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A PROPOS DE L'ALPHABET TURC

Je ne comprends pas la réponse de M. le Dr. Lardy.

Si l'arabe sans voyelles ni accents n'est pas plus difficile à lire que certaines langues européennes munies de toutes ces aides, comment cela prouve-t-il « tout simplement le triomphe de son opinion ? » M. Lardy me défend de parler de l'anglais ; je prends donc le français, autre « atroce devinette alphabétique » pour tous ceux qui ne l'ont pas appris dès l'enfance. Demandez à n'importe quel étranger qui n'a pas eu cette bonne fortune s'il est arrivé très rapidement et très correctement à le lire et l'écrire.

Quant aux caractères romains, ils sont si « admirables de clarté » en leur qualité d'interprètes des sons que vous ne trouverez pas, dans les différentes langues occidentales, deux translitérations égales d'un alphabet oriental quelconque : l'Allemand en a une, le Français une autre et ainsi de suite. N'ai-je pas moi-même, par conséquent, été forcé de me servir de lettres arabes afin de donner sans ambiguïté les sons d'une partie des échantillons d'anglais que je vous ai envoyé ?

M. Lardy ne persuade pas davantage lorsqu'il a l'air de dire que, quant à la culture, le japonais, avec son alphabet impossible, est au dessous du Russe, doué de caractères qu'on apprend en quelques heures. La bataille de Tsouchima, entre autres faits, soutient la thèse contraire ; et *contra factum non valet illatio*.

R. G. CORBET.

THE SIX « DAYS » OF GENESIS

The Asiatic character of the Christian Scriptures is too often overlooked. They are treated as if they had been expressly composed in the West for the benefit of the twentieth century Englishman, and could therefore only be read and judged from his point of view. Such being the case, it is not very surprising that the author of the Pentateuch, accused of asserting that the universe was made in six days, should have called down a good deal of scorn upon his devoted head.

Now if the object of all this contempt was Moses, we have been told not long ago, on high technical authority, that he was the best commissariat officer ever seen, and there are other reasons for believing him to have been exceptionally clear-headed ; but even if we take the books popularly attributed to him to be the work of « P. » and « J. », we might give the originator of the obnoxious statement the benefit of the doubt before pronouncing him a fool, which is what the thing comes to. In their usual English acceptation, indeed — for which he is unjustly held responsible — the words must have signified nothing but arrant nonsense ; his « days » would have been absurd periods of twelve hours apiece, beginning with the morning and ending with the evening, and, to make matters worse, half of them would have existed before the sun, dividing day and night properly so called, had rendered a morning and evening possible.

The fact is, however, that the original language of Genesis was not English, and the word in question was not « day », but *yom*. יום This is constantly used by old Testament writers to express an indefinite measure of time, in such phrases as *bayom ha en*, « on this day », and *bayom*, « in the day », i. e., at the time, at this season etc. Nay, Genesis itself,



in the very context, speaks of one of these periods as being equivalent to several, thus involving the inference that they are indeterminate. Its *bayom* is made to include the six «yoms» which it has just been describing: «These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens» (Gen. II. 4). Such being the case, it is almost superfluous to add that classical authors, to say nothing of non-Hebraic Orientals, again and again give «day» a like wide meaning. It may be received, in short, that a *yom* must not be understood here as a «day» except in the broadest sense, while «morning» and «evening» can only be attributed to it metaphorically, for beginning and end, much as youth and old age have been termed the morning and evening of life.

A duration given no limit of any kind, and merely called *Bereshith* (ברישית), «In the beginning», is alluded to before the six «days» are spoken of: this appears to stand for something outside all time, in plainer terms for eternity.

They are followed, on the other hand, by a seventh «day», differing from them in the absence of any specified end: possibly a symbol of the historical era, going on — as it is still — at the time when Genesis was written. The intermediate «six periods» themselves, which together make up one «day» reaching from the creation of heaven and earth to that of man, may be assumed to be those during which the different processes took place in the development of that matter which God had «created that He might transform» it

ברא אלהים לעשו

In fact, as far as Genesis is concerned, there is nothing very objectionable in the theory of evolution, just as there is no reason why millions of years, or even an incalculably longer time, should not be represented by the six æons. All the production of matter that occurred while they lasted is recorded by means of a word whose English version is «made», but which, in the ori-

ginal, implies the notion of «making out of what is already in existence», or, as we should express it, of transforming; while the word we render «created», used of the original causation, only recurs when matter assumes a new complexion through the advent of animal life and when man appears. Even here, too, at the same time that it points to the introduction of a fresh element, it does not exclude the idea of material transformation: man, like his forerunners, is «made».

The origin of the human race being what Genesis has directly to do with, the events leading up to it are touched upon very lightly; and, for the same reason, though contemporary phenomena elsewhere are not quite left out of sight, the changes on the earth itself naturally receive the largest share of attention when the six «days» are outlined. The narrative begins, for instance, with our globe, which it describes as shapeless, barren and covered with water. This is borne out by the Nebular Theory of Laplace, according to which the earth entered upon its separate existence as a revolving mass, so hot that the granite and other minerals composing it were in a gaseous state. Its crust gradually cooled into liquid and then solid strata, and the condensed steam fell upon these in enormous quantities, so that «our highest mountains», says Cuvier, «long after their consolidation, were covered by waters that did not nourish living beings». Meanwhile light, of whose nature radium appears destined to tell us so much, came upon the scene. The words of Genesis involve the idea of its connection with heat, and of its being, not a body that had to be separately made or formed, but a fluid emanating from other bodies, so that, as a Hebrew scholar of no means attainments has expounded them, God «commanded the light to shine» — to be brought forth, as it were — «out of the darkness» (2 Cor. IV. 6.).

In the second period the moist atmosphere of the earth is completely detached from the space beyond, thus paving the way for the beginning of life upon the planet, and a fur-

ther preparation for this is made, in the third, by the division of the dry land from the waters. The geological strata agree with the Pentateuch that the vegetable Kingdom was the first represented; and indeed the carbonic acid with which the air was at first saturated, coupled with the high temperature still prevailing, was favourable to the growth of the gigantic plants to which we owe our coal — other ways moreover. Mere «growths» (דשן). fields, but was incompatible with animal life. The different formations bear Genesis out in the simplest forms of cellular plants, preponderate in the oldest, «herbs» (עשב) in the next, and «trees» (עץ) in the most recent. The even distribution of vegetable matter over different parts of the globe, again, points to its having received heat from some source acting equally upon the whole earth — possibly from the centre, or a luminous encircling atmosphere, — not from a distant body, such as the sun. This confirms the Biblical statement that the light-giving fluid was not concentrated round the sun, revealing to the earth the celestial lights with whose aid it reckons time, until the fourth æon: then alone, from the point of view of the terrestrial observer, did they begin to be.

The continued absorption of carbonic acid by the enormous primaeval plants had gradually made the air and water a little less unlike what they are now, but they were still too much charged with it to be fit for the living beings about us. Hence, the fossils unite with Genesis in telling us, the earliest representatives of the animal Kingdom were aquatic: megalosauri, plesiosauri and other oviparous quadrupeds, with flying reptiles. Then, besides marine mammalia, come birds, whose remains have even been found in the formations peculiar to the great water reptiles; while there are fish in plenty in the substrata of these beds. Such were the creatures «which the waters brought forth abundantly» on the fifth «day».

When the last dawns the atmosphere has still further improved, so as to render pos-

sible the existence of wild beasts, domestic animals and land reptiles, followed by man; and here, too geology corroborates the Old Testament as to his having come into being after them. Science is at one with the Hebrew writer, in fact, wherever it has succeeded in piercing the veil beyond which he gazed, and its discoveries have but filled in some of the details of the story so concisely told by him.

There is reason to expect, then, that he will not be contradicted as to other parts of it when further passages of the book of nature, hitherto illegible, are deciphered: provided, of course, the figures so dear to the Eastern are not tied down to categorical meanings which never for a moment entered his thoughts. Meanwhile, at all events, his six «days», are entitled to more respect than has lately fallen to their share. If this necessity very slight sketch does anything to obtain for them a fair field and no favour, its purpose will be achieved.

R. G. Corbet



Succession au trône Ottoman

Abdul Hamid II, Sultan actuel de Turquie, a l'intention de changer le système de succession jusqu'ici en vigueur. Le seul prince héritier du trône de Turquie est, sans contredit, S. A. I. Réchad Effendi, qui montera sur le trône sous le nom de Sultan Mouhammed V; il est le frère cadet d'Abdul Hamid. Avec les bons soins (sic) de quelques ministres tels que Riza Pacha, ministre de la guerre, un des assassins de notre éminent homme d'Etat Midhat Pacha, Abdul Hamid veut consacrer l'héritage de trône à son quatrième fils Burhaneddin Effendi. Le Sultan qui, depuis plusieurs mois se trouve incurablement malade et voit s'approcher son dernier jour, effaré et jaloux, non rassasié de sang, cherche à assurer un