

But He is rescuing sinners. He is seeking and saving the lost. Is that the way to fulfil the law and the prophets? Yes, that is the way. The Pharisees thought the law and the prophets were given for the sinner's condemnation. Even John the Baptist thought the Messiah was coming to fulfil the law and the prophets by cutting down the fruitless trees and casting them into the fire. So the Pharisees hated Him and cast Him out of the vineyard and killed Him. And even John the Baptist sent messengers to Him, 'Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' They did not know, even the Baptist did not know, that the law was given, not to check and punish, but to show how to love. Even John the Baptist does not seem to have remembered that the whole law is comprehended in that one saying, 'Thou shalt love.'

He came not to destroy the law or the prophets. But some things will get destroyed. The flower is before the fruit. When the fruit comes the flower perishes. Give your boy his books of adventure; the day will come when he will cast them out, but

the love of literature will remain with him. Give your little girl her dolls; some day they will lie forgotten and forlorn, but the love of children will remain in her woman's heart. What a struggle it was in the days when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. The temple must go and the ark and the mercy-seat; the priests and the sacrifices must go: even the covenant itself must pass away. We shall never know what it cost that heroic soul to write down the words: 'In that he saith a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.'

Some things get destroyed. But not the law or the prophets. For the law and the prophets are love, and love never faileth. He came not to destroy love. He came to touch it into life, to foster it into a flame. We love, because He first loved. They that are least in the kingdom of heaven have already a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. They are already perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect.

## The Spiritual Value of the Creation Story.

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BEFORE entering upon the study of the spiritual value of the Creation story, it may be useful to suggest a few books which bear upon the story itself. The best known is probably Professor Driver's *Commentary on Genesis*, in the series known as the 'Westminster Commentaries.' He also has some useful remarks upon it in Hogarth's *Authority and Archeology*, pp. 9-18, and in an article in the *Expositor* of January 1901, 'The O.T. in the Light of To-day.' A somewhat more technical treatment will be found in the article on 'Cosmogony,' in Hastings' *D.B.*, by Whitehouse, and in Dillmann's *Commentary on Genesis*, which has been translated into English. The relation of the Creation story to modern science is dwelt on by H. Morton in *The Cosmogony of Genesis and its*

*Reconcilers*. The Babylonian cosmogony is discussed in Jastrow's work, *The Religion of the Babylonians and Assyrians*. An enlarged German edition has recently been published, but the earlier edition was written in English, and the cosmogony will be found on pp. 407 ff. The actual text of the Babylonian poem is translated by L. W. King of the British Museum, in *The Seven Tablets of Creation*.

It is not our present purpose to examine minutely the details of the Creation story in their relation to modern scientific discovery, though some of them will come before us in the course of our study. It is of little practical use to investigate the extent to which the ideas of the early Semites happened to coincide with, or to differ from, the conclusions

of modern astronomy, geology, biology, and physics. If we look at Scripture itself for its own claim to inspiration, we find it in St. Paul's words in 2 Tim, that all inspired scripture is 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness.' Whether, then, the first chapter of Genesis was written by Moses or (as is infinitely more probable) was compiled by a priest after the Exile who reduced to writing traditions which had been handed down for many generations, the permanent spiritual value of it remains unaltered.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the chosen people are called 'God's House'; and the Creation story is a sublime portico before the house; it shows how everything in the Universe was prepared for their existence.

The following remarks will be confined strictly to the first chapter of Genesis; because though chap. 2<sup>1-3</sup>, which tells of God's rest on the seventh day, is probably by the same writer, it is really a sequel to the Creation story, and not part of it.

The chapter deals with three main subjects: *A.* God; *B.* The material world; and *C.* Man.

#### *A.* God.

In order to show up more completely the beauty of the picture before us, let us first look at a dark background. There can be no doubt that, in a dim and distant past, the Hebrew story had affinities with the Babylonian story, large portions of which have been preserved for us.

In the Babylonian story the universe consisted of a watery mass, which was pictured as a dragon called Tiamat. Out of this watery mass the gods were mysteriously evolved—Lahmu and Lahamu, Anshar and Kishar, Anu and Ea, and above all the great hero-god Marduk. (The name appears in Hebrew as Merodach, in Jer 50<sup>2</sup>, and in the name of the king Merodach-bal-adan, who sent an embassy to Hezekiah.) It is possible that the story was originally suggested to the Babylonians by the physical features of their country. The great plain surrounding the city of Babylon is in winter covered with water from heavy rain floods; but in spring the sun vanquishes the water, so that dry land emerges and bursts forth into vegetation. So the Babylonians seem to picture the world as beginning in spring-time, when the watery mass Tiamat, with a brood of horrible fiends in alliance with her, was vanquished by Marduk. The gods

at a banquet appointed Marduk to do battle; he equipped himself with winds and lightning; he caught Tiamat in a net and transfixed her with a sword. He then cut her like a fish in two halves. One half was apparently the abyss of water on which the dry earth was supposed to rest, while the other half he stretched as a solid lid or canopy which kept out the upper waters from falling.

Against this background of crass and futile polytheism, place the strong solemn words of the Hebrew narrative: 'In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formlessness and emptiness, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the breath of God was brooding over the face of the waters, God said, Let there be light, and there was light.'

The Hebrew story, like the Babylonian, has a primeval watery mass, 'the deep.' The Hebrew word *Tehōm* is the same as the Babylonian Tiamat. But the contrast of conceptions with regard to God is complete. He fights against no other being; He is encouraged by no other deity. The heavenly bodies, which to the Babylonians were gods, He fastens into the firmament in the places which He chooses.

The first truth which stands out is the supreme unity of God. The Babylonians gave severally to the dragon and her fiends, and to each deity in the host of gods, an individuality, a power of thought and will. But to the Hebrews, the one God stands alone, set over against darkness, and an abyss of shapeless water. It matters not that modern science brings the universe back to spiral nebulae of fire; modern science is doubtless right. But whether it were fire or water, the truth of the unity of God is an infinitely greater truth, of which mere science can tell us nothing.

And modern science is equally helpless in the presence of another great problem—the origin of life. The Babylonian story relates that Marduk made the heavenly bodies, and vegetation and man; but the Hebrew account strikes far deeper. 'The Spirit, or Breath, of God was brooding.' Breath stands for life; and God's own life was brooding over the watery mass, infusing into it the hidden potential power of life and energy which should spring forth when he willed it. It is quite evident that the *picture* is poetical and legendary; but the spiritual truth that God is the First Source and Cause of Life is none the less true.

Then comes a grand statement—a piece of

spiritual genius—or, in other words, an inspired revelation. V.<sup>3</sup> begins 'God said.' At each stage in creation, ten times over, the words recur. It has often been pointed out that this teaches the ease with which God accomplished His work, and His omnipotent power. But it means much more than that. Science, in insisting that the world is a world of order, dwells on the fact that every effect has a cause; and those who never look beyond the limits of mere science make the mistake of thinking that everything is produced *automatically* from a foregoing production. Again, Pantheism says in effect that the whole universe with its incessant change and development and decay is, in its sum total, identical with a unifying but impersonal principle, which may for convenience be called God—or Nature, or Force, or Law, or Causation, or any other similarly indefinite term. But the Hebrew revelation teaches that every stage in creation is the result of a conscious act of will; that God is not automatic, but advances by deliberate purpose. And His 'word' is the outward expression of His will, the means or agency through which His will takes effect. As the Epistle to the Hebrews says (11<sup>8</sup>), 'By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the utterance of God.' Therefore—note the great conclusion—God is Personal; a conscious will implies personality.

Thus, at the outset, the Creation story, as purified and spiritualized by the inspired Hebrew mind, teaches the three fundamental facts on which religion stands—that God is One; that He is the Primary Source of all life; and that He is Personal at least as truly as man is personal, because He performs actions by a conscious exercise of will. If it taught no more, the chapter would possess a deep and permanent value.

But it contains the germ of far more. Consider the three expressions: 'God created,' 'The Breath of God was brooding,' and 'God said.' It was long before men learnt to realize that within the unity of God was contained a community of Persons. But the great glory of Christianity—the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—did not spring fully formed all at once into men's consciousness. It grew out of an earlier conception, namely, that the One God could be considered under diverse aspects. The one ego of man has a vital principle—a life—which finds concrete expression in the breath of his body. And again, by a conscious

act of will, the ego can use that breath as an agent for the production of speech, so that the word spoken is an outward expression of the will. This human illustration is, of course, inadequate as an analogue of the three Divine Persons whom Christianity worships; but it is more nearly adequate to illustrate the primitive germ of the truth, the threefold idea which the Hebrew legend contains: God the Supreme Ego; the brooding life-giving Breath; and the uttered word by which the Divine Will found expression.

Thus to pass from the opening sentences of Genesis to the opening sentences of St. John's Gospel, is to pass from the seed to the full-grown tree. But the presence of the seed-thought alone adds a value to the Creation story which cannot be measured.

#### B. THE MATERIAL WORLD.

We can now pass to the second stage in the teaching of this wonderful chapter—The relation of the material universe to God.

But before studying the direct spiritual teaching on the subject, one striking fact should be noticed. Though the writer purifies the Babylonian legend, and reaches far deeper into religious truth, his reticence keeps him from making an addition to it, which he might easily have made with disastrous results. The opening words should almost certainly be translated with a different punctuation to that of the English Version. 'In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formlessness and emptiness, and darkness was upon the face of the abyss, and the Breath of God was brooding upon the face of the waters—God said, Let there be light.' The shape of the sentences thus formed corresponds to that of the opening words of the Babylonian poem. There is thus a considerable parenthesis thrown into the middle of the direct statement, 'In the beginning, God said, Let there be light.' In the English Version the last of the parenthetical clauses is rendered, 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'; but this conveys quite a false impression. The curtain rises, so to speak, on a great drama; and the Breath of God is seen brooding like a bird over a formless mass of waters. That is to say, the formless mass is conceived as already in existence; not in existence before God, but before the beginning of the present order of things, before He created the heavens and

the earth. The word בָּרָא, 'to create,' is derived from a root which appears to mean 'to cut,' or 'to carve out.' In the simple active voice it is used only of God's creative action; but in the intensive voice it is used of men. For instance, Joshua bade the Ephraimites carve out a place for themselves by cutting down the forests in the hill country (Jos 17<sup>15</sup>). The word, therefore, does not of itself necessarily imply, 'To bring into being *out of nothing*.' The Hebrew legend represents matter as existing in a formless state, without content or meaning or life, before the creation. And we may be thankful that the writer did not attempt to explain the origin of matter. The deepest philosophy has never fathomed it. We can say that since God is infinite, it appears to our minds as though matter must be included in Him. But whether it has always existed within His infinity, whether it places a limit to His infinity to conceive of matter as at one time non-existent, and if not, how and why He caused it to exist, are problems beyond the mind of man. And had the Hebrew writer attempted a theory, it might have proved a stumbling-block to the faith of many whose philosophic convictions led them to reject his solution.

But though the origin of matter has not been revealed to us, we can ask, What is the theological—the spiritual—meaning of the successive acts of creation? What effect was produced by God's word upon the formless abyss of matter?

It can scarcely be necessary to dwell on the fact that the description in the Creation story is not in accord with the results of scientific discovery. Light is formed out of an unformed abyss of water, before the sun, moon, and stars. The sky is a solid canopy, like a metal plate beaten flat; that is the meaning of the word, עִקֵּי, LXX στερέωμα, something firm or solid, the firmament. It keeps asunder the upper waters from the lower, and answers to the half of the dragon's body in the Babylonian legend, which was beaten flat and stretched over the earth. And in other parts of the O.T. the Semitic belief is clearly expressed that this solid canopy is pierced with windows, through which God allows the upper waters to fall in the form of rain. Again, vegetation appears before the formation of the heavenly bodies. All live animals appear later than vegetation. And, finally, each stage occupies one day. Now, science denies absolutely that there was light alternating with

darkness before the existence of the heavenly bodies; that the sky is a solid canopy with waters above it; that vegetation appeared before the sun; that all animal life was evolved later than vegetable life; and that the whole process occupied six days. Even if the word 'day,' which the Hebrew writer distinctly describes as being composed of an evening and a morning, could be made to mean a vast period of time, which it does nowhere else in Hebrew literature, the other difficulties would remain. We look, then, not for scientific accuracy, but for a spiritual conception of the relation of the physical world to God. And we find this: That the world is framed in an orderly course, of which man is the climax; and that each stage in the course is the result of God's Word, that is, His deliberate self-conscious Will, manifesting itself in outward expression.

This can best be understood by contrasting it with two opposite views, which are false, because each contains only half the truth.

Pantheism conceives of God as immanent in the world in such a way that He *is* the world. The Universe, or Nature, or God are synonymous terms. Evolution, progress, change of any kind is purely *automatic*, working from within. On the other hand, Deism places God at a far distance above the world, in an isolated transcendence. To use a simile frequently employed, He made the world as a watchmaker makes a watch. He set it going once for all, and now sits on high and looks at it as it works. In either case, in Pantheism and in Deism, change and progress are *automatic*.

But the Hebrew view is truer, because it combines the two. By a continuous activity of a conscious transcendent will, God causes His immanent power to bring about each stage in the evolution. His Breath never ceases to brood; His Word never ceases to be uttered. The Hebrew legend describes the beginnings of this state of things, and justifies us in believing that it still continues. If God said, 'Let there be light,' He still says it; and there is light. If He said, 'Let there be heavenly bodies, and vegetation, and animals, and human beings,' He still says it, so that all these earthly phenomena still abide by a ceaseless process of creative energy. And this is not pantheism, because a conscious will is always deliberately at work.

The Epistle to the Hebrews expresses this truth. In 1<sup>2</sup> the writer says that God has spoken to us in

a Son, through whom He made the worlds. But immediately afterwards he pictures the Son as 'upholding all things by the utterance of his power'; that is, not upholding as an Atlas, bearing the burden of a world, but *φέρων τὰ πάντα*, 'carrying all things along,' incessantly and consciously, by His deliberate utterance, causing the onward movement of progress and evolution to continue.

What are we to say, then, of the Laws of Nature? What room is there for the unswerving chain of cause and effect which is evident throughout the known universe? The absolute orderliness of the world is picturesquely described in the Creation story, by saying that each stage followed in an unbroken succession of six days. The writer knew, what modern science is daily making clearer, that the world is a *κόσμος*, a world of order. But the Laws of Nature are not contrary to the conception of God's deliberate will acting in nature at every moment. A Law of Nature is simply a term which implies that under given circumstances something normally occurs. When we speak of the Law of Gravitation, we do not mean that the law makes a body tend to fall towards the centre of the earth; we only mean that, as a matter of observed fact, bodies normally do tend to fall in that direction. If we may say it reverently, the conscious will of God always works in an orderly way. The human will is so fickle, so unable to work long in an unswerving path, that we find it hard to conceive of a Will which never swerves and which has no variableness. We shall get a true conception of the world only if we realise that a Law of Nature is a term which expresses *the invariable action of an unswerving will*. Every time the centre of gravity of a body is unsupported, God consciously exercises His will; God says, 'Let it fall,' and it falls.

And the Creation story itself supplies an illustration of this. The writer hits upon one instance of God's orderly, unswerving method of working—that which we call the Law of Heredity. Vegetables, fish of the sea, animals on the land, all bring forth after their kinds. The reproduction of species is not an automatic process, following the dictates of a blind fate. At each several instance, God said—and God still says—Let it bring forth after its kind.

And from this thought we are led to a natural corollary. If God's conscious will is always acting

in every several atom of the universe, it follows that all thinkers who have taught that the physical world is inherently evil are wrong.

Matter cannot be evil if the Breath of God is always brooding over it, and the Word of God is always acting upon it. Five times the story says that God saw that the work of a particular day was good. And at last, in v.<sup>31</sup>, God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. It was in direct contradiction to mistaken teachers that St. Paul wrote to Timothy, *πάν κτίσμα Θεοῦ καλόν*, 'every thing created by God is good.' And because it is good, God takes pleasure in it.

And we may extend the thought farther. If the world were the automatic product of an impersonal Force, we may take it as probable that though the so-called Laws of Nature would be rigidly exact, though scientific investigation would find a field for its work exactly as it does now, yet the visible appearance of such a world would not possess the unspeakable beauty of Nature, as we know it. See Mozley's University Sermon on the *Beauty of Nature* as one of the arguments which contribute towards a belief in the existence of God.

### C. MAN.

There now remains the third great subject of which the Creation story treats. 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'

Now, we must not make the Hebrew writer teach more than his words will bear. It is often maintained that the use of the first person plural, 'Let us make man,' is a definite implication of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; that there were distinct Persons on an equality with God, with whom He took counsel and acted in union. But if a writer within Old Testament times had had such a clear conception of the doctrine as that, it is inconceivable that he should have been entirely alone in his belief, and that he or some of his contemporaries should not have stated it explicitly and enforced the teaching upon their countrymen. We have detected in the earlier verses the germ out of which the doctrine could grow; but I feel quite certain that it is not taught in this verse. Nor can the words, as some rabbinic writers suggested, imply the existence of angels, with whom God took counsel. We might possibly imagine God saying to the angels, Let us make man, as though asking for their interest and sympathy with Him in His work; but He could not say to them

'in our image, after our likeness.' The plural can be nothing but what is called the plural of majesty. Our sovereign to-day says 'We' in an official utterance or document. And in the Hebrew language the words for Master and Lord were often used in the plural, with the same force.

This third stage in the story teaches that man is the climax of creation; he is to have dominion over the rest of created things. To us the truth is a truism; but it was far in advance of the conceptions of pagan peoples, who in their pantheism identified all natural objects with gods and goddesses, and worshipped as Divine the heavenly bodies, animals, trees, rivers, and stones. Man was to them practically the one created thing which could not be worshipped. In the story before us man stands on the highest rung of evolution because he is made in God's Image. (Professor Driver points out that the distinction between Image and Likeness cannot be pressed; 'both words,' he says, 'refer here evidently to spiritual resemblance only: and the duplication of synonyms is intended simply to convey the idea of resemblance.'))

Man, and man alone, is allied to the Divine Nature; not only primitive man before the Fall, but all men are partakers of the Divine Nature. They possess a self-conscious reason which enables them to hold communion with God, and to love Him, and to strive after ideals. The writer of the eighth Psalm says, 'Thou madest him a little lower than God,' or, more literally, 'Thou madest him to lack but little of Divinity.'

But here again, the spiritual value of the Creation story does not lie merely in the statement that man was distinct from the beasts by being made in the Image of God. It lies rather in the fact that this too is a seed thought, from which a greater truth could grow. If God made man in His Image, He could go farther, and bring into earthly conditions a Representative Man, who should be, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'The exact impress of His essence.' Man, *with his sins*, is not the climax of evolution. That is reached in the Man who did no sin, 'who is the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation; for in Him were all things created . . . all things have been created through Him and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things have cohesion . . . for it was the good pleasure [of God] that in Him should all the fulness [of the Godhead] dwell.'

And, by vital union with Him, sin-stained man can rise to the height for which he was destined, and become the climax of the creation of God.

Let us sum up the main truths that can be gleaned from our chapter. We can take our three headings and place four points under each.

A. With regard to God—

1. God is supremely and absolutely One.
2. God is the Primal Source and Cause of all life; His Breath is Life.
3. God is possessed of conscious Will, and must therefore be not less personal than man.
4. God can thus be conceived of under three aspects: The Supreme Divine Ego; His Breath, or life-giving Spirit; and His Word the active expression of His will. We thus have the germ from which could grow the Christian doctrine of three *Persons* in one God.

B. With regard to the World—

1. The origin of matter is a problem which the writer was content to leave unsolved.
2. The progress and development of the world is not automatic; it is borne along by the continuous active expression of a Will which is so orderly and unswerving that its operations have given rise to our popular and quite unsatisfactory expression, 'the Laws of Nature.' Thus God is neither immanent in the world in a pantheistic sense, nor transcendent above the world in a deistic sense; but He is both transcendent and immanent.
3. A single instance which illustrates the unswerving orderliness of God's will is the Law of Heredity—*i.e.* the observed fact that all living creatures normally bring forth after their respective kinds.
4. Since God by His transcendent Will is always immanent in matter, matter cannot be inherently evil; God takes pleasure in it.

C. With regard to Man—

1. Although the order of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is not in accord with the results of scientific discovery,

it does so far accord with it that man is placed as the climax of evolution.

2. And he is so because, by the gift of self-conscious reason, he was made an adumbration of God's own Personality.
3. And this made it possible for God's Personality—His Fulness—His entire Nature and Being—to be completely revealed in Man.
4. It is revealed actually in the Representative God-Man, and potentially in all who are spiritually united to Him.

With this mass of deep truth shining in the Creation story, is it not what St. Paul would call a return to 'the beggarly elements' to attempt to reconcile the details with science? It is, to use the language of our schoolboy days, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning—that is, a parable.

And may I say that, if we are convinced of this in our own minds, it is wrong, absolutely wrong, to teach the story to others in such a way as to make it appear as though we thought it historically true.

The question naturally arises, What is to be done in teaching it to children or to ignorant adults? The answer is, I think, threefold:

1. If we feel drawn to teach it, we must teach it with a tender spiritual tact and wisdom; and if any man lacks such wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally.

2. If we are still afraid of teaching it, and feel pretty certain that we cannot do so without doing more harm than good, then I am quite sure that it is our sacred duty to refrain from teaching it altogether.

3. I believe that if put quite simply and naturally it can be taught to children. It is sometimes said that children, when hearing a story, will not appreciate it unless they know it to be a 'true story.' But few, if any, of those who have had a large experience in teaching children, have found that to be the case.

They will take it in and enjoy it if it is presented to them as a beautiful parable, just as they do any of our Lord's parables. It is of the first importance that a young man or woman should never have to unlearn anything that they have been taught as children. And if they are taught that the first chapter of Genesis is historically and scientifically accurate, they will inevitably unlearn it in the course of a few years; and the great trial to their faith, which will probably ensue, will lie at the door of those who taught them in their childhood things that they themselves knew to be wrong.

In teaching the spiritual meaning of the Creation story, or of any other part of the Bible—all of which was written by the hands of weak human beings, we can take our stand with St. Paul as 'ministers of a new covenant; *not of the letter*, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'

## The Pilgrim's Progress.

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### The Slough of Despond.

ONE of the greatest dangers to life, and especially to travel, in the England of old days, arose from those deep and treacherous morasses which it has taken centuries to drain. As early as the days of the Arthurian legend, chivalry at its best had felt this, among other duties of the knight, incumbent on it—a fact to which Tennyson refers finely in his 'Arthur.' In every county of England there were many 'sloughs' in those days, and tradition has fixed upon one near Bedford for the suggestion

of this picture. A modern annotator quotes the striking lines—

Where hardly a human foot could pass  
Or a human heart would dare;  
On the quaking turf of the green morass,  
His all he had trusted there.

What does this slough mean in the allegory? Christian's own explanation gives the clue; his fall here is the work of fear. It is the despondency of reaction which, if it become permanent, may deepen into religious monomania. It is to