

REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

(A Series of Lectures delivered in St Joseph's Church, Temuka, by the Very Rev Father LE MENANT DES CHESNAIS, S. M.)

LECTURE II.—IS THE BIBLE A FICTION—AN ALLEGORY? IS IT UNSCIENTIFIC AND INCREDIBLE? "THE LORD IS OUR LAW-GIVER." (Is. XXXIII, 22.)

This evening we shall confine our observations to the books of the Old Testament, whose authenticity, veracity, and integrity have been violently contested or positively denied by Rationalists. I.—Is the Bible a fiction—an allegory? The first thing which strikes me about the Bible is its antiquity. It is the most ancient book in the world. It was written long before the works of Phericides, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon, who are called the "Fathers of History," and at least five hundred before the poems of Homer and other ancient poets. Far from being a fiction or an allegory, it gives a precise account of the early families, races and nations of mankind; their habitations, their laws and customs. It throws a wonderful light on the primitive history of the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Medes, the Egyptians, and many other famous nations. It points out the gradual growth of arts and sciences, agriculture, commerce, navigation, astronomy, geography, military art, music, etc. The descriptions of the minerals, plants, and animals of the Bible have astonished all scientists who have studied those questions by their wonderful precision, completeness, and exactness. II.—The Bible is not unscientific: science and the Bible are agreed:—(1) That all the things we behold were gradually evolved or taken out from a primitive matter. (2) That all the earth was once submerged and in a chaotic state. (3) That the luminous fluid existed before the stars, as is now admitted by the most eminent scientists and was suspected by Newton and Euler. (see Lyall's "Elements of Geology"). (4) That the vegetable preceded the animal kingdom. (5) That marine species were first created, and that fishes and birds have an aquatic origin, as Mr Huxley pretends to have discovered on the 7th February, 1868, although clearly stated by Moses 4000 years ago; that terrestrial animals next made their appearance on the earth, and last of all man, the lord of creation. (6) That the first man and woman were created in a perfect state, whereas the creation of plants, birds, fishes and other living creatures was multiplex. The theory of evolution of Mr Darwin is untenable, being both unscientific and unreasonable. (1) It is unscientific because science takes its data from facts, and the theory of evolution and spontaneous generation is a gratuitous assumption. Fourens, Milne Edward, Bland, Dumas, Bronsard in their joint report to the Academy of Sciences on the 25th February, 1865 declared evolution and spontaneous generation to be a myth, an illusion, and that there is not the shadow of a proof to show that it has ever taken place. (2) It is unreasonable because it is contrary to historical and scientific experience. The description of animals by Aristotle, Pliny, Herodotus, etc., is as accurate to-day as it was then. Again, no cause can produce an effect greater than itself; spiritual substances being superior to material ones, it is impossible that our soul, which is spiritual and intelligent, should have evolved from a material substance which is inferior to it. Let Darwin, Denton or Ernest Hæckel explain to us how thought and intelligence could be evolved from a material substance or from animal life. The difference between man and animals is striking. Animals never progress, they always remain the same. Man is the only being who can master languages, and is susceptible of indefinite progress in sciences and arts. The birds make their nests to-day as they did a thousand years ago, the bees their hives, and the ants their subterranean habitations, etc., but they never improve, they never change—they remain always stationary. Not so man, who always advances, progresses, and makes new discoveries. Let evolutionists produce a chimpanzee or an orang-outang able to play on the violin, on the guitar, on the harp. We shall listen to them with pleasure. Let these inhabitants of the forests come before our House of Parliament or Legislative Assembly and state their titles to our kinship. Until then let Mr Darwin and his friends permit us to believe that we are men and not monkeys. It is objected against the Bible that the cosmogony of Moses cannot be reconciled with modern geological discoveries. This is an illusion. There is no proof whatever that Moses intended to give a geognosis of the world. According to St Augustine in his book of "The City of God" the world was created in an indivisible moment, and Moses relates successively what God did in that instant to make us appreciate the wonders of creation. There is also the system of prophetic visions: According to this system Moses was favoured by God with six visions. He beheld the earth in a chaotic state surrounded by darkness. Then light appeared and scattered the darkness. Next the firmament was seen as a glorious dome suspended around the whole earth; then the golden sun, the silvery moon, the sparkling stars shone forth and divided day and night. Fishes swam in the waters; birds flew in the air. Again, animals ran on the surface of the earth; and, last of all, man appeared full

of majesty and grandeur, and God rested from his work. Moses relates things as he saw them, and the words 'day and night' simply point out the beginning and end of each successive vision. We may also admit the system of unlimited periods of hundreds of thousands, nay of millions, of years. During these unlimited periods those phenomena would have been produced which have recently come to light. Be this as it may, certain it is that the days and nights of Moses were not measured by the rotation of the earth around its axis or its movement round the sun, which made its appearance only on the fourth day of the creation. Any of these systems is sufficient to reconcile the cosmogony of Moses with modern scientific discoveries. III.—Is the Bible credible, as rationalists pretend? In order to answer this objection we must know how the Bible was composed. The facts related in it were collected immediately after they had happened, when their truth and accuracy could be ascertained by all those present. The account was read before the whole assembly of the people, and not accepted unless declared to be accurate and precise. It was then examined by the synagogues. The authentic version was kept in the treasury of the Temple under various locks and keys. Twelve exact copies were made, and one sent to each tribe, and carefully treasured up. It was painful death to add, diminish or alter the same. Add to this, that the Jews had such a veneration for their Scriptures that they were ready to die for every word contained in them, and always carried them along with them in their peregrinations to Chaldea, Persia, Egypt, &c. The miracles related by Moses were witnessed by 600,000 soldiers, without reckoning women and children. His sincerity was such that he did not conceal his own sins, those of his sister Mary, his brother Aaron, and those of his people. So disinterested was he that he appointed Joshua, a stranger, to succeed him instead of one of his children, because commanded to do so by God. The Book of Judges, the Books of King, and those of the Prophets confirm what he had said, and Christ our Lord approved of them all. Apion (an enemy of the Jews), Porphyrius, Sincroniathon admit the reality of the miracles of Moses. Alexander Polyhistor gives the history of Joseph. Mariette, the great Egyptologist, has discovered the prison of Joseph which is held in great veneration by the Arabs and is called Esynysepp. The famous papyrus manuscripts of Sallier and Anastasius describe the ten plagues of Egypt. Paintings discovered at Thebes, and various Egyptian sculptures confirm the same. What a difference between the style of the Scriptures and of the Pagan writers! The Scriptures speak only of God and His wonderful Providence, and of the eternal destiny of man. Poets, philosophers, and historians trouble themselves very little about God's glory; they attribute all great actions to man's genius, science, and experience. The prophecies of the Scriptures have every characteristic of Divine inspiration. They state clearly and distinctly, in no ambiguous terms, what was to happen ages after. When he had no children Abraham declared that he would be the ancestor of the Messiah, that his posterity would remain four hundred years captive in Egypt and come out with great riches (Gen. xv, 13-14). Jacob foretold that there would be a ruler in the family of Judah till the coming of the Messiah (xlv, 10). The birth of Josias was announced three hundred years in advance (Kings, xiii, 2). Cyrus was called by his name two hundred years before he was born, and it was announced that he would destroy the Empire of Babylon (iv Kings, xx 16. Is. xlv, xlv). Jeremiah foretold the duration of the Kingdom, of the captivity of Babylon. Daniel announced the exact time of the coming of Christ, and the destiny of the four empires. All these prophecies, and many others we could quote, have been fulfilled to the letter, and clearly demonstrate the inspiration of the Holy Scripture. From what we have stated, it is evident that the Bible is not a fiction or an allegory, but a wonderful historical book, with graphic and accurate descriptions of places and peoples, their ways and manners, and the progress of arts and sciences. Secondly, it harmonises with modern scientific discoveries. Thirdly, the objections of rationalists rest principally on the misrepresentation of the sacred text. Fourthly, the facts of the Bible are authentic and true. Lastly, the wonderful miracles and prophecies recorded in it prove it to be the word of God, given to men for their guidance and to enable them to reach their destiny.

The living singers whose artistic greatness was once the talk of Europe are rapidly becoming fewer. Last year died Madame Albani; and now the death is announced of Madame Miolan-Carvalho, one of the first lyric actresses of the century. She was born at Marseilles 68 years ago, and as a girl of 12 entered at the Paris Conservatoire, where she studied under Duprez. Her voice was not of the first order in fulness, strength, and compass, but she had a fine musicianly instinct and innate skillfulness in impersonation. She was the original Marguerite of "Faust," and it was for her Gounod composed the part. When the work was converted into opera she and Christine Nilsson took the role on alternate nights. Her other great creations were Fanchonette, La Reine Topaze, and Mireille, and in whatever opera she appeared it was always with success. She married M. Carvalho, the director of the Paris Opera Comique, 1853, and appeared for a season at Covent Garden. It is nearly 10 years since she retired from the stage, but her voice had lost little of its freshness and clearness, and was often heard at charitable entertainments.

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