

## CHRISTIANITY'S "MILLSTONE."

I. PROF. GOLDWIN SMITH.

AT the recent English Church Congress held at Norwich, the Canon of Manchester affirmed that the increase of scientific knowledge has deprived parts of the earlier books of the Bible of the historical value that was generally attributed to them by our forefathers. The story of the creation in Genesis, and the stories of the Flood and of the Tower of Babel are, he said, incredible in their present form. This affirmation is characterized by Prof. Goldwin Smith, in the December *North American Review*, as "a bold and honorable attempt to cast a millstone off the neck of Christianity." Professor Smith says that a veil which has long hung before the eyes of free inquiry is removed by the Canon's renunciations. He then gives his own experience as a student at college, recalling, among other things that then awoke his reason, the "desperate shifts" to which a certain lecturer was driven in his efforts to reconcile the facts of his science with the Mosaic cosmogony. In this connection he says: "From the conceptions of science, geocentricism, derived from the Mosaic cosmogony, may have been banished, but over those of theology its cloud still heavily hangs. The consecrated impression has survived the distinct belief, and faith shrinks from the theological revolution which the abandonment of the impression would involve." He adds:

"The history of every nation begins with myth. A primeval tribe keeps no record, and a nation in its maturity has no more recollection of what happened in its infancy than a man of what happened to him in his cradle. It is needless to say that the first book of Livy is a tissue of Fable, though the Romans were great keepers of records and matter of fact as a people. When the age of reflection arrives and the nation begins to speculate on its origin, it gives itself a mythical founder, a Theseus, a Romulus, or an Abraham, and ascribes to him its ancestral institutions or customs. In his history also are found the keys to immemorial names and the origin of mysterious or venerated objects. It is a rule of criticism that we can not by any critical alembic extract materials for history out of fable. If the details of a story are fabulous, so is the whole. If the details of Abraham's story—the appearance of the Deity to him, so strangely anthropomorphic, the miraculous birth of his son when his wife was ninety years old, his adventures with Sarah in Egypt and afterward in Gerar, arrested by the angel, with the episode of Lot, the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, and the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt—are plainly unhistorical, the whole story must be relegated to the domain of tribal fancy. We cannot make a real personage out of unrealities or fix a place for him in unrecorded time."

Professor Smith asserts that the texture of the history of the other patriarchs is the same as that of the history of Abraham, and says:

"They are mythical founders of a race, a character which extends to Ishmael and Esau. In fact, the chapters relating to them are full of what, in an ordinary

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