

THE STORY OF CREATION.

Addresses by Prof. Orr and Prof. Jordan at Kingston.

British Whig, 24th April, 1909.

In Convocation hall, last night, Rev. Prof. James Orr, of Glasgow, gave the last of his series of lectures, speaking on the subject, "The Early Records of Genesis." Rev. W. H. Sparling occupied the chair. Prof. Jordan, of Queen's, made reply to the series of lectures given by Prof. Orr, at the close of the lecture, and the proceedings were of intense interest to those who are following up this particular line of study.

In a preface to his remarks, given to bring out the contents of the subject under discussion, the lecturer drew attention to humanity's really deep interest in the Biblical doctrine of creation, as it was the connecting link—the only guarantee of the dependence of all things on God. It was the ground of the assurance that as all things were made by God, all things were in the hands of God.

The narrative of the fall of man and the entrance of sin and death into the world though not actually referred to again in the Old Testament scriptures, was held by Dr. Orr to be confirmed by the subsequent records, else what was the explanation of the state of rebellion, apostasy, and backsliding that has marked the history of mankind from the first. He argued that if the story were not there it would have been our duty to put it just where it is in the story of the creation. The first eleven chapters of the book telling the story of the coming into being of the world were classed as a wonderfully well-knit piece of history, not in the least resembling the loose, rambling mythology of other religions. "We have heard," he said, "of a Babylonian story and its wonderful parallel to the story in Genesis, but there is no real parallel between them." The one was a long, base, polytheistic account, abounding in repetition, while, over against it, stood the sublime, orderly, monotheistic story of Genesis, divine in every way. It was easy to understand how a fine story could be debased, but not how the debased account could become ideal; there was little doubt as to which was the original story.

There was a real parallel in the accounts of the flood, but the high ethical teaching of the Biblical story was lacking in the other, which was impregnated with polytheistic ideas.

Dr. Orr referred to the common statement that the narrative of the creation was contradicted by science, and he contended that the Bible was not given to forestall the modern discoveries in astronomy, physics, and other scientific studies. The Bible employed popular, everyday language; and, taken as it was intended, as a broad revelation of truth, there were few changes that modern science would suggest. The story of the flood was said by some to be a physical impossibility, but geological science was now furnishing accumulative proof, evidence that the destruction of human and animal life did take place.

The story of the creation of life, and of man, who was made in the rational, personal image of God, did not conflict, in his opinion, with the theory of evolution; both were above it, and in the raising of nature to the high plane of man, a new factor was given entrance, but a factor no more wonderful than the giving of life to the lower creatures.

Prof. Jordan's Reply.

The chairman announced that Prof. Jordan would reply to the lectures of Prof. Orr, and when called upon, spoke as follows:—

"I would like at the conclusion of this course of lectures, to offer a few remarks

in a kindly spirit. This work of "Criticism," as it is called, is a great movement that has attracted the attention and absorbed the energies of able, scholarly men during many generations, so that in relation to it the work of any one man seems comparatively very small. Still, it is well that Christian men, occupying different standpoints, should sometimes make an effort to understand one another. In the case of Professor Orr, I find it difficult to comprehend precisely his position, and so far as it is clear to me, I am compelled to dissent from it on several points. I can claim to have given a little more than ordinary attention to his book on "The Problem of the Old Testament," and I have followed as closely as I could, the lectures given here. With regard to the lecture given last night, on "The Biblical and Critical Theories of Israel's Religion," I have in the first place to object to the title. When we are dealing with a literature that is spread over a space of a thousand years, we cannot form any view of it at all, without study of criticism, and the view is the most truly Biblical which rests upon the most careful and correct examination of the documents.

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I understand that Dr. Orr admits a distinction of the documents in Genesis, and considers that the work by which such distinction was discovered about one hundred and fifty years ago, is "scientific." I cannot see that the further prosecution of this work which led to the later dating of the Priestly Code, differs in its nature from the earlier work or because of its use of the idea of "development" it is to be regarded as prejudiced and unbelieving. Why should we be afraid of the idea of development or refuse to allow that the stage of thought represented in a document is one of the elements to be used in fixing its date? But in the case of the Priestly Code, many other considerations come into play, such as its relation to Ezekiel, Chronicles, and later Judaism. When Professor Orr speaks of "progressive revelations," he must surely mean something similar to what we mean by "historical development," but both these phrases are empty and meaningless, unless there was real growth from a simpler to a larger view of God and the world. If David uttered the well-known saying, I, Samuel xxvii., 19, he can scarcely be credited with the composition of Psalm 130. Personally, I have no difficulty in admitting that David's view of Jehovah was narrower than that of Amos or Isaiah, when I find noble men five or six centuries later wrestling with the problem, "How can Jehovah's song be sung in a foreign land?" If there was a fully developed monotheism and universalism in the time of Abraham, then there was no development, and to many of us the literature becomes unintelligible. Further, if the phrase "essential Mosaicity of the Pentateuch" is correct and has any definite meaning, there is no such thing as "development," but neither is there "progressive revelation." Seeing that Dr. Orr departs from the strict traditional view, what one desires is a clearer statement of his own position, and this seems to be due from one who attacks "critics" of all shades of opinion. Particularly does this remark apply to such phrases as "revelation," "inspiration," and "the supernatural." We admit that these great realities are difficult to define, but one who declares that the broad results of criticism weaken their significance rather than increase their meaning, should state a little more clearly the issue involved.

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With regard to the book of Genesis, two or three remarks may be made. (1) To talk of "wiping out a period" is rather misleading, whoever uses the phrase, as under the new view the period is seen to be full of strenuous life, while the documents involved yield spe-

cific teaching regarding the period in which they are placed when one remembers that the few family stories in Genesis are supposed to fill up a gap of six or eight centuries it cannot be said that, on any view, we have much historical material.

(2) When we come to the early narratives of Genesis, I fail again to see precisely what Professor Orr's view is, it seems to be uncertain and unstable. As to details, there are no doubt many unsolved problems connected with these narratives, but scholars have reached, both on the positive and negative side, a large measure of agreement. It is possible now to estimate the real nature of these narratives in their relation to science, history, theology, and religious faith.

(3) At this stage we meet a point of immense importance. I am quite certain that the men to whom the teaching of the Old Testament is entrusted in the Presbyterian Colleges of Canada and Britain would take the position that it is foolish and full of danger to make the essential facts and truths of the Christian religion dependent upon the historicity of the Genesis narratives. These narratives have their spiritual uses, in fact, to some of us, they are more full of meaning and bear a more living message than before, but to treat them as literal science or history, in the old sense, is quite impossible.

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After finishing his reply, Prof. Jordan moved, seconded by Rev. J. Charles Villiers, that a hearty vote of thanks be tendered Rev. Prof. Orr for his series of lectures, and the resolution was carried by a unanimous vote. Rev. W. H. Sparling pointed out to Prof. Orr that the resolution of thanks was rather unique, in that it carried with it some criticism, whereupon Professor Orr smiled.

Prof. Orr said that he was glad that Prof. Jordan had expressed his views on the matter. From what he had read of Prof. Jordan's works, he did not expect that he would agree with him. However, he wished to tender his thanks to Prof. Jordan for the latter's warm friendship and reception while in the city.

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