

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN, EGYPTOLOGY, AND ASSYRIOLOGY.*

#### I. THE SACRED CHRONOLOGY.

IN the great ranges of investigation which bear most directly upon the origin of man, there are two in which Science within the last few years has gained final victories. The significance of these in changing, and ultimately in reversing, one of the greatest currents of theological thought, can hardly be overestimated; not even the tide set in motion by Cusa, Copernicus, and Galileo was more powerful to bring in a new epoch of belief.

The first of these conquests relates to the antiquity of man on the earth.

The fathers of the early Christian Church, receiving all parts of our sacred books as equally inspired, laid little, if any, less stress on the myths, legends, genealogies, and tribal, family, and personal traditions contained in the Old and the New Testaments, than upon the most powerful appeals, the most instructive apologues, and the most lofty poems of prophets, psalmists, and apostles. As to the age of our planet and the life of man upon it, they found in the Bible a carefully recorded series of periods, extending from Adam to the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, the length of each period being explicitly given.

Thus they had a biblical chronology—full, consecutive, and definite—extending from the first man created to an event of known date well within ascertained profane history; as a result, the early Christian commentators arrived at conclusions varying somewhat, but in the main agree-

ing. Some, like Origen, Eusebius, Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria, and the great fathers generally of the first three centuries, dwelling especially upon the Septuagint version of the Scriptures, thought that man's creation took place about six thousand years before the Christian era. Strong confirmation of this view was found in a simple piece of purely theological reasoning: for, just as the seven candlesticks of the Apocalypse were long held to prove the existence of seven heavenly bodies revolving about the earth, so it was felt that the six days of creation prefigured six thousand years during which the earth in its first form was to endure; and that, as the first Adam came on the sixth day, Christ, the second Adam, had come at the sixth millennial period. Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, in the second century clinched this argument with the text, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years."

On the other hand, Eusebius and St. Jerome, dwelling more especially upon the Hebrew text, which we are brought up to revere, thought that man's origin took place at a somewhat shorter period before the Christian era; and St. Jerome's overwhelming authority made this the dominant view throughout western Europe during fifteen centuries.

The simplicity of these great fathers as regards chronology is especially reflected from the tables of Eusebius. In these, Moses, Joshua, and Bacchus,—Deborah, Orpheus, and the Amazons,—Abimelech, the Sphinx, and Œdipus, appear together as personages equally real, and their positions in chronology equally ascertained.

At times great bitterness was aroused between those holding the longer and those holding the shorter chronology, but after all the difference between them, as we now see, was trivial; and it may be broadly stated that in the early Church, "always, everywhere, and by all," it was held as certain, upon the absolute warrant of Scripture, that man was created from four to six thousand years before the Christian era.

To doubt this, and even much less than this, was to risk damnation. St. Augustine insisted that belief in the antipodes and in the longer duration of the earth than six thousand years were deadly heresies, equally hostile to Scripture.

**Philastrius**, the friend of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, whose fearful catalogue of heresies served as a guide to intolerance throughout the Middle Ages, condemned with the same holy horror those who expressed doubt as to the orthodox number of years since the beginning of the world, and those who doubted an earthquake to be the literal voice of an angry God, or who questioned the plurality of the heavens, or who gainsaid the statement that God brings out the stars from his treasures and hangs them up in the solid firmament above the earth every night.

About the beginning of the seventh century **Isidore of Seville**, the great theologian of his time, took up the subject. He accepted the dominant view not only of Hebrew but of all other chronologies, without anything like real criticism. The childlike faith of his system may be imagined from his summaries which follow. He tells us:

“Joseph lived one hundred and five years. Greece began to cultivate grain.”

“The Jews were in slavery in Egypt one hundred and forty-four years. Atlas discovered astrology.”

“Joshua ruled for twenty-seven years. Ericthonius yoked horses together.”

“Othniel, forty years. Cadmus introduced letters into Greece.”

“Deborah, forty years. Apollo discovered the art of medicine and invented the cithara.”

“Gideon, forty years. Mercury invented the lyre and gave it to Orpheus.”

Reasoning in this general way, Isidore kept well under the longer date; and, the great theological authority of southern Europe having thus spoken, the question was virtually at rest throughout Christendom for nearly a hundred years.

Early in the eighth century the Venerable **Bede** took up the problem. Dwelling especially upon the received Hebrew text of the Old Testament, he soon entangled himself in very serious difficulties; but, in spite of the great fathers of the first three centuries, he reduced the antiquity of man on the earth by nearly a thousand years, and, in spite of mutterings against him as coming dangerously near a limit

which made the theological argument from the six days of creation to the six ages of the world look doubtful, his authority had great weight, and did much to fix western Europe in its allegiance to the general system laid down by Eusebius and Jerome.

In the twelfth century this belief was re-enforced by a tide of thought from a very different quarter. Rabbi Moses Maimonides and other Jewish scholars, by careful study of the Hebrew text, arrived at conclusions diminishing the antiquity of man still further, and thus gave strength throughout the Middle Ages to the shorter chronology: it was incorporated into the sacred science of Christianity; and Vincent of Beauvais, in his great *Speculum Historiale*, forming part of that still more enormous work intended to sum up all the knowledge possessed by the ages of faith, placed the creation of man at about four thousand years before our era.\*

At the Reformation this view was not disturbed. The same manner of accepting the sacred text which led Luther, Melanchthon, and the great Protestant leaders generally, to oppose the Copernican theory, fixed them firmly in this biblical chronology; the keynote was sounded for them by Luther when he said, "We know, on the authority of Moses, that longer ago than six thousand years the world did not exist." Melanchthon, more exact, fixed the creation of man at 3963 B. C.

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\* For a table summing up the periods, from Adam to the building of the Temple, explicitly given in the Scriptures, see the admirable paper on *The Pope and the Bible*, in *The Contemporary Review* for April, 1893. For the date of man's creation as given by leading chronologists in various branches of the Church, see *L'Art de Vérifier les Dates*, Paris, 1819, vol. i, pp. 27 et seq. In this edition there are sundry typographical errors; compare with Wallace, *True Age of the World*, London, 1844. As to preference for the longer computation by the fathers of the Church, see Clinton, *Fasti Hellenici*, vol. ii, p. 291. For the sacred significance of the six days of creation in ascertaining the antiquity of man, see especially Eicken, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Weltanschauung*; also Wallace, *True Age of the World*, pp. 2, 3. For the views of St. Augustine, see Topinard, *Anthropologie*, citing the *De Civ. Dei.*, lib. xvi, c. viii, lib. xii, c. x. For the views of Philastrius, see the *De Hæresibus*, c. 102, 112, et passim, in Migne, tome xii. For Eusebius's simple credulity, see the tables in Palmer's *Egyptian Chronicles*, vol. ii, pp. 828, 829. For Bede, see Usher's *Chronologia Sacra*, cited in Wallace, *True Age of the World*, p. 35. For Isidore of Seville, see the *Etymologia*, lib. v, c. 39; also lib. iii, in Migne, tome lxxxii.

