

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PRÆVALET.*

It may perhaps be within the recollection of some readers of these lines that in the *EXPOSITOR* for January, 1886, I wrote an article on the "Cosmogony of Genesis," in which I pointed out the discrepancies subsisting between the order of creation, as exhibited in Genesis i., and the order as established by the teachings of modern science; and after reviewing the principal attempts which had been made to reconcile them, concluded by indicating what I conceived to be the true value and significance of the cosmogony. The justice of my conclusions was, I believe, recognised by many at the time; and more recently, writers of the stamp of Prof. Kirkpatrick,<sup>1</sup> Prof. Ryle,<sup>2</sup> the Abbé Loisy,<sup>3</sup> and Principal Whitehouse,<sup>4</sup> have expressed themselves quite similarly. But what I said met with some contradiction, especially in America. On the strength of what I had stated the grounds for fully in the *EXPOSITOR*, I ventured, in an article contributed to the *Sunday School Times* of December 18th, 1886, to say that the order of creative events as exhibited in Genesis i. was "fundamentally different" from the same order as taught by science; and that a mind trained in the precise and rigorous methods of scientific investigation could at once detect the fallacies which underlay every attempt to prove these two orders identical. An editorial note called attention to the fact that, in making this statement, I differed from "Prof. Dana, Sir J. W. Dawson, and other eminent scientists, whose opinions," it added, were "cited on another page." The article referred to emphasized in strong terms the

<sup>1</sup> *Divine Library of the Old Testament* (1891), p. 98 ("The first chapter of Genesis is not, as we now know, a scientifically exact account of Creation").

<sup>2</sup> *Early Narratives of Genesis* (1892), chaps. i. and ii.

<sup>3</sup> In the second of five excellent and ably written articles, reprinted in *Les Études Bibliques* (Amiens, 1894).

<sup>4</sup> In the art. "Cosmogony," in the new *Bible Dictionary*.

scientific eminence of the two authorities just named; pointed out that they had declared Genesis and geology to be reconcilable; charged those who ventured to differ from them with an "impatient dogmatism," as well as with "temerity and presumption"; and warned men "of inferior scientific attainments" to be careful lest they "exposed themselves to contempt" by maintaining the contrary. The article very adroitly concealed the real point at issue: for, as of course it was only upon *scientific* ground that the authority of scientists could be appealed to as decisive, it led the reader naturally to suppose that it was there that the controversy entirely lay; whereas, in point of fact, no one controverts the statements of *scientific* fact made by the scientists referred to; the controversy is simply whether these facts, accepted *precisely as stated by them*, agree or do not agree with the narrative of Genesis. And this is a question on which the Hebrew scholar and student of language, as indeed the man of general culture and intelligence, is entitled to be heard quite as much as the specialist in geology. The writer of the article was also careful not to explain to his readers the *method* by which the two eminent geologists whom he referred to effected their reconciliation: had he done so, it would at once have been apparent not only how frequently their explanations were mutually contradictory, but also upon what paradoxical assumptions many of the steps in their argument depended. Manifestly the writer attached no value to a plain and simple statement of the facts.

At the time of writing my article in the EXPOSITOR, though I had carefully studied Sir. J. W. Dawson's view, I was not aware that Prof. Dana had written on the subject. Naturally, upon discovering that he had done so, I lost no time in procuring his article:<sup>1</sup> I was eager to know if, where so many had failed, he had succeeded. The results of

<sup>1</sup> *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1885, pp. 201-224.

my study of it I published in the *Andover* (U.S.A.) *Review*, December, 1887, pp. 639-649. In this article I first commented on the paper in the *Sunday School Times*, to which I have just referred. I protested against the charge of "impatient dogmatism," in which (though not mentioned personally) I was implicitly involved; and I pointed out that in differing from Professors Dana and Dawson, not on questions of scientific fact, but on the question whether or not the scientific facts, *as taught in their own scientific writings*, agreed or did not agree with the narrative of Genesis, there could be no "temerity" or "presumption." The question was no longer an exclusively scientific one; and others besides scientists were entitled, after a sufficiently careful study of it, to pass judgment upon it.<sup>1</sup> The particulars of my examination of Prof. Dana's theory I need not repeat: it will be sufficient if I state that he understands by "earth" and "waters" in Genesis i. 2, 3, not anything which we should describe by those names, but matter in that unimaginable condition in which it existed, while yet "inert," *prior to its being endowed with force, and the power of molecular action* (pp. 208, 210); while by the same term "waters" in v. 6 he understands the attenuated substance of the universe, while yet diffused in a nebular form through space. Prof. Dana replied to my critique in the same review, February, 1888, pp. 197-200. I had no occasion to complain of either the manner or the matter of his reply. He did not, as some controversialists do, when more solid arguments fail them, disparage or vituperate his opponents, and he found no fault with my statements of scientific fact; on the contrary, he allowed that if the objections urged by me were insurmountable, science could only say

<sup>1</sup> I corrected the same strange misapprehension (viz. that I differed from Professors Dana and Dawson on points of geological fact) in this country, in two letters in the *Church Times*, Feb. 3 and 17, 1893.

that the cosmogony of Genesis was false. He did not seem altogether to insist upon his previous position, but took rather a broader and more general view of the harmony between Genesis i. and science. A small mistake which he made in thinking that a sentence of mine imputed to him a misrepresentation of the facts, I corrected in a note in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1888, p. 565 f. In an article (unsigned), written in a somewhat more antagonistic tone, in defence of Prof. Dana's position, which appeared in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1888, pp. 356-65, the author, while admitting that details in it were open to objection, argued that his theory of reconciliation "was in the main proved beyond reasonable doubt." And a comment upon my note on page 565 f. of the same volume shewed that the *Bibliotheca Sacra* of that date still adhered firmly to the reconcilability of Genesis i. with the teachings of science.

But since 1888 times have changed. In the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for April and July 1897, there appeared two articles<sup>1</sup> by President Henry Morton, of the Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey, in which the whole subject was reopened, and the arguments of the "Reconcilers" were subjected to a searching examination, with the result that, in substance, precisely the same conclusions are arrived at, which were reached by me twelve years ago in the EXPOSITOR. To this endorsement of my conclusions by a professed man of science, who is plainly also well able to appreciate the theological aspects of the question, I naturally attach no small weight. President Morton examines in detail, first the reconciliation of Prof. Guyot (pp. 11-39 of the reprint), then more briefly—for this theory is in many respects the same as that of Prof. Guyot, so that there is no necessity for repeating the same criticisms—that of Prof. Dana (pp. 39-43), then (pp. 43-50) that of Sir J. W.

<sup>1</sup> Since reprinted, in a separate form, under the title "The Cosmogony of Genesis and its Reconcilers."

Dawson, and lastly that of Mr. Gladstone (pp. 50-57) : his own view, in stating which he refers with warm approval to Prof. Henry Drummond's paper in the *Nineteenth Century* for February, 1886, follows pp. 57-62. I cannot well abridge the trenchant and detailed criticisms by which President Morton exposes, one after another, the unreality of all these schemes of reconciliation ; but, speaking generally, the rock upon which each in turn is wrecked is the extreme and incredible violence done to the text of Genesis, for the purpose of forcing its statements into harmony with what is taught by science.

Prof. Guyot, for instance, finds in the division of the waters below the "expanse" from those above it (*v.* 7) the separation of the "visible lower starry world" from the primitive luminous nebula ; and in the appearance of the dry land above the water (*v.* 9) the whole history of the earth according to the nebular hypothesis, including a stage in which it was a self-luminous sun ! How Prof. Dana understands the apparently simple terms *earth* and *water* has been stated already. Sir J. W. Dawson, if he treats the text of Genesis with less violence than this, nevertheless makes many other wholly unauthorized assumptions : he harmonizes the work of the Third Day, for instance, not with the history of the earth as attested actually by geology, but with an *assumed* history, which assigns to plants and trees a place in better conformity with the narrative of Genesis (*p.* 47 f.). President Morton expresses frequently his astonishment at these and the other extraordinary suppositions, by means of which the cosmogony of Genesis is "reconciled" with the cosmogony of science ; and at the singular paradoxes to which even able men will commit themselves, when a given opinion has at all hazards to be maintained. His general conclusion is stated in these words :

"In reading the works of all these writers, the impression

is the same. The more we admire their ability, learning, and pious enthusiasm, the more clearly do we see that they have undertaken an impossible task, and that their failures are in no way due to any deficiencies on their part, but only to the insoluble character of the problem they have set themselves to elucidate" (p. 55). And he considers (pp. 57-62) the true solution of the problems presented by the cosmogony of Genesis to have been found by those scholars who read it in the light of the age in which it was written, and who, while not forgetful of the spiritual teaching of which it is made the vehicle, interpret it, on its material side, in accordance with the place which it holds in the history of Semitic cosmological speculation.<sup>1</sup>

The administration of the *Bibliotheca Sacra* is to be congratulated on the progress which it has made since 1888.

S. R. DRIVER.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sayce expresses the opinion held generally both by Assyriologists and by modern Biblical scholars, when he writes (*Monuments*, p. 77 f.): "The Biblical writer [of the first chapter of Genesis], it is plain, is acquainted, either directly or indirectly, with the Assyrian and Babylonian tradition. With him it is stripped of all that was distinctively Babylonian and polytheistic, and is become in his hands a sober narrative, breathing a spirit of the purest and most exalted monotheism. In passing from the Assyrian poem to the Biblical narrative we seem to pass from romance to reality. But this ought not to blind us to the fact that the narrative is ultimately of Babylonian origin" (to the same effect, *Expositor*, Jan. 1886, pp. 38-44).