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Poetry.

FAITH.

A SONNET.

"Works are the breath of Faith!" Broad-chested Faith,
First but a babe just strong enough to weep
That it can do no more—then fall to sleep,
And wake, again in sighs to spend its breath.
Next it doth learn to utter childish sounds,
With imitative tongue and lisping voice,
Speaking the accents of another's choice,
Nor venturing speech beyond tuition's bounds.
Then, youth, more ardent and much bolder grown
Elects its when and where, nor will be taught,
But that it finds loud words oft go for naught.
Yet, healthy lungs gain strength with every tone,
Till in its stalwart manhood, bold and wise,
Faith breathes forth love, and prayers responsive rise.

Religious.

The longevity of the first men.

A phenomenon which does not fail to arrest, at times, the observant student of the Holy Scriptures in the reading of the first pages of Genesis, is the long duration of the life of the first men. How astonishing and mysterious these existences, which prolong themselves very far beyond the bounds of life to-day assigned to mortals; these careers which perpetuate themselves during seven or eight generations, and which permit a man to see himself reproduced in his remote children's children; these venerable patriarchs, who, during very near a thousand years, have assisted in the pageant of all that has passed since the beginning of the world, and who are themselves the living history of an entire epoch!

To disembarass himself of a fact which to him seemed incredible, Varro, cited by Lactance (*De origine erroris*, L. II., cap. 12.) thought of reducing the biblical years to simple months, supporting himself by the customs of the Egyptians, who measured the duration of time, not by the revolutions of the earth around the sun, but by those of the moon around the earth. According to this calculation, a life of eight or nine hundred years, is found reduced to one of eighty or ninety years. But this computation is evidently inadmissible. It is, first, contradicted by the biblical chronology itself. How can we doubt that with the Hebrews the year was composed of twelve months, of thirty days each, when we find Moses, in the history of the deluge, giving to us the detail of the months and days during which this destructive scourge continued? And then, it is overthrown by the difficulties it creates, and the impossibilities it accumulates. If the years, according to Moses, instead of being composed of twelve months, number only thirty days, Seth begat his first son at the age of eight years, Enos at the age of seven years, and the longest of the patriarchal lives, that of Methuselah, does not reach beyond ninety years. Who can believe this? So then, to rid ourselves of perplexity, we complicate the difficulty that we wish to remove. In short, if we incline to the opinion of Varro, all the chronology of Moses is overthrown, and the period which elapsed from the creation to the deluge has no longer any settled measure which we can make to accord with history; the foundations of historic certitude are subverted.

Let us cling, then to the commonly-admitted interpretation; let us not depart at all from the orthodox belief; and let us admit, in all its extent, the longevity of the patriarchs as it is presented by Moses.

In this position we have tradition, first, to confirm us. All the historians and ancient poets agree in their representations of these lives, as passing away mild and peaceable, free from the cares of life, exempt from fatiguing labours, screened from those long and cruel diseases which exhaust the constitution, and which bring in their train a precocious old age. Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, are unanimous on this point; and it was not only during the continuance of the golden age, but also during

the period of the age of silver, as they assure us, that men attained to a long and happy old age. It we believe the poet Hesiod, who embellished the tradition of his epoch, man at a hundred years of age was yet young, during the centuries which formed the age of silver.

And in the thing itself, what is there so surprising in the generally-admitted opinion? Are not all the inductions in its favour? Whether we set out from the biblical point of view, or place ourselves on the ground of reason, the belief in the longevity of the first men has in its favour more probabilities than the contrary belief. We shall not have much difficulty to convince ourselves of it, in view of the following reflections.

Man, as he went forth from the hands of his Creator, possessed a sinless soul, and a healthy body: he had no physical infirmity, no moral stain. The most perfect organs were in the service of a pure soul, which no passion had yet agitated. Sin comes, breaking the union of man with God; it shatters also the union of man with nature, and overthrows the perfect equilibrium which existed between the faculties of the soul and the forces of the body. Passion once awakened, the nervous system is shaken, the blood is heated, disease is produced, and step by step it brings death. But this work of destruction was not wrought in a moment. It advanced slowly and steadily. It gradually undermined that powerful constitution which the Creator had made to last for ever. Adam, in continued innocence, would never have died. It is the teaching of Scripture. If, in God's design, he was not to remain always on the earth, he would have been transferred, at the termination of a period which it would be hazardous to determine, into a better abode, but without any necessity of passing through the terrible ordeal of death. But now, in destroying a constitution so vigorous, in reducing to dust a body so strongly organized as was that of the first man, how many years, how many centuries even, might not pass away! It would be astonishing that an organization so magnificent, as from Scripture and from reason we may suppose was Adam's, should have fallen at the first shock. It would be inconceivable that the direct, immediate work of the creative power, should have yielded to the first attacks of disease; and that Adam, a sinner, and his first descendants, sinners with him, should not have lived a longer time than sinful men in our days. The oak of the forest does not fall under the first blow. The roots which sustain and strengthen it, and which are to spread the sap in all its branches, endure a longer time than its leaves and its fruit. The plant is pierced at its root by the gnawing worm, but it preserves sufficient of life to support itself and to remain. The poison of sin had insinuated itself into man's physical and moral being. But there must be a considerable lapse of time ere it shall enter into all their parts, corrode all their organs, penetrate to the seat of life, and consummate the final separation of the soul and the body. And this lapse is found in the seven, eight, and nine centuries which history has assigned as a limit to the life of the first men.

These long lives continue until the deluge. From this epoch the duration of human life sensibly diminishes. Because, on the one hand, human corruption had made amazing progress and frightful ravages, as is seen in reading of the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Genesis; and because, on the other hand, our globe, without doubt singularly modified by the terrible catastrophe which had submerged it, was no longer as favourable as before to the preservation of human life; we can very reasonably suppose that, after this, many causes concurred to abridge the existence of men. While before, pure air, a cloudless atmosphere, a frugal life, healthy food, and simple habits, probably contributed to maintain and to fortify the principle of life, that same life was now found assailed and enfeebled by the action of the most formidable agents, leagued, in some manner, to make war upon it. Thus the accumulation of burning sands as in the Great Sahara; the formation of immense morasses on many maritime coasts; the sudden alternations of cold and heat; excess of humidity, of snow and of ice in certain countries, and of drought and heat in others; infectious, miasmas, originating in

corruption, or venomous animals quickly following an inundation so dreadful, which had left debris of the dead; all these, and other causes, doubtless, would work in concert, and end in considerably reducing the bounds of human life. Perchance, in the origin of the world, man lived only upon vegetables and fruits, and these sufficed to repair the powers of the constitution in all the vigour of a continually renewed youth. But perceiving his powers weakened by slow degrees, he found the need of modifying his alimentary regimen, and adding to plants, which had almost wholly composed his first sustenance, the food of animals. Although man was organized to be carnivorous, yet nothing is opposed to the admitted fact, that he did employ, from the beginning, the granted privilege, and that in providential designs he abstained from the flesh of animals, until it had become indispensable in sustaining his enfeebled life. But the evil was done, and the wisest no longer sufficed to guarantee the most robust of men from the attacks of an even premature death.

Add to the reasons which we have just given for the longevity of the first men, an argument which we may call providential. This longevity was necessary to preserve ancient traditions pure. Were any of the natural reasons wanting which we have given, that which we are about to develop would suffice, it seems to us, to resolve the difficulty of the problem. At an epoch when the scarcely-formed primitive language only began to attempt speech, when no trace of literature yet existed, when industry and art in a state of infancy did not permit the construction of monuments destined to perpetuate the remembrance of deeds, when the almost exclusively pastoral or nomadic life of the first tribes was incompatible with a high degree of intellectual culture, of what importance was memory as almost the only means of retaining the recollections of the first ages! The patriarch of the family supplied in himself the absence of books and of institutions, and was to it solely the science and the literature of the age. His mission was to guard carefully all moral and religious revelations, all social traditions, all the remembrance of history, all the gifts of language. His was the entire trust of general instruction. The longer he lived, the longer were the treasures of future generations, concentrated in his person, preserved intact and pure. But, on the contrary, the more generations multiplied, the more did the archives of humanity, whose keeping had been confided to him, run the risk of being altered and lost. But admitting that sin did not produce in the lives of the antediluvians the same results as in those of the men who have succeeded them,—the moderate period of whose lives being at the number which Moses indicates,—then Divine Providence has provided the most excellent means of assuring the perpetuity of the primitive relations given by God to the first father of the human race.

We will judge by an easily-established calculation. Adam, who lived 930 years, died only 126 years before Noah's birth, and might live fifty-six years with the father of this patriarch. Noah himself, whose career was 950 years, left the world only seventy-six years before Abraham's birth; and between the death of Abraham and the birth of Moses not more than 250 years passed away. Then between Adam, the head of the human race, his first patriarch and prophet, and Moses, the first of the inspired writers, there were from three to four generations only. So that, even admitting the hypothesis of those who think that Moses, after ancient documents preserved by oral tradition, or by the means of writing, has committed to writing the history of the creation, of the first man, the deluge, the tower of Babel, and the dispersion of the people, what confidence should not inspire documents which might so easily reach him without falsification! And how can it be doubted that under the Divine inspiration, which enlightened his thought, directed his judgment, and guided his pen, he has made the best use of those materials placed at his disposal by the families of the patriarchs? The father of Noah had without doubt seen and conversed with Adam; Noah, in his turn, could see the father of Abraham, and could transmit to him revelations which from that time were faithfully kept in the family of the

patriarchs, even to the very moment when Moses, called from on high to the holiest of ministries, came to ineffaceably engrave and to perpetuate to the end of time the great remembrances of the creation, and the weighty instructions of primitive times.

What importance, then, in this point of view, does not the question of the longevity of the first men acquire? And how painful is that mocking infidelity which, without any reason, is pleased to deny or to turn into ridicule avowed facts, solely because it cannot receive them within the narrow bounds of its limited capacity!

But the providential argument which we have just presented can be seen in still another point of view. The earth, prepared for the abode of man, was to be peopled as promptly as possible in its principal parts. Otherwise, it was exposed to be covered with forests, to be covered with forests to be filled with wild beasts, its land to be changed into heaths and morasses, and even the atmosphere which surrounded it was exposed to change. To avoid all these evils, for whose disappearance many centuries could scarcely have sufficed, a rapid propagation of the human species was necessary, and not less indispensable was it that men increasing should come by degrees to people the surface of the earth. And how could this end be more properly attained, than by giving a length to human life which should permit growth and extension to each family until it should become a tribe? And, admitting that the physical causes above indicated were not sufficient to prolong the existence of the first men, how can it be denied that the Creator in his wisdom and power could find means to supply them? But that which was a blessing for the sixteen centuries which preceded the deluge, would have become an evil for those that followed it. The longevity necessary to people the world, would have become a scourge, had it remained after the world was peopled. Accordingly, at this epoch, God pronounced that the days of man should be no more than 120 years; and the author of the ninety-third psalm complains that already in his time the limit of human life did not exceed seventy years, and the most vigorous did not live beyond fourscore.

Thus Scripture, tradition, the nature of things, reason, and providence, all unite in convincing us that there is nothing fabulous in those antediluvian existences whose genealogy Moses has preserved, and that their considerable length has nothing in it which should astonish men who believe in the inspired Word, and who make a legitimate use of reflection.

Bible Revision.

DEAN ALFORD ON THE AUTHORIZED VERSION OF THE BIBLE.—The first number of "The Sunday Magazine," a new periodical edited by the well known Dr. Guttridge, contains an article by the Dean of Canterbury, in which the Authorized Version of the Scriptures is discussed. Dean Alford, reminding his readers that of the 500 and more of the manuscripts of the Gospels from which the text was printed, "no two are in all points alike, probably in no two of the more ancient can even a few consecutive verses be found in which all the words agree," and adding that some of the differences are very important, "even to the omission in some copies and insertion in others of passages of considerable length," remarks still further that in the most ancient documents, the forms of the sacred text become more widely divergent. He says:—"Nay, a remarkable phenomenon is forcing itself on the minds of those who have been widely conversant with these oldest authorities, viz., that the further back we go, the more divergent in mere outward form become the wordings of the same passages which are narrated by the Gospels in common, and also the more divergent in the different primitive manuscripts, become the mere words of the sacred text throughout." The practical purpose of the article is, to urge the revision of our present version of the New Testament. After saying that our English version "abounds with errors and inadequate renderings," he (Dean Alford) continues—"In this matter let me speak plainly, and say that the church of Christ in this land has not acted faithfully by her members. A formidable list