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A FREETHINKER'S VIEW OF THE BIBLE.

The Bible is an outgrowth of the human mind. The Old Testament is the literature of a people, a remarkable as well as an ancient people. It appeared during stages of development through which they can never pass again. It has not only the marks of the national characteristics, but the impress of all the influences incident to the changes and vicissitudes which the Hebrews experienced. No modern people, no other ancient people could give to the world such a literature. To produce such a work as the Old Testament the writers would have to be Jews, transported back thousands of years, with the experiences, surroundings and circumstances—never to be repeated—by which its authors, centuries ago, were influenced to write their thoughts and imaginings, their hopes and fears, their prayers, their curses, their hymns of victory and their songs of love. The same is true of Greek literature. Only a Greek, and a Greek of the Homeric age, could have produced the *Iliad*. There is no reason for inferring the superhuman origin of the Bible because the combined wit and wisdom, genius and learning of the age could not give us a work like it.

But it is frequently said: It is impossible to produce another book equal to the Bible. Equal in what respect? Surely the historical portions of the Bible are not of a high order. No one will say that in style, arrangement or literary excellence they will compare with Gibbon, Macaulay, Grote or Prescott, or even with Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon or Tacitus. If such history as that of the Bible were written to-day it would be considered beneath criticism. The scientific portions of the Bible are of such a character that they have been a source of much perplexity and mortification to the more intelligent and thoughtful believers in

the divinity of the Bible. We can safely put Lyell or Agassiz, Huxley or Haeckel against Moses as a scientist. The poetry of the Bible is a good deal better than its science and history, which are really about as bad as they can be. Portions of Job, the Psalms and Isaiah especially are very fine. Excellent poetry appears among comparatively unadvanced, unenlightened people. Says Lowes: "Imagination precedes science, poetry precedes prose, ornament precedes comfort." While the beauty and sublimity of some of the poetical portions of the Bible are undeniable, no literary critic, not under the influence of theology, will pronounce them beyond the powers of the unassisted human mind. There is, in my opinion, no poetry in the Bible that equals in excellence the finest flights of Shakespeare, Goethe or Byron. The legal portions of the Bible are certainly inferior to many other codes. They are narrow in conception and cruel in spirit. The larger portion of the laws of Moses consists in commands of childish observance thoroughly priestly in character. Surely no sane man will say the laws of Moses are comparable with the great legal codes of England, Germany and France. Indeed, they ought not to be spoken of in the same breath. Origen, one of the earliest Christian advocates of the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, said that "were it necessary to attach ourselves to the letter, and to interpret the law after the manner of the Jews or populace, I should blush to say aloud that it is a God who has given us such laws. I should find even more grandeur and reason in human codes, such as those of the Athenians, Lacedaemonians and Romans." As we have become enlightened we have discarded laws by which the Jews were governed when Jehovah was their king. In this age we do not stone to death Sabbath breakers or stubborn children; we do not in case of accidental homicide permit the nearest relative of the slain to pursue the slayer and kill him if he fail to reach a place of refuge. Husbands do not now write a "bill of divorcement," put it into the hands of the wife and send her out of the house. Soldiers are not now authorized to seize female captives when they have a "desire unto them" to humiliate them, and when they "have no delight in them" to send them away. Heretics are still threatened with hell, but no longer put to death as the law of Moses commanded.

Some persons have a notion that all modern law is taken from