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John A. Weir

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THE BOOK OF THE BEGINNING.*

The first book of Revelation possesses a charm and an importance which fill the mind and which it is not easy to describe. As prophecy goes miraculously before, so Genesis goes miraculously behind, all events of the world's history that could be recorded or remembered. It tells us the beginnings of all the things and all the arrangements in which we are most deeply interested, not only of the world and of all the orders of beings inhabiting it; but of our moral condition, of sin and redemption; of the church and society; of true religion and of heathenism; of life and death; of crime and punishment; of the family, the tribe, and the nation. Here we see God emerging from timeless, formless eternity, and descending to the limitations of creative activity. Here is the beginning of matter, of time, of space, and of form. Here the fire-mist of a boundless chaos, without form and void, resolves itself, under the broodings of the Spirit of God, into a beautiful world, tenanted by happy sentient beings, and by the last work of all, the roof and crown of things—the free, moral, religious being—man. Here, at the beginning, stand the lost purity, the lost joy, the lost Paradise of the race. Here is man's monstrous failure, and God's instant promise of a far greater recovery through a Hero-Redeemer. Here is the first profession of faith in the divine promise, which separates from the world, and which, in Abraham as in Peter, is the immovable rock on which the church of God is founded.

What battles of giants have been, and are now being fought between truth and error, between the Bible and science, falsely so called, for the occupancy of this ground, so early pre-empted by the Holy Ghost through Moses! It is a life-struggle. Yield but this commanding ground to error, and it will cover the whole region of revelation. Let but a false philosophy, Materialism, Pantheism, Positivism, sway our ideas of the beginnings of things, and we have assented to the premises of all their arguments. Deny the fall, doubt its historic reality, and you cast away the foundations of New Testament theology. Deny the facts of the first three chapters of Genesis, and you turn the story of Gethsemane and of Calvary into a shallow human tragedy.

Geology, astronomy, psychology, zoology, ethnology, philology, chronology, historical criticism and research in ancient ruins have all been arrayed in hostility to Moses. And in spite of the frequent failure of similar attempts, each age seems to bring up the old objections in a new fashion, besides inventing new ones for itself. Not only is an immense age ascribed to the unformed matter of the earth, but vast geologic epochs are put over against the simple six days of Moses; and the contents of caves and peat-bogs are supposed to give a far different and more trustworthy account of the age of man than Genesis. Indeed, the very idea of beginning is replaced, in a pretentious school of modern naturalists, by that of infinitesimally gradual development; and a freak of scientific imagination is regarded as worthier of credence than a sober simple statement of the alone adequate cause of all things—the miracle of creation. The immense chronologies of Egypt and China are set over against the six thousand years of the Scriptural chronology. The persistent character of the various types of mankind, as shown by ancient monuments, is made an argument against the chronology or the ethnology of the Bible. The rejection of one error—that of Darwinism—is put upon the ground of another, equally destructive of the claims of Moses to historical credibility,—that of the diverse origin of different races of men and other living things. While historical and grammatical criticism expatiates, as if under special license, over all these primitive documents, defying its own laws in its intemperate zeal to destroy their authenticity, their integrity, their antiquity. "It reduces the Old Scriptures not only to fragments, but to fragments of fragments in most ill-assorted and jumbled confusion. Its supporters find themselves at last in direct opposition to their favorite maxim, that the Bible must be interpreted as though written like other books. For surely no book was ever so composed or so compiled. In the same portion, presenting every appearance of narrative unity, they find the strangest juxta-

positions of passages from different authors and written at different times. There are the most sudden transitions even in small paragraphs, having not only a logical, but a grammatical connection. To make the confusion worse, there is brought in occasionally a third or a fourth writer, an editor, or reviewer, and all this without any of those actual proofs or tests, which are applied to other ancient writings, and in the use of which this 'higher criticism,' as it calls itself, is so much inclined to vaunt."*

A Commentary on the Book of Genesis which will meet the demands not only of this enormous adverse criticism, but of the healthful spirit of inquiry in the church itself, will be one of the highest and most meritorious achievements of modern Christian culture. English-speaking scholars have not, as yet, produced such a work. Commentaries on Genesis, which, in the sense required in this day, can be called good, have scarcely been attempted in England or America. After Bush, a whole generation passed, and only yesterday the comparatively brief works of Murphy and Jacobus broke the silence of our Biblical scholars, on this, in many respects the most important and interesting book of the whole Bible. Their books, indeed, have true merit, but they are still more interesting as heralds of a better, broader and more satisfactory era of criticism and interpretation in this important field. It is to the believing section of the indefatigable Bible-workers of Germany that we turn for adequate methods and material in the interpretation of Genesis. Combined with the best results of the more clear-headed, direct and practical Christian thought of America, it would produce a work which must needs be accepted as the last and best word of Christendom on these ancient and profound problems of Revelation. **LANGER'S COMMENTARY ON GENESIS**, with the emendations of its American editors, especially of **TAYLER LEWIS**, may, on these grounds, justly claim pre-eminence among all that have yet appeared. Its issue last week from the press of Scribner & Co., may, without exaggeration, be described as an epoch in the history of Old Testament Exegesis in England and America. Its complete introductory apparatus, including also an introduction to the whole Old Testament, the special introduction of Prof. Tayler Lewis, as well as his learned and vigorously written contributions at various points in the body of the work, (twenty-nine in all), greatly enhance its value. Difficulties are rather welcomed than evaded by the indefatigable author and his associates; some answer, worthy of his regard, will be found by the inquirer, to every reasonable question he may raise. It is, indeed, more than could be expected of any human work that it should satisfy all who consult it. Certainly we may say, without hesitation, that it sensibly aids in the great work of reconciling faith and reason on some of these long debated and momentous topics.

The theological world is already deeply indebted to the publishers of this volume. And the unwavering energy, enterprise, and liberality with which they are carrying forward this greatest biblical work of the age, is settling their claim to pre-eminence in this line of the publishing business in the Western world.

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* **Tayler Lewis.**

LIST OF REVIVALS.

A gratifying, but very imperfect table of revivals since the new year, in our branch of the Church, will be found on one of the inside pages. In this, the names of one hundred and forty-eight churches are given, in which more or less powerful manifestations of the Spirit's converting grace have appeared. Only sixty-nine of the churches have reported the number received on examination; the total reported from these is 1956. It is, perhaps, safe to assume that nearly four thousand persons have been admitted to the 148 churches on the list, since the beginning of the year. Consulting our files for the corresponding period last year, we find only about half this number of revivals reported, the average results of which, in each instance, certainly do not exceed those which we now summarize. However, we think it has been observed that the revival season, so to speak, commenced later this year than last. The indications often vouchsafed, in an encouraging degree, in the last quarter of the year, were missing amid the commercial embarrassments and political excitements of the season of 1867, and only with the week of prayer did we seem to enter upon an era of spiritual refreshing which seems to be approaching more and more to a continuous state of the Evangelical churches.

With these limitations as to time, we think the revival of the present year will be found quite as powerful and pervading, quite as rich in results numerically, and as to the quality of the material gathered in, quite as promotive of lay activity in

new forms and in old, as any of those preceding it in recent times.

PUBLICATION COMMITTEE'S LIST.

Nine new volumes are about being added to the Committee's excellent list of Sunday-school and juvenile books. The good judgment, care and thorough evangelical spirit hitherto shown by the Committee in this department of their work, not to the exclusion of the necessary elements of interest in plot and style, will be found to be exemplified in these new volumes. Parents and teachers are never heard to complain of anything wrong or inappropriate slipping into the hands of their children from the list of the Committee. Nor will they hear the children accuse these portions of the library of dullness. Purchasers may buy securely, knowing that an adequate and conscientious judgment has already been pronounced by the Secretary, Rev. Mr. Dulles, and his faithful and competent sub-committee, while the externals of typography and that indispensable adjunct, well-drawn and handsome illustrations, are skillfully provided by the Business Agent, Rev. Mr. Critchfield. The course of the Committee is steadily onward. A larger income will enable them to call out a wider range and perhaps a higher degree of ability; but no publication enterprise of any branch of the Church is using what it possesses more satisfactorily to the Christian public.

EXTRAORDINARY ASSUMPTIONS.

It is difficult to characterize with sufficient severity the assumption of exclusive orthodoxy, Calvinism, and conformity to the theology of the Reformation, which are so coolly and habitually made by the public men and organs of the other branch. Surely they are the people and Calvinism will die with them. All who do not understand the Confession or the Reformed sense as they do, are incontinently denounced as rejecting it. And there is little or no hesitation in ascribing insincerity, or wickedness, or downright falsehood to those who claim to hold the system, but who will not conform to their precise view of it. An illustration of these lofty and ridiculous pretensions to the exclusive possession of the Westminster standards, and of historic Calvinism is found in the following extract from the *Presbyterian* of last week. The italics are our own.

Another point which is gradually disclosing itself is, that the doctrinal portion of the Basis proposed by the Philadelphia Convention is not agreeable to a number of our New School brethren. It was adopted by their representatives in this Convention, after it had been amended in an important particular by Dr. Henry B. Smith, one of the acknowledged leaders of the New School Presbyterian Church. But it is not accepted, in its pure and simple form, by many in the ministry, and perhaps many in the eldership in the New School branch of the Church. The additions proposed to be made to it in various quarters, in the way of providing for liberty of interpretation or of explanation, show the nature of the objections made to it. It is thought to bind a little too tight. It does not fit easily upon limbs which have hitherto been unrestrained. This again re-acts upon the Old School men who heartily consented to this part of the Philadelphia platform, but who now begin to suspect that this particular plank in the platform is not so strong as they thought it to be, or that others have a singular facility for slipping off from it, and jumping on again as occasion may offer. The wide acceptance which the Philadelphia Basis met with, grew out of the persuasion that it was fully, honestly accepted by the churches represented in that Convention. The discovery that the New School Church cannot receive it without amendment excites apprehension, and much abates the generous enthusiasm which marked that famous Convention.

The single meaning of this paragraph is: Because we have protested that by historic or Reformed sense, we did not mean the sense of a single modern Coccian school of Reformed doctrine; because we did not intend to be bound by the interpretation of Princeton and of Allegheny, therefore we rejected the Reformed sense entirely! Did ever any observer of regenerate or unregenerate humanity meet with such an illustration of the evangelical grace of humility? Will any one doubt that *Asop* actually did see a frog trying to achieve the dimensions and importance of an ox, since this croaking school of theology tries to erect itself into the entire Reformation Calvinism,—to comprehend in itself the vast and many-sided movement of Calvinistic thought? We warn our Princeton friends, who, as representing one of these great Calvinistic movements, are worthy of all honor and respect, to desist from the perilous and ridiculous role of the ambitious frog. It is belittling, and if persisted in, is sure to lead to a melancholy catastrophe.

As for ourselves, we can always find something better to do than to argue with those who doubt our honesty. We need only say that the amendments suggested on our side to the Philadelphia platform, are designed to guard it from a one-sided interpretation. Those who choose may insinuate that we mean covertly to abandon it. We are glad to find from the regular correspond-

dence of the same paper, that there are some important persons on its field who take diametrically opposite views, on this subject, to those of the editor. We refer to the letter of its Rochester correspondent, "Doulos Christou," upon the late Buffalo Convention, which, our readers will remember, exhibited in speeches and resolutions the utmost readiness, on both sides, to allow this New School idea of a diversity not inconsistent with Calvinistic unity. The extract is as follows:

"The most marked approbation was given when Dr. Hall, of Rochester, one of the staunchest Old School men, and in the day of war among the boldest and most uncompromising, exclaimed, 'My soul carries still the scars of a veteran, but it indignantly and vehemently revolts at the idea of using the union as a trap by which to catch heretics.' The resolutions reported were the work of Dr. Walter Clark, of the First church, Buffalo. They are the best paper, we think, that has yet been given to the public and to the Church on this subject. They are just what we must have, as a distinct understanding, if we are to have a union, though they may hardly satisfy the advocates of absorption of all the other churches into the 'Old School.' Dr. Beacock attacked the whole idea and scheme of reunion, for he is nothing if not antagonistic; but even he, I believe, is more and more satisfied with the result of the Convention."

We publish with pleasure, on the next page, Mr. Rankin's explanation of his position in the late Buffalo Convention. We regretted that no report of his well considered and valuable historical argument for liberty was made, and that we were obliged to rely solely on our memory in the remarks we made upon it. The point of Mr. Rankin's letter seems to be this, that nothing beyond a difference of interpretation prevails between the different schools of opinion in our churches; and that a difference of doctrine would involve heresy; which he, of course, does not wish to appear willing to tolerate, as he might be supposed to be, from our remarks. We give him the full benefit of the disclaimer, while we remind him that in one of the very cases which he cites (that of Craighead), the Assembly recognize doctrines as "different from those of the Reformed church and of our church," but declares "the error to be not of fundamental importance," consequently not heresy, nor a ground of exclusion from the Church. Mr. Rankin also argues that the Governmental Theory of the Atonement, included in the Hopkinsonian circle of views, is under the express toleration of the General Assembly, which reversed the decision of a lower judicatory condemning Hopkinsonianism. This too he considers as allowing liberty of interpretation only, not difference of doctrine. We will not argue the case, but refer him to Hodge on the Atonement, who, page 340, says of the Governmental Theory, among many other elaborate and severe sentences: "This doctrine is false," and page 345, "The origin, history and logical development of this doctrine demonstrate that it is radically and necessarily inconsistent with the system of Calvinism." Now the Governmental Theory is none of ours; and we are quite willing to leave the defense of it to Mr. Rankin and others on that side, but we think we have given a reason why New School men, wholly within the limits of the Reformed and Calvinistic sense, in the opinion of Mr. Rankin, might yet claim the toleration of different "doctrinal views," and might interpret Mr. Rankin's able defense of toleration as an acquiescence in their claim.

IMPORTANT IF TRUE.

A gossiping correspondent of the *Presbyterian* gives the following account of matters which transpired in the Old School part of the Joint Committee, and in the Joint Committee itself. The first paragraph will open the eyes of some of our brethren very wide indeed.

"At the recent meeting of the Joint Committee, the Old School members of that Committee had a separate meeting, and resolved, by an unanimous vote, that they could not consent to any terms of union which should bind the United Church to the latitude of interpreting the Confession, which the New School has hitherto allowed. We do not give the resolution *verbatim*; but such was its intent and meaning. The members, personally, were no doubt opposed to any such latitude of construction; and they knew that they might as well throw the whole re-union project into the sea, with a millstone about its neck, as to go before the churches with any such proposition.

"Another decisive evidence on this subject is the action of the New School members of the Joint Committee. When that Committee met last in Philadelphia, the Rev. Dr. Patterson, of Chicago, took the ground—1. That a large part of the New School ministers held the doctrines of which Mr. Barnes might be considered the representative. 2. That those doctrines must be received in the United Church as of unquestioned orthodoxy. His New School brethren on the Committee, while dissenting from him as to the extent in which Mr. Barnes was a fair representative of New School theology, did not, in any case (*i. e.*, no one of the New School Committee) dissent from the claim that the doctrines which he was supposed to represent were entitled to recognition as consistent with our system of doctrine. This claim was insisted upon. Here, then, was a dead-lock. The Old School Committee unanimous in declaring that

certain forms of doctrine could not be admitted; the New School Committee unanimous in declaring that they must be admitted. Neither party could yield. Neither party did yield. They adopted a formula on which each could put its own sense, and departed."

RESPONSE FROM A HOME MISSIONARY.

From time to time, we receive funds to be used in furnishing our paper to Home Missionaries. Recently, we received the following response from one, to whom we were enabled, by the liberality of S. C. Perkins, Esq., to donate the paper.

REV. J. W. MEARS—DEAR BROTHER: I know not to whom I am indebted for your excellent paper, a copy of which came in to-day's mail, from the label on which I should judge it was to be sent for one year. Please to thank the donor for me. I would long since have subscribed for the *AMERICAN-PRESBYTERIAN* myself, but being a pioneer, on very small salary, I have been compelled to practice strict economy. I like your paper much. I like it because it is a New School paper, a Presbyterian paper, our Church paper, a union, but not a union-at-any-sacrifice paper. The past year has been fruitful in blessings to this little church. We have been prospered materially and spiritually. A beautiful parsonage has been erected, costing about \$2000, paid for, or the payment provided, with the exception of about \$125. Twenty-three were added to the church at our communion, the first Sabbath in this month—10 on profession of their faith, 13 by letter. Others are hoping, but wait for more light. Your fraternally,

Papers are sent to Home Missionaries or their widows for \$2. Three copies for \$5.

AFFAIRS AT THE CAPITAL.

WASHINGTON, April 27th, 1868.

The President has given us a new sensation this week in the sudden and unadvised nomination of Gen. Schofield as Secretary of War, "in place of Edwin M. Stanton removed;" thus withdrawing the name of Mr. Ewing and ignoring Gen. Thomas. The nomination has been made without consultation with the Cabinet; even Gen. Thomas who was at the Cabinet meeting the day before knew nothing of it, and when first informed of it expressed doubts of its truth, but contented himself by strong assertions that he was still Secretary *ad interim*. This movement is an admission, by the President himself, that all his previous action in regard to the Department has gone for naught. It is regarded here as designed to be an olive branch to conservative Republicans, assuring them that if the President is acquitted on the impeachment trial he will endeavor to live amicably with the party. I do not hear of any Senators pacified by this weak device, but I do hear the whole thing ridiculed by members of the House, and others who are free to express their sentiments.

Arkansas is here, in the persons of Senators and Representatives elected under the new Constitution, asking for recognition as a sovereign State. Louisiana, Georgia, North and South Carolina have prepared themselves for re-admission into the Union under the Reconstruction laws, and will present their Constitutions to Congress in a few days for acceptance.

The argument of Gov. Boutwell in the impeachment trial was compact and thorough. It was listened to with closest attention by the leading minds of the Senate, and evidently produced a decided effect upon the minds of some who have been regarded as doubtful. His manner of treating the whole subject was that of one feeling deeply his responsibility. His argument was not addressed to the galleries but to the Senate, and his oratory, which usually is impassioned, was subdued, calm and most monotonous. His moral convictions are very strong, and, speaking as they do in his tones, his gestures and in every feature of his earnest face, giving directness in his choice of language and structure of sentences, they carry his arguments home with great power.

Mr. Nelson, who followed him, is regarded as the special friend and personal associate of the President, and his rambling speech was very much like the swing "round the circle." The most decisive evidence that the advocate was saturated with the teachings of his principal was the audacious avowal before the Senate that in Mr. Johnson's opinion and his own, the House is incompetent to impeach, and the Senate to try, because the ten rebellious States are still unrepresented, and his intimation that the proceeding might justly have been resisted by force. At one time the rumor was current that he intended to speak till the close of the President's term, and from the topics introduced there was good reason for the feeling.

Judge Chase has taken pains to contradict the rumor that he should charge the Senate as in cases before a jury; he has no idea of addressing the Senate in that way or at all. The confidence of the Republicans in the certainty of the President's removal increases. Some anxious correspondents in Maine, Illinois and Iowa would doubtless feel relieved could they have heard three Senators, as a friend of mine did last week, comparing notes of letters received and threats administered on the supposition that these three men were about to betray their country by a vote to acquit the President. Their alarmed constituents may calm their fears.

FENWICK.