

**THE TWO RECORDS: THE
MOSAIC AND THE
GEOLOGICAL: A LECTURE**

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The Two Records: The Mosaic and the Geological: A Lecture by Hugh Miller

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TWO RECORDS:

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A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE YOUNG MENS' CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION,
IN EXETER HALL, LONDON.

BY

HUGH MILLER,

AUTHOR OF THE "OLD RED SANDSTONE," "FOOTPRINTS OF THE CREATOR,"
"FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ENGLAND AND ITS PEOPLE," ETC. ETC.

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MOSAIC AND THE GEOLOGICAL.

It is now exactly fifty years since a clergyman of the Scottish Church, engaged in lecturing at St. Andrews, took occasion, in enumerating the various earths of the chemist, to allude to the science, then in its infancy, that specially deals with the rocks and soils which these earths compose. "There is a prejudice," he remarked, "against the speculations of the geologist which I am anxious to remove. It has been said that they nurture infidel propensities. It has been alleged that geology, by referring the origin of the globe to a higher antiquity than is assigned to it by the writings of Moses, undermines our faith in the inspiration of the Bible, and in all the animating prospects of the immortality which

it unfolds. This is a false alarm. *The writings of Moses do not fix the antiquity of the globe."*

The bold lecturer on this occasion,—for it needed no small courage in a divine of any established church to take up, at the beginning of the present century, a position so determined on the geologic side,—was at the time an obscure young man, characterized, in the small circle in which he moved, by the ardor of his temperament and the breadth and originality of his views; but not yet distinguished in the science or literature of his country, and of comparatively little weight in the theological field. He was marked, too, by what his soberer acquaintance deemed eccentricities of thought and conduct. When the opposite view was all but universal, he held and taught that Free Trade would be not only a general benefit to the people of this country, but would inflict permanent injury on no one class or portion of them; and, further, at a time when the streets and lanes of all the great cities of the empire were lighted with oil burnt in lamps, he held that the time was not distant when a carburetted hydrogen gas would be substituted instead; and, on getting his snug parsonage-house repaired, he actually introduced into the walls a system of tubes and pipes for the passage into its various rooms of the gaseous fluid yet to be employed as the illuminating agent. Time and Experience have

since impressed their stamp on these supposed eccentricities, and shown them to be the sagacious forecastings of a man who saw further and more clearly than his contemporaries; and Fame has since blown his name very widely as one of the most comprehensive and enlightened, and, withal, one of the most thoroughly earnest and sincere of modern theologians. The bold lecturer of St. Andrews was Dr. Thomas Chalmers—a divine whose writings are now known wherever the English language is spoken, and whose wonderful eloquence lives in memory as a vanished power, which even his extraordinary writings fail adequately to represent. And in the position which he took up at this early period with respect to geology and the Divine Record, we have yet another instance of the great sagacity of the man, and of his ability of correctly estimating the prevailing weight of the evidence with which, though but partially collected at the time, the geologist was preparing to establish the leading propositions of his science. Even in this late age, when the scientific standing of geology is all but universally recognized, and the vast periods of time which it demands fully conceded, neither geologist nor theologian could, in any new scheme of reconciliation, shape his first proposition more skilfully than it was shaped by Chalmers a full half century ago. It has formed, since that time, the preliminary

· proposition of those ornaments of at once science and the English Church, your present venerable Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Bird Sumner, — with Doctors Buckland, Conybeare, and Professor Sedgwick, — of eminent evangelistic Dissenters, too, — such as the late Dr. Pye Smith, Dr. John Harris, Dr. Robert Vaughan, Dr. James Hamilton, and the Rev. Mr. Binney — enlightened and distinguished men, who all alike came early to the conclusion, with the lecturer of St. Andrews, that “the writings of Moses do not fix the antiquity of the globe.”

In 1814, ten years after the date of the St. Andrews’ lectures, Dr. Chalmers produced his more elaborate scheme of reconciliation between the Divine and the Geologic Records in a “Review of Cuvier’s Theory of the Earth;” and that scheme, perfectly adequate to bring the Mosaic narrative into harmony with what was known at the time of geologic history, has been very extensively received and adopted. It may, indeed, still be regarded as the most popular of the various existing schemes. It teaches, and teaches truly, that between the first act of creation, which evoked out of the previous nothing the *matter* of the heavens and earth, and the first act of the first day’s work recorded in Genesis, periods of vast duration may have intervened; but, further, it insists that the days themselves were but natural days of twenty-four hours each;

and that, ere they began, the earth, though, mayhap, in the previous period, a fair residence of life, had become void and formless, and the sun, moon, and stars, though, mayhap, they had before given light, had been, at least in relation to our planet, temporarily extinguished. In short, while it teaches that the successive creations of the geologist may all have found ample room in the period preceding that creation to which man belongs, it teaches also that the record in Genesis bears reference to but the existing creation; and that there lay between it and the preceding ones a chaotic period of death and darkness. The scheme propounded by the late truly admirable Dr. Pye Smith, and since adopted by several writers, differs from that of Chalmers in but one circumstance, though an important one. Dr. Smith held, with the great northern divine, that the Mosaic days were natural days; that they were preceded by a chaotic period; and that the work done in them related to but that last of the creations to which the human species belongs. Further, however, he held, in addition, that the chaos of darkness and confusion out of which that creation was called was of but limited extent, and that outside its area, and during the period of its existence, many of our present lands and seas may have enjoyed the light of the sun, and been tenanted by animals, and occupied by plants, the descendants of which still continue