

QUESTIONS FROM THE PEW.

BY FRANKLIN N. JEWETT.

THE CREATION NARRATIVE OF GENESIS I, 1—II, 4, a.

IS there any serious doubt that by "day" in this narrative the writer meant a common day? "There was evening and there was morning, one day. . . .and there was evening, and there was morning, a second day, etc." This seems to be clear and definite, and to correspond with the ancient, and also the modern Hebrew reckoning of the common day. If extended periods had been intended nothing could have been easier than to say so. Limitations of language certainly cannot be pleaded here. And what did the words convey to the ancient world, to the mediæval world, and also to the modern world down to very recent times? They conveyed their plain meaning of six common days. If there were exceptions they certainly were so few as to attract little or no attention. Moreover, belief in the six (common) days of Creation, when seriously questioned, was defended with nothing less than fierce tenacity.

What these days meant to Moses seems to be shown us very plainly by Exodus xx. 9-11, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." The people were to work six days and rest the seventh because the Lord himself did the same.

The exact correspondence of the language in Genesis to the prevailing reckoning seems to give a definiteness of meaning to the words in question that cannot possibly be evaded. Here, as elsewhere, whatever a passage was especially or quite exclusively adapted to produce in the minds of those to whom it was originally addressed, *that* it must have been *intended* to produce, and *that* was the original meaning of the passage. How can this conclusion be

avoided? Or, if any one should claim a remote meaning, more important perhaps than the plain one, and to be discovered by mankind not until several thousand years later, the plain meaning would still be a real meaning, and the only meaning communicated at the time, and it would have to be reckoned with.

For two reasons the use of the word "day" in the latter part of Gen. ii. 4. . . "in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven," can hardly be admitted as bearing upon the meaning of the word in the preceding chapter. First, though the word was very likely used in a general as well as in a particular sense then as it is now; the connection in any case would show, or should show, which of the meanings is intended. If one refers to the customs of the country in George Washington's day, the meaning is clear. This however in no wise obscures his meaning whenever he should speak of a succession of days during which a work was done, each containing a morning and an evening, with enumeration of the parts of the general work done during each of the days. Accordingly if the "day" of Gen. ii. 4 is to be taken in a general sense, the fact can hardly obliterate the definiteness of the "days" of the preceding chapter.

All this holds if we understand that the last part of ii. 4 belongs to the same original narrative as the preceding verses. If, however, in the second place, the word "day" in verse 4 belongs to another original narrative, then the case is still stronger, if need be, against denying to the word in the preceding narrative its simple plain meaning. Now there are at least two cogent reasons for believing the narratives to be distinct. The record from ii. 4 on, is certainly very different from the preceding narrative; it is even difficult or impossible to reconcile the two. Besides in the second narrative the designation of the Deity is Lord God, while in the previous one it is God only. This is itself a marked difference; and its co-existing with the different character of the narrative makes the case much more than doubly strong. Hence "day" in ii. 4 appears to be entirely out of any close connection with the word as used previously.

But the days have been interpreted to mean immensely long periods of time. We understand that this interpretation, however, was resorted to only under great pressure of necessity, when the results of prolonged investigations were supposed to be disproving or in danger of disproving the truthfulness of the narrative. But, whatever its origin, how does this interpretation fit the facts?

The narrative has "grass," and "herb" and "fruit tree" in full

perfection during the third day. The "moving creature that hath life" was brought forth, by the waters, not until the fifth day. Now it seems to be very clearly established that the beginnings of life on this planet were in the water, and that aquatic life, both animal and vegetable, flourished long ages, millions of years doubtless, before there were any "fruit trees."

Again, the flourishing of grass, herbs and fruit trees before the creation of the sun and moon seems to be a phenomenon utterly foreign to what we know of such vegetation. Sun light is essential to its existence. Also æons before the existence of fruit trees the waters teemed with animals having well developed eyes. This is proof positive of light, and it would seem, proof sufficient of sun light, at this remote period.

Still again, the distinctions of evening and morning before the creation of the sun are suggestive of an opinion, to us strange, held by St. Ambrose, and, as we understand, by others of the early Church Fathers. According to this opinion the light of early morning was quite independent of the sun. St. Ambrose is quoted as saying, "We must remember that the light of the day is one thing and the light of the sun, moon, and stars another. . . .the sun by his rays appearing to add lustre to the daylight. For before sunrise the day dawns, but is not in full refulgence, for the sun adds still further to its splendor."

Is not this same view of the independence of the dawn apparent in the Genesis narrative? With the light of dawn independent of the sun there could of course be morning and evening before the sun existed. May not St. Ambrose have obtained or verified the quoted opinion from this narrative?

Of interest in this connection is Job xxxviii. 19, 20:

"Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof; that thou shouldst take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldst discern the paths to the house thereof?"

These questions are a part of the answer of the Lord to Job out of the whirlwind. The chapter evidently contains some of the profoundest reflections of antiquity upon common, but most impressive physical phenomena. Where was Job when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth? Who measured the earth? and upon what do its foundations rest? Who confined the sea within its impassable barriers? Has Job during his lifetime commanded the coming of the morning? Has he entered into the recesses of the deep? Does he understand aught of the mystery of death? Does he know

the way to the dwelling place of light, and to the confines within which darkness is at home? That is, does he know where the light goes to when it goes away at nightfall? And does he know whence it comes when it re-appears? Where has it been meanwhile? And so of the darkness. These comings and goings of light and darkness must have been very impressive and mysterious to early man, when once he began to think about them. How could he account for the changes? Indeed, the view of the matter here given seems a very natural one under the circumstances. May we not add that it would be especially so to those who were familiar with the narrative in the first chapter of Genesis?