

the existence of a long prehuman period.... Moses describes the process of creation as gradual, and mentions the order in which living things appeared, plants, fishes, fowls, land-animals, man. By the study of nature geology has arrived independently at the same conclusion. Where did Moses get all this knowledge? How was it that he worded his rapid sketch with such scientific accuracy? If he in his day possessed the knowledge which genius and science have attained only recently, that knowledge is superhuman. If he did not possess the knowledge, then his pen must have been guided by superhuman wisdom. Faith has, therefore, nothing to fear from science....⁴³

T. R. Birks

In 1862 the Religious Tract Society of London published the book The Bible and Modern Thought, by the Rev. T. R. Birks, rector of Kelshall, in Hertfordshire. The Preface states that the book was written "in order to supply some antidote, in a popular form, to that dangerous school of thought which denies the miracles of the Bible, explains away its prophecies, and sets aside its Divine authority."⁴⁴ This volume contains 19 chapters and 5 appendices, dealing with such topics as, "The Supernatural Claims of Christianity," "The Reasonableness of Miracles," "The Historical Truth of the Old Testament," "The Historical Unity of the Bible," and "The Inspiration of the Old Testament." Chapter 14 is entitled "The Bible and Modern Science." In it Birks takes a position very similar to that of Hitchcock, whom we discussed above--though without the breadth of scientific knowledge shown by the latter. Birks, like Hitchcock, emphasizes that the purposes of the Bible are religious and moral, rather than scientific. He astutely observes at this point that, if its purpose were scientific, it would have to contain a great deal more of scientific detail than it does, in order to be of much value as a scientific work.⁴⁵

Birks accepts the scientific observations of astronomers and geologists as valuable and as descriptive of real events and real periods of time. In this chapter we are reminded that any seeming disagreements between the Mosaic account of creation and the observations of science easily disappear when we realize that the Biblical account is "optically given, or describes changes as they would appear to a terrestrial observer." The "optical" nature of the account is seen as a recording of events according to the way they would appear to a human observer. The reality of such a method of revelation is said to be supported by the fact that such a style "is the constant usage of all historians, without exception, ancient and modern," and "is the idiom of the Bible itself in every other part of the sacred narrative." The record of the 4th day of creation is one of the places where we most clearly see that Moses was writing in an "optical" style, since the celestial bodies were very evidently created prior to the 4th day.⁴⁶

As for the location of the greater part of the geologic ages in time, Birks places them just after "the absolute creation in the first verse," and before "the six days of creation that follow."⁴⁷ He summarizes his view of creation in relation to geology as follows: