

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW SCIENCES.

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VI.—THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES.

The Book of Genesis represents mankind as originally belonging to one family, hence for a time "of one language and of one speech." To this view modern science, under the influence of the evolution theory, is more and more ready every day to agree without demur. But when we ask how the multifarious languages and dialects now spoken have arisen we get answers that on the face of them seem to be diverse and inconsistent.

The Bible story of it is exceedingly picturesque and quite circumstantial. When, after the deluge, the families of the sons of Noah had multiplied and their descendants began to scatter far from the ancestral home, the project was formed of building a huge tower. The object of this is not very clear. The Jewish traditional view, as given in Josephus, is that it was for the purpose of providing a refuge against another flood. Much more probably it was intended as a citadel or fortress to dominate the earth and hold mankind together in one universal empire. Whatever the design, it is represented as displeasing to heaven, and when the building had been partly accomplished, its completion was frustrated by a divine judgment which confused the speech of the workmen and made it impossible for them to understand each other's wants or orders. It has commonly been taken for granted that the event was sudden and miraculous. The languages thus formed are presumed to maintain and perpetuate themselves in succeeding generations.

Modern philology, on the other hand, gives a very different account of the matter. According to it the formation of new languages is a perfectly natural process which may be watched in progress to-day in every part of the world by anyone who