

**THE NEW WORLD
AND THE
NEW THOUGHT**

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The new world and the new thought by James Thompson Bixby

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BY

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The New World and The New Thought

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPANSION OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE ENLARGEMENT OF FAITH.

As the traveler visits the old shrines and cathedrals of Europe, or the scholar delves among the mediæval treatises on astronomy or geography, he is continually meeting with conceptions of the world and its creation of a most curious and childlike simplicity. A frequently recurring group in the sculptures, mosaics, stained-glass or missal paintings of the Middle Ages is that which represents the Almighty in human form, moulding the sun, moon, or stars, and with His own hands hanging them from the solid firmament which supports the upper heaven and its celestial waters and which overarches the great plain of earth; and when the work of the six days is finished He is represented as sitting, bent and fatigued, in the well-known attitude of the "Weary Mercury" of classical sculpture. As late as the seventeenth century, Milton, in his poetic representation of the popular theology of his day, does not hesitate at the most literal description

of how the second person in the Trinity, when the hour for making the universe came

“ Took the golden compasses, prepared
 In God’s eternal store, to circumscribe
 This universe and all created things.
 One foot He centred, and the other turned
 Round through the vast profundity obscure,
 And said, ‘ Thus far extend ; thus far thy bounds :
 This be thy just circumference, O world.’ ”

The two statements in the Genesis myths, that the world was made in six days and also that “ God spake and it was done,” were both of them accepted in the most literal way by the great ecclesiastical and scientific authorities of Christendom down to the sixteenth century. The contradiction of an instantaneous creation which lasted through six days was usually reconciled by some explanation, like that of St. Thomas Aquinas, which was adopted even by Luther and the earlier Protestant Reformers, viz.: that God created the substance of the world in a single moment but employed the six days in separating, shaping and further adorning it. As to the date of this great event, it was the general verdict of both Catholic and Protestant authorities down to a century or two ago that it could hardly be more than 6,000 years ago.

As to the shape and dimensions of the world, the prevalent ideas during the Middle Ages were marked by a precision and pettiness equally crude. Following unreflectingly the lead of whatever imagery the Scripture presented, they insisted that the earth was at creation vaulted over with a solid dome or ceiling, the firmament of Genesis, above which was the celes-

tial cistern, containing the waters which are above the firmament. It is through apertures in this vault, "the windows of heaven," that the rains are allowed to fall on the earth by God and His angels; and above it, in the third heaven, or seventh as others said, is the customary abode of the Almighty and His court. In the curious description of the universe, based upon Scripture, written in the sixth century by Cosmas Indicopleustes, which for a long while was regarded as most authoritative, the ideas of the early Christian theologians were summed up in a complete system. As in the ninth chapter of Hebrews the world is likened to the tabernacle in the desert, it must be oblong in shape. Like the table of shew-bread, the earth is flat, and twice as long as broad, 400 days' journey one way and 200 the other. It is surrounded by four seas, at the outer edges of which rise massive walls, the pillars of heaven of which Job speaks, on which the vault of heaven rests. The disappearance of the sun at night is caused by its passing behind a great mountain at the north of the earth.

Although by the scholars of subsequent centuries this naïve representation of the world was much refined and modified, yet the general conception of the universe as a sort of huge house, with heaven as its upper story and the earth as its lower story, prevailed among the people and a large part of the world of scholars, close down to the modern period.

When the sky-parlor of the heavenly host was so little a way off, legends of saints and prophets caught up to heaven or of angels flying down to earth, of heavenly voices speaking from the upper story to

chosen men on the lower, or of frequent special interventions by heavenly powers to rescue the holy or punish the wicked, would most naturally arise. Even when men's conceptions began to enlarge, they still remained comparatively diminutive. Certain Egyptian astronomers, says Flammarion, calculated that the sun was 369 miles distant and Saturn 492. An Italian system, that the same astronomer mentions, was on a somewhat more generous scale. The crystalline sphere in which the moon was set was 107,000 miles distant, Mercury 209,000 and the sun 3,892,000. As late as the sixteenth century, Zwingli and the early Protestant Reformers held to the view of the church fathers that a solid floor or dome separated the heavens from the earth, that above it were the waters and the abode of the angels, and below it the earth and man. And in the cellar of this world-house, not far below the earth's crust, popular superstition, corroborated by the authority of great poets like Virgil, Dante, and Milton, located the caverns of the underworld, from which imp and devil and perturbed spirit came up at times to walk the earth.

To-day, how has science stretched out this baby-house universe of our ancestors! The astronomer has turned his telescope on that adamantine firmament and it has dissolved into thin air. The glittering points that gemmed its surface have expanded into enormous suns, thousands of times as large as our own globe. The petty heaven of the Book of Revelation 12,000 furlongs or 1,379 English miles each way has spread out, from that one-twentieth part or less of the cubic dimensions which we now know our own