

## ARTICLE VI.

## CONFIDENCE, THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF CAUTION.

BY REV. LEONARD WITHINGTON, D.D., NEWBURYPORT, MASS.

*Evitando vivit anima, quae adpetendo moritur.*

AUGUS. CONF. Lib. XIII. § 21.

ONE of the proofs of the Bible's being the word of God is, that it everywhere gives tokens of its coming from an omniscient mind. The test of omniscience is foresight. None can see into the future but God. The prophecies, therefore, as they roll on to their accomplishment, speak the wisdom of him who gave them. But it is not in the direct prophecies alone that the foresight of God is seen. We often find in human writings, and sometimes in authors of eminence, remarks that are sparkling and ingenious, but their truth can by no means endure the test of time. The ink is hardly dry on the paper before the teaching has lost its application and the author's reputation has gone to ruin. As the hill that arises highest into the air is apt to stand upon the strongest granite foundation, so the permanency of a doctrine is the signal of the strength of its origination. The editorials of a partisan newspaper, the speech of a pleader in a private trial, a funeral sermon, and often a political oration, are calculated only for the hour. Their best beauties are like the hues on a cloud after a vernal sunset, dependent not only on a fading ray, but the direction of that fading ray, and soon to be followed by a darkness which obliterates their form and memorial, until they return, on another day, to an existence as transient and as soon to be forgotten.

It is one of the proofs of the divinity of the Bible, that all its principles rest on a permanent foundation. Even when the transient appears, it is only a vesture to wrap up an immortal form. Generally speaking, we everywhere find the

vestiges of far-reaching foresight. It is the professed object of the prophecies to foresee and foretell ; and every coming age, until the coming of the millennial kingdom, is to magnify the wisdom which prepared its foundation and predicted its accomplishment. But it is not in professed prophecy alone that this permanent wisdom is seen : The Bible never outlives its principles. The oldest book in the world is never out of date. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." How many instances of this divine permanency may be brought from the sacred record ! It seems to us that most of the popular objections to the high truths of revelation have been anticipated, showing the foresight that secures their future existence. When Paul says "I speak as a man," he projects himself into the popular sentiment, and takes away the sword of the adversary before he has drawn it from its sheath. In Rom. ix. 19 we have a remarkable passage : "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault ? For who hath resisted his will ?" How natural is this question on the preaching of the doctrines of Paul, and how many millions of times has this objection been made ! So the saying of Peter (2d Ep. iii. 4) : "Where is the promise of his coming ? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." These simple words contain the first postulate of all the objections of Hume and others to the miracles ; the doctrine of La Place and most of the French infidels, the German objections, and the whole tendency of infidel geology and what the pious geologists are attempting to meet. All is anticipated in its simplest form, and traced to its origin through all its Protean variations. Perhaps there is not a single heresy that has ever infested the church, that has not been "prevented," in the double sense of that old, pregnant word. I can imagine the shades of the old heresiarchs rising from their sepulchres

and saying, each one, to Paul, *Οὐκ ἂν φθάνοις, λέγων, εἰ τι ἤσθησαι με φίλτρον ἐπιστάμενον, ὃ ἐγὼ εἶδως λέληθα ἐμαντόν;* "If you knew me to possess some filtre which I was unconscious of, would you not tell me of its power before I asked you?" An historical commentary might be written on the New Testament, illustrating those wonderful provisions against heretical error, such as the Gnostic, the Manichean, the Arian, the Pelagian, the Universalist, which the light of truth was sure to generate in that mingled darkness which it modified, but did not remove.

The Bible has vast foresight in another direction. We would not refine; nor would we for a moment pretend that it assumes any other province than to afford men religious instruction. It leaves the bowels of the earth and the stars of heaven to offer their own evidence to the interrogation of mankind. But religion is involved in many other modes of improvement. Now one of the evils of a growing civilization is the vast inequality it introduces in property, multiplying riches while it diminishes the numbers that hold them, and increasing poverty while it multiplies the number of the poor. This inequality alone is the prime cause of many a revolution. Now the laws of Moses provided for this evil the year of jubilee,—the returning of the possessions to the original holders; and moreover, the assuming their conquered lands on this condition, enacted an agrarian law with justice, and made the whole thing popular and feasible. Rome perished for the want of something similar, and the opposite evil produced the French Revolution. Here then is wisdom, incidental wisdom, which marks the foresight of a divine provision. So polygamy was indirectly prevented by the division of the territory of the promised land into small tenements; probably a more practical provision than a prohibitory law would have been. And what a beautiful provision is that recorded in Deut. xx. 8: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as

well as his heart." This is said of their soldiers going to war: what a deep knowledge of human nature and political wisdom does it imply! We are acting on this system in the present war. We are calling for volunteers. Courage generally is conscious power founded on activity and strength; and there will always be men enough in every great nation of such a temperament to excuse their weaker brethren, who may still serve their country in a laborious and retired life. Let the brave defend the timid, and let the timid support the brave. Each man finds his place, reaps his reward, and the harmony of the social system is supported by its diversity.

Many other proofs of the telegrams which revelation has sent into futurity might be adduced. But there is one line of invention on which the human researches have moved, in which we feel great solicitude to ask: What foresight has revelation shown? What provision was made for those objections and difficulties which were sure to arise? We allude to those discoveries of science which seem most to conflict with the facts and principles of revelation, particularly in the departments of astronomy and geology. Has the same permanent wisdom been shown in respect to these sciences as has anticipated all other improvements? Do we see here *the unambiguous footsteps of a God?*

The views which the Bible takes of the material creation are the most infantine possible. The material creation is assumed to be *κατ' ὄψιν*, according to the first impressions on primitive observers: The sun rises and sets; the earth is a plain extended over the waters; there is a solid expanse which supports the upper flood; the windows of heaven are opened when it rains copiously; there are an upper and under and a middle world; there is an absolute *up* and *down*; heaven is always above us and the nether floods beneath; and the plurality of worlds in the stars is utterly ignored. Even the slender attainments of the Greek and Latin poets and philosophers in natural science are not reached. The sublimity of the Bible does not lie in the line of discovery of the secrets of creation.

These views are not formally presented, but incidentally involved in its other teaching. The formation of the whole host of stars, the gaze and the admiration of modern astronomy, is put into a short parenthesis in the first chapter of Genesis. Now it is obvious that a book of these assumptions sent into a world where science was to be progressive for untold centuries, was likely to meet new objections with every new discovery.

The question then is, whether the Bible has made any provision for these future objections, and what the special provision is.

It would be contrary to its usual scope of foresight to say that it has made no provision. For if without parade, and in an informal way, it has armed itself against every heresy and objection that has ever appeared, it would be very strange if it had left itself unguarded in this most important department. We see at once the very partial and limited philosophy of Socrates, when, not contented with the negative ground, he ventures to say that natural philosophy was a hopeless pursuit: *Ἐθαύμαζε δέ, εἰ μὴ φανερόν αὐτοῖς ἔστιν, ὅτι ταῦτα οὐ δυνατόν ἔστιν ἀνθρώποις εὐρεῖν,*<sup>1</sup> "He was astonished that it was not manifest at once, that such discoveries are impossible to men." This remark was exceedingly natural in his day, before the telescope was invented, before a careful induction had paved the way to the true knowledge of nature. But certainly it is a decisive proof that Socrates had no anticipation of the circle of knowledge which human investigation would fill. The remark does not stand the test of time. If the modern philosophers had believed his doctrine, philosophy would still have been an idle repetition of moral precepts. Now the Bible has no doctrines which thus outlive their own date; and, though we do not contend that it anticipates, or even limits, any *possible* discovery out of its own department, yet it never, on the negative side, makes an assertion like that of Socrates, inconsistent with the knowledge of future times. We say,

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon Mem., L.b. I. c. 13.

then, that revelation occupies permanent ground. Its truths are now as harmonious and credible as they were in the infancy of its dawn.

But what special provision has revelation made for the difficulties supposed to be engendered by the discoveries of modern science?

We can imagine two methods: one would be to foretell them all, and to make it a part of divine prophecy to foresee the Copernican system, the laws of Kepler, the gravitation of Newton, the formation of the hypogene rocks, as taught in geology, and all the wonders of the nebular theory. But what an endless task! And where shall the record stop? We are yet but very imperfectly instructed into the mysteries of nature, and other ages must be provided for as well as our own. It would have changed the whole character of the book; it would have diverted attention, and frustrated the whole design of revelation. Besides, God completed his revelation, in this line of knowledge, when "he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." He set his vast creation before the observing eye, and when he made the light of the distant stars to reach our earth, he gave a signal which at once excited curiosity and ensured, to a surprising degree, its gratification. All the improvement, all the sharpening of the intellect in these noble sciences, is owing to the speaking of the book of signs and the silence of the book of words.

The other method of proceeding is the one which *has been taken*; and it seems to *us* to be remarkably suitable to the design of a religious revelation, and worthy of the wisdom of God. Let us contemplate it with some care.

It seems to *us* that the provision of the Bible is peculiar, and is the very best we could conceive to have been adopted. It teaches the general ignorance of man, and his ignorance *after discovery*: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations

fastened? or who hath laid the corner-stone thereof? When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it issued out of the womb" (Job xxxviii. 4-7)? So verse 12: "Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the day-spring to know his place? and, verse 16: "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? So the apostle tells us: "Now we see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). And again (Eccl. viii. 16, 17): "When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth; then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it." Now we conceive these declarations differ from the explicit declaration of Socrates, who puts his finger down on an especial department of knowledge and says or rather insinuates that man can never make discoveries in that line; but the Bible foretells the *general* ignorance of man; an ignorance not total, susceptible of being diminished by degrees, but an ignorance, after all his progression in knowledge, so great as to preclude the possibility of a valid objection to the revealed wisdom of God. The system of nature, the laws of nature, never can be grasped by us as a totality: we never can compare two totalities together, that of nature and that of revelation; and hence when they seem to jar, we should be cautious; the two notes have never been fully sounded together. Besides, the very knowledge of nature is but a spreading ignorance; the Newtons, the Pascals, the Butlers of the intellectual world, have felt it most, and been the first to acknowledge it. Never was there a discovery in nature which, while it answered one question, did not start a hundred more. Our natural researches are like lighting a lantern in a dark forest at midnight; it gleams on a little circle round your feet only to show you the thickened, the boundless gloom that limits your observation and darkens

your horizon. Hence the *specific* ignorance taught by Socrates has been confuted by a train of discoveries, whereas modern science has only sealed and confirmed the general ignorance asserted in scripture.

It is one of the perpetual delusions of the scientific world (not so much perhaps of the real leaders), to impute a fulness and a completion to certain new sciences which subsequent discovery modifies or overthrows. We are fond of arranging our knowledge and completing our arrangement. We cannot help imputing a totality to the works of nature, as we do to the existence of space. Now place a human mind before this totality. How vast the book! How mean the reader! Can we imagine a greater contrast? And the progress of knowledge hardly approaches to a comprehension of this totality. Then science always leads you to some power that is incomprehensible and out of her province. For instance, the laws of motion from compound forces producing a new direction. How beautifully it explained the motion of the planets in their orbits. One might be tempted to hope that the discovery had exhausted the problem. But oh, whence comes the main force, the impulse? We only confess our ignorance when we say it is the finger of God.

It is not only true that the investigations of science have hitherto not diminished the force of the application of our ignorance to the revelations of God, but it always must be of equal force; we see no tendency to such a completion of science as ever to lay a valid foundation for a valid objection. Thus, in the motion of the planets one of the powers is unaccounted for, and every astronomer, we believe, has as deep a conviction that it never will be accounted for. If we understand it, the philosophy of Newton as clearly demands special divine interposition as modern geology. The natural law leads to a supernatural origin. It always begins in miracle:

He, by the blended power  
Of gravitation and projection, saw  
The whole in silent harmony revolve.



“He” is Newton; and we can conceive of no natural power as producing projection. The clearer we see, the more we know we see in part. You always meet some buttress that stops your journey. All your researches but serve to give you a vaster idea of the infinite that is before you.

This assertion of human ignorance in the Bible — not that which denies the possibility of knowledge in a specified department, but the general assertion that our ignorance must be more clearly felt by our increasing knowledge — may be regarded as one of the provisions against the infidelity of scientific objections.

But, secondly, that the Bible so clearly insulates its own province, and ignores all that is beyond it, may be regarded as the provision of this foresight. The lamps of a lighthouse shine over the sea, but the kerosene lamp which you put on your centre-table when you draw your evening curtains, is intended to illuminate only the walls of your parlor. Perhaps there was a significance in the construction of the old tabernacle. The shew-bread, the golden candlestick with its seven branches, the ark, and the table were all enclosed from the open air, and the light of the sun was excluded from them. Moses was careful not to sanction the creed of those, who,

With gentle heart  
Had worshipped nature in the hill and valley,  
Not knowing what they loved, but loved it all.

He had very little sympathy with Byron:

Not vainly did the early Persian make  
His altar the high places and the peak  
Of earth — o'er-gazing mountains, and thus take  
A fit and unwall'd temple, there to seek  
The Spirit, in whose honor shrines are weak,  
Uprear'd by human hands. Come and compare  
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth and Greek,  
With nature's realms of worship, earth and air,  
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy prayer!

Childe Harold, Canto III. 91.

This tabernacle seems to be a significant emblem, that the light of nature and the light of revelation, for certain purposes and to a certain extent, must be kept separate, and that we are never more deceived than when we attempt dogmatically to mix them, in order to walk in a twilight of our own blending<sup>1</sup> —

Darkness is better.

But there is, thirdly, another provision — the frequent cautions we have to beware of philosophy. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Philosophy is a general term; but what peculiar specification had the apostle in view? I have no doubt he had in his mind those peculiar speculations begun by the Ionic school, and which Socrates, or rather his accusers, called, *τὰ τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ τὰ ἐπουράνια* and sometimes *μετέωρα* and *δαιμόνια*, that is, investigating the secret laws of the material creation. A shade of impiety in the early ages was cast over such pursuits. Now it is remarkable that the caution is not addressed to the philosophers but to Christians. They must not take the initiative; and when it is said “beware of philosophy,” it cannot be meant philosophy standing on its own independent basis; but the *application* of philosophy either to the support or the overthrow of religion. The warning seems to be: Take care how you bring the subjects together, take care how you blend them; take care that you do not magnify a conjecture into a certainty, or a seeming difficulty into a positive opposition. Here is the danger. Men are tempted to harmonize too soon; and dogmatism here is peculiarly pernicious. The whole history of the church verifies this remark. The evidences of Christianity have suffered as much by the hasty efforts of its defenders to press natural philosophy into its

<sup>1</sup> Far be it from us to exclude the light of nature from the general evidences of revealed religion. Here, too, the emblem holds: the light of the sun helped you to walk to the entrance of the tabernacle; but after you were within, your only light streamed from the seven lamps in the golden candlestick.

defence as it ever did from the assaults of the philosophers themselves; nay, the very difficulty has often arisen from the previous dogmatism which created it. Thus, when we assume that the popular language of the Old Testament concerning the earth's being founded on the waters, the sun's rising, etc., is strictly literal and philosophic (an assumption which originally no one thought of), we lay a foundation for all the objections which investigation generates. The objections are wholly relative; and how many of these assumptions are there in the ancient writers! Who does not wish the phoenix away from the pious epistle of Clemens Romanus? Who can be edified by the long disproof of the antipodes in Lactantius, Lib. III. 24. Inst. De Falsa Sapientia? Who does not lament that Augustine did not always follow his own rule? Non legitur in Evangelio Dominum dixisse, Mitto vobis Paracletum, qui vos doceat de cursu solis et lunae. Christianos enim facere volebat, non mathematicos (Augustine to the Manicheans).

Even later writers have forgotten the apostle's "beware;" the learned Grotius, in his *De Veritate*, makes evaporation a miracle (Lib. I. sect. 7); and how unfortunate was the suggestion, not long since, that the shells on the mountains were triumphant proofs of the Noachean deluge. What a splendid book of splendid blunders is Dr. Thomas Burnet's "Sacred Theory of the Earth!" and its long reputation how astonishing! Never did fancy win such a triumph over reason. And even more sober men in a later age have wronged the cause they attempted to aid. Take such a book as Gisborne's *Testimony of Natural Theology to Christianity*, and see how little the witness can bear cross-examination, and how he is confuted almost before he leaves the stand. These instances, and a thousand more, illustrate the simple principle, that a bad argument injures the best cause.

Now all this is a contrast with the *silence* of scripture. None of these courses of reasoning have a scriptural tone to them. Conceive for a moment how it would sound to read

a chapter in Matthew like the following : ‘ Now Jesus and his disciples passed through Magdala, and it being the heat of the day, the Master, being weary, sat down on a rock — it was a conglomerate — and his disciples stood round him ; and the Master said to Thomas, run and get me a hammer, and let us break in pieces some portion of this rock. Here, my children, you may see the wonderful power of God ; here you may trace the footprints of the Creator. This rock has passed through fire and water ’ — but we must stop ; we dare not write any more ; we feel as if we were bordering on profanity ; but ancient profanity is modern wisdom ; at any rate, let us beware of philosophy when it dogmatically aims either to help or hinder religion. It is like mixing those chemical compounds where you are in danger of an explosion.

But perhaps the man of science may say he wants exemplifications ; these remarks are general. We would meet this demand by saying, in the first place, that we have no doubt as to some of the prime discoveries of geology. There can be no doubt, under the attainments of modern investigation that the prime matter of our globe is far more ancient than the six-days theory of creation about six thousand years ago would allow us to suppose. We allow that the famous quotation from Cowper, in the present state of science, would be out of place.

“ Some drill and bore  
The solid earth, and from the strata there  
Extract a register, by which we learn  
That he who made it, and revealed its date  
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.”

and even the remark of Alexander Brozniart :<sup>1</sup> “ If any suppose themselves of sufficient knowledge of geological phenomena, and are endued with so bold and penetrating a spirit as to be able, with the few materials we possess, to set forth the manner in which our earth was created, we leave them their splendid undertaking ; as for ourselves, we feel

<sup>1</sup> See Leonard Woods’s *Theological Review*, Jan. 1834, p. 126.

that we are in possession neither of sufficient means nor strength to erect so bold, and probably so perishable, a structure." If this be truth, it is precisely the truth which one would not wish now to utter. It might be wisdom fifty years ago. Yet we must confess we are not satisfied with some of the popular *reconciliations* now afloat. Both the scriptural and the scientific class is too little solid. The harmony is remote; the discrepancy is glaring; the method is dogmatical; and the imperfect solution of one doubt leads to twenty more.

But let us exemplify; let us ask what are the imperfections of the modes of reconciling brought forward by our Christian geologists, and what is the better way?

The fault is (as it seems to us), they are too specific, and of course too dogmatic. A dogmatic solution of a dogmatic difficulty is bad — especially if the solution be more dogmatic than the dogmatism from which the difficulty arose. When an apparent discrepancy meets us between scripture and science, in the vast abyss of powers and probabilities presented by both, we can seldom fasten on *one* as the only certain solution. We must be careful, therefore, to keep on the negative side — not to glide over to the positive. Our formula should be: it may be this, it may be that; it may be many laws, many causes; but we should be very cautious of selecting one of the possibilities, and turning it into an iron fixture. We certainly lay a trap for confutation. Progressive science may confound us. The standing prejudice of scientific men, especially men scientific in particular departments, is to presume a point of view which does not exist. This presumption leads often to an unconscious dogmatism. Many definite schemes, being based on the present state of science, run great hazard from future discoveries; besides, they are not proved; they secretly turn a possibility into an imaginary certainty.

*It may be so* does not prove *it is so*. Because an hypothesis seems to reconcile a discrepancy, it does not prove it is true, though the converse would prove it false. Let us ex-

emplify. The sun and the moon stood still at the word of Joshua. Some say a halo was substituted, and the miracle consists in a visible light imparted to a narrow region. "Sun stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon" (Josh. x. 12). Well, this saves all the improbability of disturbing the solar system; what would you say better? First, we have no doubt of the miracle, and no doubt of the power of God to work a miracle, great or small. Secondly, we are not called upon to *deny* that the miracle was as great as the most literal sense would imply. But, thirdly we are not called upon to *affirm* this. If the whole solar system was disturbed, it might be by some unusual law of nature; it might be by supernatural interposition; it might be by some secondary purpose, which God had to accomplish in other worlds; for a very philosophic poet has told us:

In human works, though labored on with pain,  
A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;  
In God's, one single does its end produce;  
Yet serves to second too, some other use,

It may have been a halo, or it may have been a miraculous impression on the contending hosts, without anything in the objective. All we are concerned to show is, that amid the mighty powers and possibilities of nature, we have no reason to doubt the narrative or diminish the wonder. In our ignorance of causes we have a vast storehouse of materials to answer objections; and ignorance is here wiser than knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I must confess for one, that Dr. Chalmers's famous Discourses on the Christian Revelation, viewed in connection with the modern astronomy, with all their blaze of eloquence and power of illustration, are far from being satisfactory. He solemnly assumes a positiveness on both sides — on the side of science and on the side of revelation — which is not proved and does not exist. For he assumes the peopling of the planets (very cautiously at first, but it grows into a certainty), which we know nothing about; indeed geology teaches that for ages and ages our globe had no rational inhabitants. Why may not the stars be still in that state? And then, if they *are* inhabited, who knows who or what their inhabitants are — sinners or holy beings? What he says about the importance of a transaction not being indicated by the narrowness of the field on which it takes place

The same remark may be made concerning the expert geologists in their attempts to reconcile the first chapter of Genesis with the last discoveries of their science. They insensibly glide into the specific; they attempt to extract from this science a positive testimony to revelation which is not so satisfactory to the common reader as to themselves. Where is the necessity of saying whether the long period they demand for the testimony of their science is found in the interval supposed between the second and third verse of the first chapter of Genesis, or in the long days they give to the week of the world's creation? Why not simply say: 'The narrative of Moses is perfect for his purpose; he neither aimed at chronological or scientific exactness; he merely meant to teach us that this world belonged to God, for he made it, and he made it for a benevolent purpose. "The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land." One cannot help distrusting τὸ πῶς through the whole domain of theology. Already we have been told by Hugh Miller, that the systems<sup>1</sup> of Dr. Chalmers, Dr. J. Pye Smith, Dr. Buckland, Dr. Harris, Dr. King, Professor Sedwick have been antiquated. What was satisfactory in 1814 is no longer so in 1839. Then, on the other hand, the interpretations of the Bible which they adopt to meet these specifics are often exceedingly forced; such as no mere philologist would have discovered in his own line. We must confess that the best observations we have ever found on this subject are made by old Calvin, long before geology

is altogether inapplicable until we know more about the subject. The fact is, that splendid work in answering one difficulty raises twenty more in every reflecting mind. How much better, then, to stop a little sooner, and to say at once that we know too little about the stars; too little about the design of God in making them; too little about the extra-mundane connections of the gospel — either to start an objection, or to be satisfied with an ingenious solution of an *objection, which never ought to be started.* Besides, all that Chalmers has said in seven splendid discourses, had been before suggested by Andrew Fuller (in his Gospel its own Witness) in a few paragraphs. Chalmers's force lay in glittering expansion.

<sup>1</sup> i. e. systems of reconciliation.

had appeared to enlighten or to distress mankind. Standing on a sort of Pisgah, as if he had foreseen the promised land, and the flood we were to cross, he says in his Commentary on the Pentateuch (Gen. i. 16): “Dixi Mosen non hic subtiliter disserere de naturae arcanis, ut philosophum; quod in his verbis videre est. Primum planetis et stellis in expansione coelorum sedem assignat: astrologi<sup>1</sup> vero sphaerarum distinctionem tradunt et simul docent stellas fixas<sup>2</sup> proprium habere locum in firmamento. Moses duo facit magna luminaria: at qui Astrologi firmis rationibus probant, Saturni sydus, quod omnium minimum propter longinquitatem apparet, lunari esse maius. Hoc interest, quod Moses populariter scripsit quae sine doctrina et literis omnes idiotae communi sensu percipiunt: illi autem magno labore investigant quicquid humani ingenii acumen assequi potest. Nec vero aut studium illud improbandum est, aut damnanda scientia, ut phrenetici quidam solent audacter rejicere quicquid est illis incognitum. Nam astrologia non modo iucunda est cognitu, sed apprime quoque utilis: negare non potest quin admirabilem Dei sapientiam explicet ars illa. Quae ut laudandi sunt ingeniosi homines qui utilem operam hac in parte sumpserunt: ita quibus suppetit otium et facultas, hoc exercitationis genus negligere non debent. Nec Moses sane ab eo studio retrahere nos voluit, quum omisit quae sunt artis propria: sed quia non minus in doctis et rudibus quam doctis ordinatus erat magister, non aliter potuit suas partes implere quam si se demitteret ad crassam istam rationem. Si de rebus vulgo ignotis loquutus foret, causari poterant idiotae altiora haec esse captu suo. Denique quum hic Spiritus Dei promiscuam omnibus scholam aperiat, non mirum est si ea in maxime deligat quae passim ab omnibus intelligi. Si Astrologus veras syderum dimensiones quaerat, lunam reperiet Saturno minorem, verum id est reconditum: oculis enim aliud apparet. Ergo Moses ad usum potius se convertet. Nam quum Dominus

<sup>1</sup> By astrologers Calvin means astronomers.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin received the old Ptolemaic theory.



manum quodammodo ad nos usque porrigat, dum facit ut solis et lunae splendore fruamur: quantae ingratitude foret ad ipsam experientiam ultro connivere? Non est igitur quod Moses imperitiam videant arguti homines, quia lunam facit secundum luminare: neque enim nos in coelum evocat, sed tantum proponit quae ante oculos patent. Habeant sibi Astrologi altiore notiam: interea qui a luna percipiunt nocturnum splendorem, coarguuntur ipso usu, perversae ingratitude, nisi Dei beneficentiam agnoscant."<sup>1</sup> These remarks of Calvin have reference to the

<sup>1</sup> "I have said that Moses does not discourse here concerning the secret powers of nature, like a philosopher, which is clear from his words. First, he assigns the seat of the planets and stars in the expanse of heaven. Astronomers indeed define to us a distinction of spheres, and teach us the stars being fixed has each its proper place in the firmament. Moses makes two great lights, though astronomers show, by immovable reasons, that the planet Saturn, which seems so small, on account of its distance, is larger than the moon. The difference is, that Moses writes, in a popular way, what all the common people may understand by common sense, without learning or letters, while the others investigate with great labor whatever the sharpened genius of man can pursue; and this learned study is by no means to be blamed, or to be cursed, as it is by some fanatics, who vilify what they do not know. Astronomy is not only a pleasant science, but it is very useful. It cannot be denied that it is an art that shows the wonderful wisdom of God; and those ingenious men are to be praised who applied their useful toil in this department, which ought not to be neglected by those to whom ability and leisure is given. But as Moses was ordained a teacher, both to the rude and ignorant as well as to the learned, he did not execute his office but by stooping to the simplest apprehension. If he had spoken of things commonly unknown, the common people (idiotae) could have complained that his subjects were beyond their abilities, nor could he discharge his office without condescending to their crude conceptions. Finally, since the Holy Spirit opens in the Bible a school for all, it is no wonder that he selects such knowledge as all can understand. If an astronomer inquires into the true dimensions of the stars, he will find the moon to be less than Saturn. But that is a recondite fact; it appears otherwise to the eyes. Therefore Moses turns from science to practice; for when God, as it were, reaches out his hand to us, in giving us to enjoy the splendor of the sun and the moon, what ingratitude it would be to wink out of sight our own experience. There is no reason, therefore, why hair-splitting men should laugh at the artlessness of Moses, because he makes the moon the second luminary; for he does not call us up to heaven, but only spreads what is obvious before our eyes. Let the astronomers have their profounder knowledge to themselves; in the meantime, let those who perceive the nocturnal splendor of the moon be convinced by its very light of perverse ingratitude, unless they acknowledge the beneficence of God." — *Translation.*

science of astronomy, but they equally apply to all the present and all the future discoveries of geology. They are pregnant with anticipation and foresight. They foreclose all possible difficulty from any amount of future discoveries. It seems to us that one may venture to say that no future discovery in astronomy, unless it should prove a flat contradiction to some essential postulate in revelation, can ever meet an objection which is not obviated in these remarks. The great force of Calvin consists in his knowing when to stop. He is not too articulate for his future strength. He takes eternal ground, never to be abandoned until the word of God perishes.

Now let us copy him in meeting the objection of another science. It is equally wise to say that Moses did not intend to teach geology any more than astronomy. There is as little positive in the Bible of one of these sciences as of the other; and we may say in both cases: "Si de rebus vulgo ignotis loquutus foret, causari poterant idiotae altiora haec esse captu suo."

Now it seems to me that most of our pious geologists transcend this safe line. They are not governed by Calvin's caution. They attempt to extort from science a positive testimony to revelation, which science by no means *fairly* gives; and, secondly, they attempt to extort from revelation an accommodation to science which a philologist never would have found. There is a double violence done in each department, and the two rows of trees, forced by violence over our path, form only an ominous and transient shade. When you have once said that Moses ignores every particle of the scientific, you ought not to turn round and magnify every accidental resemblance into a scientific indication.

Let us verify these general remarks. Thus, when it is said that the Bible represents the creation as the special result of Jehovah's efficiency, to the exclusion of every other cause, and yet that God employs instrumentalities in the work of creation; that the creation was a gradual work; the emergency of the land from the water before the crea-

tion of animals and plants; that the earth had an early revolution on its axis in twenty-four hours,—all this may seem obvious to the sharpened eye of the learned reconciler, but we fear a plain reader (Calvin's idiotae) would complain, that these things were *altiora esse captu suo*; that they had never found them either in science or the Bible. They present to the common mind too forced a conformity, and are far from being necessary to the satisfaction of our science or our faith. We had better stop sooner.

Some of the interpretations of the Bible are equally defective: "Ever since I began to read the Mosaic account," says Dr. Hitchcock, "with reference to geology more than forty years ago, two facts have been more and more strongly impressed on my mind in respect to the days. One is, that Moses understood them, and meant his hearers to understand them, as literal days. The other is, that they are in reality, or stand for the representatives of, something quite different. The earth's submergency during the first day and emergence on the third, if we can judge from geological changes of analogous character, could have been no twenty-four or even seventy-two hours process, but rather requiring untold ages. So geology teaches us that all the great classes of plants were introduced only after immense intervals, whereas Moses brings them all in upon a single day."<sup>1</sup> Again, "I cannot believe that any man of unbiased judgment can read the account, and not feel that Moses is writing a literal history. The objects about which he writes are all of them real existences, which were before him and he seems to be giving an account of their creation in the simplest possible language. Now to be told, that he understood the word *day* to be a period of indefinite length, and meant his readers so to understand it, seems so discrepant to the whole character of the record, that it greatly troubles an honest inquirer. But the symbolic theory allows us to understand the account literally; at least as much so as many prophecies. That is, we may take the terms in a lit-

<sup>1</sup> See *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1860, n. 688.

eral sense until science shows us that they are insufficient, and then we may be allowed to expand them as far as is necessary. It may be doubtful whether Moses had any idea beyond the literal sense, just as was probably sometimes the case with the prophets. Yet subsequent discoveries make a wide expansion of the term *day*. Moreover by regarding the account as a literal one, and the days natural ones, the sanction of the Sabbath is preserved in all its force to those unacquainted with geology, and retained symbolically to those acquainted with it."<sup>1</sup> Now we yield to no man in veneration for the world-wide reputation of this writer; we have the highest conviction of his piety and good intentions towards revelation; and we have no thought of writing him a letter, exhorting him to save his ruined and ruining soul by a retraction of his impious mistakes. But we cannot refrain from asking, how much he gains in his harmonizing scheme by substituting an emblematic in the place of a literal meaning? Has he considered? Has he looked ahead? Does he not know, that by adopting such an expedient he sanctions a general principle. Suppose I march out among my people and meet a universalist, and I press him with the passage in Matthew xxv. 46. "These shall go away into eternal punishment." "Why yes," he says "I have no doubt the word *eternal* means never-ending; and that it is as strong when applied to the pains of hell as the joys of heaven; I have no doubt our Saviour meant so, and meant that we should understand it so; but then I have got an emblem here, which comes in to alter the whole signification. The words *eternal punishment* present a most expressive emblem of the sorrows of life, which certainly never end till life ends; and, as it is utterly impossible that a benevolent Deity should ever make any of his creatures forever miserable (geology can present no exigency greater than this), I must conclude that eternal punishment is only a sad emblem of the protracted suffering of our

<sup>1</sup> Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct. 1860, p. 694.

present life; and in this interpretation I am sanctioned by the example of some of our most pious and learned men.

It is well remarked by Colridge, that "in arguing with infidels or the weak in faith, it is the part of religious prudence, no less than of religious morality to avoid whatever looks like an evasion. To retain the literal sense, wherever the harmony of scripture permits and reason does not forbid, is ever the honest, and, nine times in ten, the more rational and pregnant interpretation. The contrary plan is an easy and approved way of getting rid of a difficulty; but nine times in ten a bad way of solving it."<sup>1</sup> Now let this writer imagine himself in the presence of three classes of people; infidel geologists, mere biblical philologers, and plain Christians (Calvin's idiotae), will not his canon of interpretation (though not so to him) to them — to all of them, appear like an evasion? Would they not say, he would not have thought of it if not pressed with a difficulty; and still worse, if they should become his converts and adopt his rule, will they not thrust in his emblems in some literal spot where he would be horrified to find them. The wise builders in the temple of orthodoxy should remember, they seldom lay a stone but another builder must lay another stone over it. Let us remember the old proverb, *ιδεῖν τὸ τέλος*.

One is surprised often at the great rapture which the *experti* in a science feel at some alleged similitude, seeming very remote to every other man. The idea that pre-Adamite perished races of animals, fishes, etc., that this has anything to do with the gospel, as is alleged by the eloquent author of the "Cross in Nature," is surely a conviction which will not strike every mind as forcibly and beautifully as it does his own; for only think what it demands of us: First, that the signification came ages and ages before the thing signified; the symbol is not the shadow of the idea, but the idea is the shadow of the symbol. Secondly, the suffering of these primitive creatures, though it prefigures

<sup>1</sup> Aids to Reflection, Intro. Aph. XIV.

sin, is not properly a punishment of sin. Thirdly, sufferings not penal in beings not sinful, are an appropriate emblem of beings that will have penal sufferings because they are sinful. Fourthly, this strange signal stood for ages for nobody that could possibly understand it. Fifthly, when God made the world and gave man a revelation he preserved a mysterious silence as to this symbol. Sixthly, six thousand years roll away, and all the evidences of this signification lie buried up in the depths of the earth; and, lastly, in modern times, when by our learned excavations we have brought the proofs to light, the resemblances are so remote that not one man in ten can trace them, even when they are elaborately pointed out by the most scientific finger; for we most solemnly declare, we cannot see how an effect should go before its cause; how sin should blast creation millions of years before it existed; how a signal should be held out so long before any could understand it; and finally, when men do come on the earth to admire this harmony, how they can see any harmony between the natural sufferings of creatures not sinful and the lost condition of mankind to be released by Jesus Christ; the sufferings are different, the beings are different, and the one happens millions of years before the other is known; and what analogy can bind them together?

It is my turn: if I see a spider dart on a fly, and —

“ The fluttering wing  
And shriller sound declare extreme distress,  
And ask the helping, hospitable hand;

I may think of Satan seizing a miserable soul, and I may use it as a striking comparison; but it is quite another thing to say such was the intention of nature when flies and spiders were made; and still more remote is it to imagine that a groaning creation gives forth didactic sounds when there is no being to hear them. Besides, what do the other things in the primitive world signify: the granite rocks, the slates, the ferns, the coals, the molluscs, the trilobites? How

amidst such a bundle of figures, flying at the mast-head of creation, are we to select the one that has a meaning? Reason gives the matter over to imagination, and imagination herself, as she stretches her wings over the dreadful chaos, is confounded in the mighty void.

But we are all bound to reconcile science with scripture. What would you substitute as safer ground? We would simply say, be less articulate. We cannot do better than to take Calvin's remarks, applied to astronomy, and apply them to geology, or any other science, which may now or hereafter *appear* to conflict with the Bible.

To make my meaning clear, let me suppose myself a trembling candidate for a settlement before a council of venerable Doctors of Divinity, and some of them consummate geologists. They examine me as to my ability to defend the Bible against the scientific infidelity of the day. A venerable man arises and asks. Do you consider yourself as set to defend the gospel? *Trembling Candidate.* Yes sir, as far as I know how. *Learned Doctor.* Have you studied geology thoroughly, in its connection with revelation? *Trembling Candidate.* No sir, I have not. My knowledge, to you, I have no doubt, would appear very superficial. *Learned Doctor.* How can you expect then to defend the gospel? *Trembling Candidate.* I may be a very imperfect champion. *Learned Doctor.* Have you given any attention to the subject? Are you aware of any difficulties in bringing the two sciences to an agreement. *Trembling Candidate.* Yes sir, I have. I believe I have read all your books on the subject. *Learned Doctor.* Well, have they done you any good? Have they enlightened you on the subject? *Trembling Candidate.* Certainly, sir, they have. I acknowledge the general truth of the science, and I respect you as one of its most able benefactors. *Learned Doctor.* Well, do you intend to follow my example in answering objections? *Trembling Candidate.* As far as I can, sir. I have read your books with the greatest interest, and received from them much instruction. But I certainly follow you more heartily

when you keep on the negative side than when you pass over to the positive, and attempt to extort from revelation or nature a specific testimony that they agree. I then start back, and prefer *my* ignorance to *your* knowledge. *Learned Doctor.* Do you mean to throw contempt on my speculations? *Trembling Candidate.* No, by no means; I have read your works with a double instruction; often as an example, and now and then as a warning. I cannot involve myself in some consequences which I see sanctioned by very high authority. *Learned Doctor.* How will you then defend the Bible? *Trembling Candidate.* Simply by saying that an inspired writer and a philosopher fill two departments, each of them perfect in his line. I suppose the narrative of Moses conveyed *all that he wished it to convey.* It was perfect for his purpose. It presented God as the rightful sovereign, because he is the literal creator of this universe. He meant also to sanction a Sabbath. But he designed to teach little or nothing of science. I shall stop where he stops. I shall stop on obvious declarations. I see, on my ground, no positive contradictions, nor, when the subject is fairly considered, much difficulty. I shall deem it safe to be as ignorant as Moses or Paul was, and as silent, on the dogmatic side, as was Jesus Christ. *Learned Doctor.* Well, I dont know but I must let you pass until you get the egg-shell off your head. *Trembling Candidate* (whispers to himself). It is not yet knocked off by you.

Many other instances might be given than those noticed above. We present only specimens.

The opinion that it is geology solely that proves a supernatural interposition among the operations of nature, i. e. that it lays a foundation for believing the miracles of the gospel, is surely unsupported. Most of the old philosophers (except the Epicureans) bear one testimony on this point. Anaxagoras is said to have introduced mind to account for the motion and arrangement of matter.<sup>1</sup> Πάντα χρήματα ἦν ὁμοῦ· εἶτα νοῦς ἐλθὼν αὐτὰ διεκόσμησε. "All the wise

<sup>1</sup> Diogenes Laertius, Lib. II., Anaxagoras.



agree," says Plato, "that the ruling principle in heaven and earth is *νοῦς*" (mind).<sup>1</sup> It was a general principle that the beginning of motion was mind. Modern philosophy echoes the sentiment. MacLaurin, in his account of Newton's discoveries, says: "We are always meeting powers which surpass mere mechanism." Newton himself says: "The main business of natural philosophy is to argue from phenomena without framing hypotheses, and to deduce causes from effects, till we come to the very first cause, which certainly is not mechanical;" and the following maxim is found in Cote's preface to Newton's *Principia*: "*Causae simplicissimae nulla dari potest mechanica explicatio; si daretur enim, causa nondum esset simplicissima.*" It is a fixed maxim, in all comprehensive philosophy, that the laws of nature lead to something above nature; but what is above nature is the *miraculous power*. The first decree that creation offers to our adoration is, that she is not sufficient to her own operation; and geology only adds a weak—"weak" because the vote was taken in the subterranean chambers of the earth and kept there for ages—suffrage to Nature's ancient and stronger declaration.

One evil must always attend these recondite resemblances between science and revelation. They never can recur spontaneously to the plain Christian. They never strike him, because they are found beyond the sphere of common observation, and they are totally unlike any proof adduced by the sacred writers.

<sup>1</sup> *Philebus*, p. 28, C. D.