circumstances, to be impossible. Not a few plants actually live longer than the periods here assigned to antediluvian men, and it is proverbially difficult to prove a universal negative. But science cannot help re-