

HELPS AND HINTS, TEXTUAL AND TOPICAL.

BY ARTHUR T. PIERSON, D.D.

Marginal Commentary: Notes on Genesis.

GEN. xi. 5. *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded.* Possibly "children of men" here is emphatic, like the "daughters of men" (vi. 2), indicating a godless type of enterprise.

God's arresting the builders' scheme indicates the impious element. It was all an act of rebellion against Jehovah, and can best be understood if we regard it as the first *organized scheme of godless empire—the first world-kingdom of history.* God struck at every element in their plan. He defeated their centralization by compelling diffusion. He broke up their ideal civilization by introducing such confusion of speech as made coöperation hopeless. And He hewed to pieces their idolatrous polytheism by destroying the unity of their worship and creed. In its inception the daring and defiant scheme was demolished; otherwise no one can tell whereunto this would have grown.

7. *And there confound their language.* How this was done must ever remain a mystery. It is plainly recorded as a supernatural, if not miraculous, interposition. It may have been an inward process, whereby old associations of ideas as connected with words were so broken that new forms of speech became natural. Or it may have been an outward process, whereby confusion of the lips, of pronunciation, of dialects, made exchange of thought impossible. Or it may be that, as in Chinese today—like words convey totally different meanings—some changes of inflection hopelessly confused the mind.

One scientific fact may throw some light upon the possible process. It is a well-known medical phenomenon that often in case of effusion of blood in the brain *words cease to remain connected with former associations and other words*

take their place without any apparent law to guide the new association. For instance, a man who two days later was fatally paralyzed, came into his house and said to his wife, "I brought a trundle-bed home and it hangs on the bootjack," meaning a *bundle* on the *hattrack*. During those two days before his stroke he was an example of Babel—all the old associations of words broken up, and new associations taking their place, so that he became unintelligible to members of his own family. He would call a table a clock, and a door a jar; sometimes the association, as in this latter case, partially disturbed (a door ajar), and sometimes no perceptible link remaining.

May this not suggest how easily God could so disturb the mental process as to destroy all old links between words and ideas and create a new association?

8. *They left off to build the city.*

Note: It is not said the *tower* was left unfinished. And possibly this, as the nucleus of the new empire, was the first built. The Jews have a tradition that it was overturned by a terrific tempest and shattered by lightning.

9. *Therefore is the name of it called Babel, i. e., confusion.* This is the essential point. There was a *confusion which compelled diffusion.*

We tarry to expand somewhat the central thought of the narrative: The history of this Babel Tower is the history of the origin of heathenism and the typical history of all godlessness.

We cannot but be struck with the fact that from this point to the close of the Bible we never *lose sight of Babylon*, and meet it at last in the Apocalypse as a mystical symbol of an apostate religion.

BABEL in the Book of Genesis represents *worldliness undertaking to achieve success without God.* Concentration, civilization, organization, coöperation, idolatry—a monstrous scheme of com-