"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, are spirit and are life."—John vi. 63.

Is the Bible God's book? Is it God's book in any sense in which Nature is God's book? If it be, there will be an agreement between the Bible and Nature.

Or thus — Two Words of God cannot contradict each other. The Bible is God's Word. Nature is God's Word. Therefore the Bible and Nature cannot contradict each other.

Or again, thus — Two Words of God cannot conflict in their statements. Nature is certainly God's Word. But the Bible conflicts with Nature. Therefore the Bible is not God's Word.

Which, then, shall it be? The Bible and Nature one harmonious Word; or the Bible against Nature, two conflicting Words? Are these two agreed, or is there a disagreement and a discrepancy between them? Are they in harmony together, or is there such a difference that the choice of the one, necessarily involves the rejection of the other?

I propose to try the issue, taking for my theme the Bible narrative of the deluge. In the course of the argument, the following questions will come up for consideration. Does the Bible description of the deluge agree with the conclusions of modern science? Can any such agreement be effected if the Bible narrative is only to be interpreted in the sense of the letter? If no such agreement is possible, are we at liberty to understand the narrative otherwise than in the sense of the letter?

Is it to be regarded as an allegory, and not as a literal history, and will this resolve all difficulties? Lastly, how far is Christianity implicated in the discussion?
It will be seen by this, that the subject is comprehensive in its bearings and of great importance. The divine authority of the Bible and of the Christian religion is bound up with it. One experiment is as good as ten thousand, and a failure here is a failure everywhere. According as the deluge of Genesis shows an agreement or the reverse, between the Bible and Nature, Christianity is very much affected by it. For a belief in Christianity includes an acceptance of the Old Testament as the Word of God. A belief in Christianity, is a belief in the Divine authority and inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures, No man has any claim to the title of Christian, who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and this one article will be found to involve the belief of a hundred others, of a similar stamp. The Christianity of the New Testament, was a Christianity which did not curiously inquire into the inspiration of Moses and the prophets. It accepted that without inquiry. It did not stop to ask, is this credible ? or is that well authenticated ? but took it for granted that it was both credible and authentic, because it was there written.

With these preliminary remarks, I will now proceed to my subject.

The popular idea of the deluge, as it has been derived from the plain statement of the Scripture is, that it was an overflow of water by which the entire surface of the earth was submerged; and that it was produced by a breaking up of the fountains of the great deep, and forty days of incessant rain. This is the orthodox faith, which universally obtained for so many ages; and which would still so obtain if it were possible, and if it only knew how. The science of Geology, however, demonstrates that the faith is a superstition which has no foundation: in fact.

Ever since mankind have gone to the book of Nature to read in her pages, they have been gradually giving up the ancient belief as untenable. It was for a long time supposed that geology itself substantiated the account of the Scripture deluge. When the science was first cultivated, it was believed, for instance, that marine shells and other fossils were an effect and proof of the deluge. But this opinion is now entirely exploded. It is now known that these remains are no evidence of the Noachian deluge; and, indeed, that no evidences of it exist in nature. Geology demonstrates that the earth's surface has never been disturbed since man has lived upon it; but the very purpose of the deluge of Genesis, was to sweep man from off the earth! Dr. Hitchcock, an orthodox clergyman, and author of the "Religion of Geology," says upon this point, that "the moment we come to examine the details respecting marine petrifactions, we see that nothing can be more absurd than to suppose them the result of a transient deluge." And again he observes, "among well informed geologists at least, the opinion is almost universal, that there are no facts in their science which can be clearly referred to the Noachian deluge; that is, no traces in nature of that event,"

Thus, then, the subject stands at present.

Nature pronounces against the Scripture deluge as the literal history of physical phenomena. The granite book, whose inspiration none can doubt, directly contradicts the written book, whose inspiration is in question. The deluge, therefore, is a piece of fabulous history; or the
narrative must have another meaning than that which appears from considering the plain, literal, import of the language. Now we might rest the argument here, as against those who hold the Bible to be God's book, and at the same time think that God's book can teach a literal deluge. But let us notice a few of the difficulties that beset this position. Let us see, a little more in detail, where they have placed themselves, who affect to believe, contrary to the teachings of nature, that this story of the deluge is the inspired Word of God, in the sense of the letter, and according to the plain grammatical import of the language.

In the first place, it is not necessary to make an appeal to geology, in order to overthrow the Bible narrative, considered as a literal history. The language employed in describing the deluge, sufficiently proves its absurdity as a physical fact. We have seen how geology refutes the popular tradition of marine shells as an evidence of the deluge. We shall now see how the Bible itself refutes it.

When we picture the deluge to our minds, we think of a tumultuous mass of waters, sweeping along the surface of the earth with the strength of a thousand tides; and rushing up the mountain slopes to engulf the wretched creatures who have fled to them for safety. This may be the deluge of painters, but it is not the deluge of the Bible. There are no features of this terrific picture, in the narrative of Genesis. There, the rise and falling of the waters are described as having been gradual and tranquil. Vegetation, even, was not destroyed; but an olive leaf is said to have been plucked off from the tree, after it had been under deep water for the best part of a year. Then, again, there is no mention of any storm having arisen. For all that we read to the contrary, the ark lay like a log on the waters. The narrative, moreover, is not consistent with itself. We find, for instance, that Noah sent forth a dove "to see if the waters were abated," one hundred and fourteen days after the ark had actually rested on Ararat; that after the hills were covered, the waters rose twenty-three feet, and then the mountains were covered—not a great difference this, between hills and mountains — that the ground was dry nearly two months before the earth was dry, and other strange contradictions. In fact, the Bible sufficiently refutes itself, if it teaches a literal deluge. It is evident from the narrative in Genesis that the surface of the earth was very little disturbed; and consequently this deluge could not have occasioned those vast changes under the earth's crust which were once ascribed to its action. These changes are now known to be the results of different diluvial actions, which have taken place in other and former ages of the world; and none of them are universal, but local only.

To refer them to Noah's flood, is to require us to believe, among other things, that in three hundred and eighty days there were deposited rocks six miles in thickness over the existing continents of the globe, and these rocks made up of thick beds exceedingly unlike one another in composition and organic contents. We cannot believe this possible without the intervention of a miracle, compared with which all the miracles recorded in the Bible sink into insignificance.

So far we have considered the deluge, supposing it to have been brought about by breaking up the crust of the earth, and submerging the land under the water. But there is another way in which it may be attempted to account for it, viz., by bringing the water up over the land, and
so leaving the earth's crust unbroken.

We will now examine this hypothesis, and see whether it can be rationally believed. We read in Genesis vii. 19: "And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered; fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered." The difficulty which meets us here is, the great quantity of water that would be required to cover the whole earth above the tops of the highest mountains. It would require a volume of water equal to about five miles above the level of the sea; or eight times greater than all the water existing on the globe. The question naturally suggests itself: whence was all this water to be collected, and how was it to be disposed of after it had answered its purpose. Such a vast body of water would increase the equatorial diameter of the earth eleven or twelve miles, and also the earth's gravity, thereby producing and propagating disorder throughout the whole solar system. These are great difficulties, and very puzzling, but the attempted solutions of them are still more so. Some have supposed that the interior of the earth is full of water, and that this enormous supply came from thence. They have also been very ingenious in devising methods for forcing it to the surface. Others, again, account for the water by supposing that a comet must have come in contact with the earth, and thrown the waters of the ocean over the land. Others, still, have conjectured that the water came from one of the planets, and that the deluge being ended it returned back again to its former place. But the last resort has been to omnipotence and miracle. The author of "the Religion of Geology" thinks this "the most satisfactory way of getting over the difficulty if he must believe the deluge to have been universal." Lyell, in his "Principles of Geology," expresses the same opinion: "for my own part" he says, "I have always considered the flood, when its universality in the strictest sense of the term is insisted on, as a preternatural event far beyond the reach of philosophical inquiry, whether as to the causes employed to produce it, or the effects most likely to result from it." Now these are great authorities in science, but in theological matters they must be listened to very cautiously. There are the most serious objections to this argument of miracle. In the first place, it is too convenient. There is no difficulty so great but that it may be avoided by having recourse to supernatural agency. We may believe anything, however incredible in itself, by merely affirming, it is a miracle; and nothing can be easier, than to make the omnipotence of God the scapegoat of physical impossibilities. Secondly, this supposition of miracle does not accord with the tenor of the Scripture narrative. No one can read the narrative, without having the impression left on his mind that everything was brought about by natural causes. We are not, surely, at liberty to call in the aid of miracle, to solve difficulties of which the writer appears to have been totally unconscious. Thirdly, the deluge having-been miraculously produced, every vestige of it must have been miraculously destroyed. Fourthly, the argument of miracle was never heard of, until science had demonstrated the falsity of every other argument. And lastly, the argument for any miracles whatever, in the orthodox sense of miracle, is in such a distressed condition, that it may very properly be dispensed with in the present discussion.

Aware of these and similar objections, theologians now deny the universality of the deluge. The original idea, and which obtained for so many ages was, that the deluge was an overflow of the whole earth by water, about four thousand years ago; but, as we have seen, the phenomena appealed to in proof of it, give no evidence that there has ever been any such event. This opinion is now generally abandoned as untenable, and it is alleged that the Bible deluge was universal only in respect to man, but limited in geographical extent. The author of
the "Religion of Geology" adopts this view. He considers that the deluge was limited "to the
inhabitable part of the globe which embraced at that time probably the small portion of Asia
originally fitted up for the residence of man — that by heavy rains, and the upheaving of the
Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, and perhaps the Indian Ocean, through internal volcanic
agency, the whole of that region was covered, even the highest mountains, destroying man
and beast, except those preserved in the ark—and that it is probable that the theory which
makes the deluge limited in extent will meet with more favor than any other with candid and
intelligent men, to obviate the suggested difficulties of the case." But to the theory of a partial
deluge the objections are quite as serious as to that of a universal deluge. I will mention a few
of them. In the first place if it were local in respect to the earth, and universal only as respects
man, then by the very circumstance of its being thus limited, the probability is greatly
increased of finding human remains in proof of it. 'But geologists tell us that "no bed produced
by diluvial action has ever been discovered which contained a single bone or tooth of the
human species, or any the least relic of man."

2. The ark rested on Mount Ararat, in Armenia. A flood, therefore, which covered the top of
Ararat, must have overspread every other portion of the globe, for that mountain is upwards of
17,000 feet above the level of the sea. How is this to be reconciled with the theory of a local
deluge ?

3. A late writer furnishes a third objection. "There are, as is well known, several species of
trees, which grow to a very large size, and live to a great age. Some of these are found in
Africa, and others in the warmer regions of our own continent.

Now there are infallible methods of ascertaining the age of trees. And many of these trees on
being felled, exhibit unmistakable marks of having been growing where they now stand for
nearly six thousand years — a period which reaches back for many hundred years before the
date of the deluge. It is also certain that these trees could not have retained life during a
submergence of three-quarters of a year: they would have been destroyed in a very short
time by any flood which should have overflowed their tops. If the deluge ever occurred, it
would have reached the places where many of these trees now stand, and would have
overwhelmed the most of them."

4. A fourth objection to this theory, or to any theory of the deluge as a literal fact, is suggested
by the received chronologies of the Bible. The date commonly assigned to the deluge, is
about 2400, B.C. Now there were only eight persons saved in the ark; the history of mankind
may therefore be said to date from the flood, and to begin anew in Noah and his family. But it
is certain that the circumstances connected with the early history of the Egyptians, Mexicans,
Hindoos, Chinese, and other nations, demand a much greater extension of time than this. "
The Chinese were undoubtedly located in their present country, as early as the alleged date
of the deluge, on the longest chronology allowed by the Bible;" that is, the Chinese people is
vastly more ancient than the deluge, and the Chinese language vastly older than the
supposed confusion of tongues at Babel. The same may be said of many other peoples and
their language.
5. The last objection which I shall offer, and one which renders every other superfluous, is derived from the plain intelligible purport of the Bible narrative, as literally understood. The narrative gives no countenance to the theory of a local deluge. The deluge was universal, or there was none. We read, "And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered." And again, "Behold I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven, and everything that is in the earth shall die." There is no mistaking the literal import of these words. The language is so plain that many theologians have flatly denied the conclusions of science, because the deluge is found related in the Bible, and the Bible is the Word of God. And this, indeed, is the only consistent course open to them. They find here a "thus saith the Lord," and this, with them, outweighs the clearest scientific demonstration. Science, in their opinion, is "falsely so called." Philosophy is "vain deceit," while the simple word of Scripture is proof enough. They want no more than a "thus saith," or a "thus it is written," and this though it be "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness," is to them "both the power and the wisdom of God."

The hypothesis of a deluge, whether partial or universal, is so utterly unfounded, that those who are resolved to maintain it in either sense, are obliged to rest at last on the simple authority of the Bible. The farther, indeed, that we investigate this subject in its relations to modern knowledge, the more absurd and contradictory will it appear; for, besides the difficulties already enumerated, there are others quite as perplexing connected with the ark and its contents—difficulties so great as to demand miracle upon miracle to dispose of them. Let us give a glance at one or two.

1. The ark was to receive seven pairs of clean animals, and two of unclean, besides eight persons. There must also be room enough to store away twelve months' provisions. How could this be accomplished in a vessel of the dimensions the ark is described to have been? The number of the species of animals already known to science is not less than 150,000; and the actual number is probably half-a-million. How were all these creatures to be taken in? Theologians have made their estimates for about four thousand species, or one thirty-seventh part of the number already known to exist—a mistake which comes of not teaching natural history in the colleges. The ark was a vessel of about four hundred and fifty feet long by seventy-five feet broad, and forty-five feet high: where could these half-million creatures find room in it?

2. Supposing the ark were capacious enough to hold the pairs and septuples of all the species of animals, how could eight people take care of them, and give them their water and food daily?

3. The ark was pitched, within and without, with pitch. It had only one door and one window, and these were never opened for "the Lord shut them in." There was, therefore, no means for ventilation; and how then could they escape a pestilence?

4. If this story of an actual deluge be true, then all species of animals have migrated from
Armenia as their common centre. But this is contradicted by science. Both zoologists and botanists are agreed that there must have been several centres of creation, from which animals and plants radiated, only so far as climate and food were adapted to their natures. At all events, they are thus distributed at present, and it is found that most species will die if taken beyond certain geographical limits. We cannot, therefore, conceive how the animals could be brought together in the ark; or how, many of them could live in a climate altogether unsuited to their natures; and, above all, how, after the flood had subsided, they could be distributed again to their proper localities. It is of no avail to appeal to miraculous agency for an answer to these objections; for the ark was expressly intended to dispense with miracle, by rendering a fresh creation of animals superfluous.

There still remains the moral argument — the argument from humanity. The tragedy of a drowning world! Did any man ever try to realize it and not shrink back with horror at the thought? Did he ever bring before his mind's eye, the spectacle there presented? Did he ever fancy that he saw those wretched mothers with little children uplifted in their arms, or that he heard the thousand shrieks of terror as they fled before the whelming waters. The Creator of the Universe who made his creatures and knew what they would be when he made them, would never, surely, have directly ordered this.

Where then is this deluge? We cannot find it. Science is against it. History is against it. Humanity is against it. Perhaps it may be said, that it is referred to in other parts of the Bible. This is true; it is spoken of by Jesus Christ, and in some of the Epistles of the New Testament; but this, of itself, proves nothing. It does not therefore follow that the deluge is true, and worthy of belief, because Jesus Christ alludes to it. That which is certainly and demonstrably false cannot be made true by any process — not by quoting any number of texts of Scripture. However, it remains to be shown that Christ did believe this natural deluge. The way in which he alluded to the deluge determines nothing as to the light in which he understood it. He speaks of it as some great calamity, and that is all; as for the nature of the calamity that may be altogether spiritual for anything that is said to the contrary; and most likely was so, if his own saying is to guide us: "The words that I speak unto you, are spirit, and are life."

The same remark applies to the traditions of the deluge common among so many ancient peoples. Whence, it is asked, have we the traditions of a deluge, if it never happened. We answer; the point to be first proved, is the kind of deluge referred to by those traditions. It is assumed to have been a natural flood of waters; but whether it was so, is disputed, and very doubtful, as we shall see in the further exposition of our argument.

We may now dismiss the theory of a physical deluge; for if the narrative in Genesis is to be taken for a history of natural phenomena, then all that we can say of it is, that it is simply untrue from beginning to end. What then is to be done? Plainly, only one thing — we must seek another and spiritual meaning; or be content to acknowledge that this, at all events, is no part of God's word. The discoveries of science carry with them the convincing privilege of demonstration. The glory of science is its certitude; and to reconcile the certainties of science with the precise literal language of the Scripture account of the deluge, is impossible. Is there
any other theory? Is there any view which will admit the truth and soundness of the arguments advanced, against the deluge considered as a physical occurrence, and at the same time, give an intelligible meaning to the Bible narrative? This is what now remains to be considered; and I shall therefore devote the concluding portion of this Lecture to the exhibition of one other view, against which, it may be affirmed at the outset, none of the objections already urged will have weight, for it takes the subject entirely out of the sphere of their influence.

According to this view, the narrative of the flood is not a literal, but, an emblematical history. It is an allegory, in which the things signified are contained within the things mentioned, so that the latter only serve as a medium for the conveyance of the former, and have no proper meaning of their own. The opening chapters of Genesis, down to the fourteenth verse of the eleventh chapter i.e. to the birth of Abraham, it is said, are written in this style. They are written throughout in the language of symbols, after the fashion of all the most ancient writing; and are intended to express spiritual things only, by means of appropriate images drawn from that fount of all human speech, the world of nature. They relate to the moral and spiritual history of man, and only allude to other matters in subordination to this one great purpose, and according as they can be made to subserve it. Thus, the first chapter of Genesis, in its true and proper meaning, is a description, by natural images, of the spiritual education of the first men of the race; called collectively, Adam, or the Man. It is a history of the development of primeval man, from the period of his moral infancy, when "the earth" or external nature of man "was without form and void;" 'till he grew up to be " an image and a likeness of God." This chapter treats of the rise, progress, and perfection of the first or most ancient Church; which was pre-eminently man; and in which dwelt the love of God above all things. The succeeding chapters describe the various changes through which this Church descended, from its culminating, or Eden state, when " God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." These changes are typified as the posterity of Adam. Thus, Cain and Abel, are not simple historical personages; but represent the people in whom "faith was disjoined from charity—also the death of charity, by which faith became a fugitive and a vagabond principle in the Church." This Church having, at length, altogether corrupted its way upon the earth; and having no longer any perception of truth and good; finds its consummation in the flood, when it is swept away, and only Noah and his sons, that is, a lower or spiritual Church survived. The Church represented by Noah, begins a new dispensation; or a secondary religion, in which the principle is not, as in the Eden Church, the spontaneous love of good, and the intuitive perception of truth, but conscience; or the following of what is good and true, from a principle of intelligence and utility.

Such is a very general sketch of the design and meaning of these chapters; and we may now, perhaps, understand what is signified in the narrative of the deluge. According to this view, the building of the ark refers to the establishment of a new society or Church, for which the people, under the name of Noah, were instructed to prepare. The ark represents the Church; or what is the same thing, a certain state of the human mind, into which was incorporated everything good and true; all spiritual gifts and graces necessary as a means of defence and protection against the evils which threatened the destruction of the race: evils, we may remark, which were the effect of the violation of natural and spiritual laws. To enter the ark, is to be saved; or, which is the same thing differently expressed, to be confirmed in the life of the religion which the ark represented. The clean beasts which were to be taken into the ark,
denote the higher affections of man's nature; and these were to be taken in by sevens, which signifies that they are pure and holy. The unclean beasts represent the lower affections. These were also to be taken into the ark, that is, to be regenerated, and made obedient to higher ends and uses; for the great end of religion was the same then, as it has ever been, viz: to develop the internal man, and to give him his rightful place and supremacy, by bringing all things of the external man into loving and obedient relations to him. It was then, as it is now, the aim of life to deprive the natural appetites and propensities of their pernicious tendencies, by the complete preponderance of the good affections and higher sentiments.

This then, it is averred, is the real meaning of the flood; not a drowning of the world by water, but the destruction of goodness and truth in the existing form of society; in other words, a moral deterioration of the race, attended, of course, with physical degeneracy and decay. It was a spiritual flood; an inundation of evils and falsities, primarily affecting the souls and spiritual lives of men, and thence, by necessary consequence, issuing to the injury and destruction of their bodies and natural lives. In fact it was a flood of evils, somewhat similar in kind to that which is now destroying the American Indians and other worn out and senile races which are fast disappearing from the earth, ever since they have been in contact with the temptations and the vices of a civilization which was too strong for them.

It will now be proper to glance at some of the arguments which are offered, in support and confirmation of this theory.

1. The Scripture usage and representation of a flood shows the spiritual import of the word, and that it does not necessarily convey the idea of natural waters. Thus in the Psalms, "Save me, 0 God, for the waters are come into my soul. I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me." Again in another Psalm, "Thou earnest them away as with a flood." So also in Isaiah c. 59, "when the enemy shall come in like a flood the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."And again in Daniel ix. 26 : "And after threescore and ten weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the prince that shall come, shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood" This latter text is an exact parallel to the meaning given to the flood in Genesis; for it refers to the destruction of the Jewish Church. Similar Scriptural confirmation may be produced in reference to the meaning given to the clean and unclean beasts that were to be gathered into the ark. The peaceable character of God's true Church, or the truly regenerate mind, is
the theme in both places.

2. Another and most weighty argument in favor of the spiritual theory is, that it gives such a sublime quality to the Bible and adds so greatly to the probability of its divine origin. The authority of the Bible is the great question underlying all religious controversies. Did God write the Bible? Yes, is the orthodox reply — the Church says he wrote it. And why does the Church say so? Because the Jews said so? And why did the Jews say so? Because God himself told them; or at least they say he told them. This is the famous circular movement of theology, and of those contrivances known by the name of "Christian Evidences," — the Church proves the Bible, and the Bible proves the Church. But here is another method. Here the Bible, like nature, is its own witness, and contains within itself the proper evidences of its divinity. And there is no other possible way but this, by which to attempt to show that it is God's book. For what is it that we should expect from a book claiming to be from God? Surely, we say, there must be this one grand mark of its Divine author in such a composition — the wisdom and goodness of God must shine forth from its pages. The book, as to its contents, must be like him who wrote it — infinite and divine. Now this is the principle on which the foregoing spiritual interpretation of the deluge is founded. There is nothing in that interpretation, but it is a mere fancy, unless it be demonstrably true that the word of God contains, and, in order to be the word of God, must contain,— in every part and particular of it, an inner or spiritual meaning which treats only of spiritual things — of God and man, and the interior and religious things of man; and also, that the outward expression, or external meaning, is constructed throughout, in entire subserviency to this divine purpose.

The principle is an eminently rational one. It first conceives worthily of God—of his nature and attributes—and then looks for the same in that which professes to be a revelation of his will. It argues that such as God is, such His word must be, if he should write a book for the instruction of man; On this principle the word of God is also a work of God; and every work of God, unlike the works of man, contains within it "wonderful things," which do not appear on the surface. In a word, this interpretation of the flood from a spiritual ground, is only a sermon on that sublime saying of Jesus Christ: "It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, are spirit and are life." But it is far otherwise with the words in the relation of the deluge, according to the popular acceptation of them. They are not spirit, nor yet life. They are nought. If the flood and the particulars therewith connected, have no other signification than that which is presented in the reading of the letter, then even a child may see that there is nothing whatever spiritual in the relation. The Scripture narrative, in the sense of the letter, supposing it were true, and not an absurd fable which it is, would be no more than a historical statement, and of a like utility and authority with any similar account composed by anybody.

3. A third argument which may be offered in confirmation of this view is, that it is perfectly consistent with all that we know of the genius of the earliest peoples of whom history has left any records. Few things are more certainly established than that the histories professing to describe the commencement of any nation of antiquity, are of a purely allegorical character. They are not, by any means, plain statements whose meaning he that runs may need; but most figurative and poetical. And why should this early history of Genesis be an exception? Divines are fond of asserting, that the book of Genesis is the oldest piece of writing in the
world. They know, or ought to know, what is the uniform character of all ancient writing; and yet they deny this same character to what they believe to be the most ancient of all! They commit the egregious literary blunder of judging the compositions of a period essentially figurative and symbolic by the genius of the plain, prosaic, matter of fact people of this utilitarian age of steam. Surely, by every rule of reason, by every law of analogy, by every precedent of antiquity, it is most rational to presume that this record of Genesis, whether it be or be not the word of God, is not, and never was intended, to be understood as a piece of plain writing, whose meaning is all patent on the surface of the language. If it be the oldest writing in the world, then it must be of a symbolical character, otherwise it is inexplicable how all other ancient writings are so.

4. Another argument, closely connected with the foregoing, is that this theory agrees with science and tradition in disproving the received Scripture chronologies. Indeed it makes light of all chronologies. It speaks of "a day of no annals" which history was not worthy to record. When we thus interpret the first chapter of Genesis, "not in the letter which killeth, but in the spirit which giveth life," then immediately we cease to think of Adam as the first man, or of his birth into the world as the beginning of the year one. Instead of regarding the record as an account of the formation of the material heavens and earth, and of the natural creation of man—themes far too high for human faculties—we read it in a much nobler and more human light, as an account of the successive spiritual states of the primeval races of men. It describes to us, not the order of natural creation which, indeed, is indescribable; but that spiritual process by which Adam, or the Man, is raised from the lowest degree of natural perception to the lofty realization of a true and truly human life. And who can count these years of Eden? Who can number this chronology? That well known puzzle about Cain—where did he meet with a wife, if there were nobody in the world besides himself, his father and mother, finds its solution here. Indeed this record of Genesis, ancient as it is, may after all, be quite a modern production, compared with those divine oracles that may have preceded it. And, doubtless, we may say, the first and best word of God—the divine voice heard among the trees of the garden—was not given in the words of any book, however holy; but was the world itself; and doubtless too, if we ourselves were as the first readers of that word, we should now need none other. The book of nature would be to us above all other books; for nature is the elder Scripture, and one day, when the golden hours come back again, she, the first-born, will supersede all written Scriptures, by fulfilling them with symbols of spirit and of love. Under the teachings of this spiritual interpretation, our minds expand far beyond the received orthodox limits; and we begin to think that the period of time between the creation of man and his fall, as related in the Bible, may cover as many thousand years as have elapsed from the fall to this day. Nay, we can even imagine it most probable, that the fall itself, so far from being as the popular theologies do teach, an instantaneous event, may have been in process hundreds or thousands of years before its full consummation and effect. Under the teachings of this view, we smile at the conceit of liberal Christianity which "leads civilization back to savagery for its origin," and thinks that from Adam to the present time there has been a gradual and steady advance in the state of society. We believe in the Eden of Scripture. We believe in the Paradise of God.

5. It may further be alleged in support of this theory, that it is not a new thing; but was propounded long before the progress of the natural sciences had rendered it necessary to seek some other explanation, than that which had so long been believed among Christians.
The idea of a local and partial deluge, advocated by Dr. Hitchcock and others, would never have been thought of, but for "the oppositions of science." Orthodoxy would have slumbered on in the dark, serenely reposing on the wisdom of Moses, if Lyell and his associates would only have held their peace. Not so, however, with the theory before us. That was in the world, published and proclaimed, yea, most minutely described and drawn out in every the least particular of interpretation, when as yet science had pronounced no word against the orthodox faith; and all the Christian world believed in the literal deluge of Genesis. This fact may be claimed as something. It shows, at least, that the spiritual theory, be it mystical, or far-fetched, or intricate, or visionary, or what not, is no "refuge for the destitute," and was never designed as such. Strange that orthodoxy, in its learned labors to make some sort of a credible story out of the deluge, should seem to be so ignorant of this view as never once to mention it in any way! Strange indeed, but it will be still more so, when, as I clearly foresee, orthodoxy will have to take up with this view, whose existence it now ignores, and to take up with it because it must. "When that shall come to pass, then the stage will be clear, and the real struggle between the Christianity of the Bible and the Christianities of nature will begin. It may or it may not be, that these will be found to dwell together in unity. It may be, that the Christianity of the Bible will have "to sit down in the lowest room."

6. And this suggests one more argument, and the last. Christians must either accept the spiritual theory, or they will lose "all their living"—all that they have. The evidence against the popular notion of the deluge is so overwhelming that we might as well affirm the most impossible thing we can imagine—as well say that the moon is an illuminated cheese—as that such a deluge has ever been. It is disproved in every particular of the Scripture narrative. It is simply untrue in the sense of the letter. There is but one other sense in which it can be true—a spiritual sense; and if it be not true in that sense, it is true in none. Which shall it be? For my own part, I do not here undertake to pronounce either way. I think the time is not yet come for that. I only say that the truth, if there is any, will be found in the direction just pointed out—in that system of exposition on which the spiritual explanation of the deluge is based. To the extent I am able, I have presented the subject to those who are most particularly interested in it. It does not so much concern me who belong to no sect, and am not the advocate of any peculiar set of fixed opinions. It concerns rather the popular Christianities; whether calling themselves liberal or orthodox. As they believe the word of Christ and his apostles, they are bound to believe in a deluge of some sort. They cannot avoid the belief. If they believe in a natural deluge, then, of course, they must think that Jesus Christ and his apostles believed so too. If they do not believe in a deluge of any sort, then what do they think Jesus and the apostles believed in? It is a very pretty dilemma, and it makes little difference on which horn of the dilemma they had rather be impaled. No; "the flood" will run after them. They cannot escape it, as so many no doubt would do, by the use of a few fine phrases about "jarring creeds," and "intricate theologies," and "religion identical with goodness," and "the spirit of Christ," and "practical Christianity," and so forth: No: Christ believed in a deluge—in a preternatural deluge; and so must they believe, or they do not believe in Christianity, whatever else they may believe in. Preachers have a habit of using the words Christianity, religion, morality, goodness, as if these were synonymous terms; but that they are so, is a very long way from being proved as yet. Nobody, perhaps, would care to dispute the identity of religion with goodness, if religion be defined as the loving link which hinds man to God, and men to each other. As a speculation, this is the commonest of all commonplaces, and, at least, as old as the creation of man. But what the world is waiting to know, is the identity of Christianity with goodness. Marry these two—make of these twain,
And yet how can this be done, when every Christian sect is entangled in the acceptance and belief of a hundred stories, as absurd as this literal deluge? We should think very strangely of the man, who should now assert the truth of the old astronomical speculations, that the earth was the largest body in the universe, and sun and stars created merely to be its appendages; but this is in nothing more absurd than what the popular Christianities do teach, when they attempt to teach anything, on these opening chapters of the Bible. How to get our mental progress reconciled with Christianity—that is the religious problem of today; and it is hopeless to go to any of the Christian sects for its solution. They are effete. If they were equal to their pretended mission, no such problem could ever have arisen to trouble us. Modern knowledge and ancient belief—these are the opposing powers. Which shall give way? Modern knowledge? Who dreams of such a thing? That knows no backward movement and no rest; neither can men say to it, as they fain would in their wrath, "hitherto thou shalt go, and no further." It is the ancient belief which must change, and which is changing every day. Where the change will end at last, none can tell; only, one thing is certain, that if it is to be in the direction of this "liberal Christianity," then the Christian Church will die. Christianity is a supernatural system, and or it is nothing. Supernaturalism,—using the term in its theological sense,—is the very life and soul of the Christian religion, or it has none. But it is becoming every day more evident to any thoughtful person, that liberal Christianity can only be consistent with itself, by denying the supernatural element altogether. It is mere naturalism in disguise—the wolf in sheep's clothing. The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. This people draw near to Christ with their mouth, and honor him with their lips, but their heart is far from him. Judas-like, they betray the Son of Man with a kiss. A man may be a believer in God and heaven and immortality, who does not believe in Christianity or the Bible; but Unitarianism and Universalism, as Christian systems founded on the Bible, are only the half way house to infidelity, as Christians call infidelity. They are nurseries for sceptics. No one who has thought deeply on religion, needs to be told how close and firm is the chain that binds Roman Catholicism with the last infidelity; and the various forms of orthodox and liberal Christianity are only so many links in that chain. Nay, Atheism itself, is nothing but the Catholic faith run to seed. It is simply the last development of "a corrupt tree which cannot bring forth good fruit." Atheism is orthodoxy in its dotage; for it follows the same stupid metaphysical methods, and only shows how stupid they are, leading as they do, when atheistically, that is, legitimately carried out, right down to the valley of darkness and death. How many who were once attached members of the Universalist society in this town, are now, and have been for years, disbelievers of both orthodox and liberal Christianity. And what has made them such? Nothing, only they saw that if Universalism were pursued to its last results, it must land them—where they are. The desperate methods of "liberal" theology in its dealings with the Bible, convinced them that Christianity could not be sustained on a basis of Universalism. The time has come when Universalism must contrive somehow to alter this, or its end may be clearly seen; which, indeed, is now shadowed forth, in the growing complaint, of want of interest and lack of spirituality among its members. The time has come when Christians of all sects, must entertain higher and clearer views of the Bible as God's book; or the time is not far distant when all idea of its inspired authority will be abandoned. But no one, surely would ever dream of looking to liberal Christianity for any such views; for its tendency has been ever more and more, in quite the opposite direction. What is the liberal theory of inspiration? Can any body tell? On what grounds does liberal Christianity believe the Bible to be God's book? Does any body know? Does any body know on what grounds any of the Christian sects believe the Bible to be God's book, or can believe, with the impossible absurdities that they charge upon the Bible? I profess I do not. I only see that one and all of
them make each their own Bible, to suit their own views. I see that no two books could more
widely differ, than the orthodox and Universalist Bibles. The one affirms the other's truth to be
a lie; and that, too, in regard to the most vital doctrines of the Christian religion. As one proof
out of a multitude, of their mutual impotence and inconclusiveness, take the following. The
editor of a Universalist paper inserts in his weekly issue, a half dozen of the strongest
orthodox texts. The editor of an orthodox paper puts into his weekly columns, the same
number of the strongest Universalistic texts. And with what object? Is it that the one should
disprove the other's dogmas? Oh, no; nothing so impossible and quixotic as that. It is only to
try which editor will soonest be tired of parading his adversary's Bible before the eyes of his
readers. So do Christian teachers play at theology—

"Sending buckets into empty wells, And growing old with drawing nothing up."

Seemingly it is never once doubted, but that the Bible is a thorough Universalist book; but on
what is the conviction grounded? on what theory of inspiration? on what law or rule of
interpretation? In a late number of the Universalist Quarterly Review, (October 1851) there is
a paper which emphatically approves of the modern miserable theory of a local and partial
deluge, as being the inspired teaching of the word of God. Is it, then, by criticisms of this
stamp that the Universalism of the Bible, and of the writers of the books of the Bible, is to be
proved to us? Nay, I think not; nor, I am sorry to say, by any kind of criticism now known
among Universalist teachers. A sect which can allegorize the temptation of Christ in the
wilderness, and refuse to entertain the idea of the deluge as an allegory, is no trustworthy
authority on the Bible. I hold in great respect, the name and memory of Father Ballou, but this
does not prevent me from seeing or saying, that the principles on which his Scripture
interpretation was based, are now no longer tenable. He was a sincere believer in the plenary
inspiration of the Bible, according to the old fashioned orthodox idea. He proved Universalism
from orthodox premises. Granted his premises, and his logic was, perhaps, irresistible; but if
you refused to grant them, what then? It will appear in due time, what then? Right manfully
he battled with the old theology on its own ground; but it is not there the battle will be fought
and won, for it is not there that the vital point is ever once touched. His letters to Abner
Kneelend on the divine authority of the Bible, do not reach the scepticisms of these days.
Father Ballou did a great work—for these liberal Christianities are among the things
foreordained—but he has made a work for his successors, the burden of which, none of
them will be able to bear. No doubt but there are Universalist texts in the Bible, plenty of them;
but so are there Orthodox texts in much greater plenty; and Baptist texts, and Roman Catholic
texts, and Shaker texts. Aye, and there are some texts, and they not a few, which are not
owned by any of the sects; neither printed in any of their Bibles, except in invisible letters.
Jesus says, "take no thought for the morrow." But where is the stickler for the plain sense of
Scripture, who lives as if he believed this? He says again, "give to him that asketh of thee,
and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not away." Will any one give us distinct scriptural
preaching from this text?—DISTINCT SCRIPTURAL PREACHING, in this land whose God is
gold, and where the interest is "six per cent?" He says again "if any man sue thee at the law,
and take away thy cloak, let him have thy coat also." Surely there can be no difficulty in
ascertaining what was "the thought which the original speaker had in his mind" here. But
what is to become of the legal profession, if this law of Christ should rule the day? He says
again, "if any man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." A man's cheek is
no doubtful matter, and the smiting is plain enough; but alas for the Christian Bibles, where is
this written in their pages? He says again, "Swear not at all, but let your communication be yea, yea, and nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Where is the child in a Sabbath school —where is the wayfaring man though a fool" who can err therein? But where is the Christian Church whose "wise and prudent doctors" do not reverse the saying, — "let not your communication be yea, yea, and nay, nay, but swear; for whatsoever is less than this, cometh of evil?" Truly they would seem to say of Jesus, as some said of old; "He hath a devil and is mad, why hear ye him?"

It is the easiest thing in the world, to prove Universalism or its opposite, or any doctrine, from texts of Scripture; but it is time this child's play were ended. If the Bible be the word of God, then these contradictory texts are merely phenomenal; and what we want, if we must have a theology, is a law or rule which will resolve all the phenomena; and construct out of them one uniform system of doctrine. Such a law most probably underlies the spiritual theory of interpretation which I have sketched in this lecture. Such a law must be found, sooner or later; or nothing is more certain, than that the Christian religion will eventually sink to the level of a mere philosophy, cold and colorless; without life and without power; wanting the refreshing dews of heaven, and the warm sunshine, and the summer air.

In the meantime, we see sect after sect springing up; and each new sect only serves the more to loosen the hold of the entire system on the minds of the people. Vast and increasing numbers sign off altogether; and refuse any longer to march under the sectarian banner, or to sit beneath the shadow of the sectarian pulpit. They say, what is the use of going to meeting to hear over again, the same old story we have heard any time these twenty years? Others again are yet found within the Church's walls, but not because they get any good there; rather because they must have somewhere to go on the Sabbath, if only for the sake of their children. And all the while the Church looks on, in fluttering impotence, like some poor hen, whose brood has taken to the water. The spirit-rapping revelations are drawing away their hundreds and thousands from the very temple stairs; and that Christianity which should be the teacher of all truth, stigmatises these marvels as a delusion of the Devil, or something worse, but cannot prove them to be so. Be they true, or be they false, they are working a mighty revolution in the common mind, in regard to the future life. They are totally confounding both orthodox and liberal ideas of heaven and hell; and there is many a preacher in New England at this time, who is in great trouble and heaviness of soul for some of his society, who now prefer to hear the Gospel from the "spirits," and listen to him by "spiritual" permission and sufferance only, if they listen at all. The future world, with its "palpable obscure," is the Churches' tower of strength, which gives them the little vantage which yet remains to them, above other and ordinary teachers. But the spirits are lifting the veil, and lo! the palpable obscure becomes as the noon day; and sorrowing hearts want no more the preacher's consolations, for they have found their Father's house by another way, and have bread enough and to spare. Hitherto, heaven and hell have been the vested rights of the clergy; and no man was thought qualified to speak on these high themes, who had not gone through the prescribed course of theological studies, and been duly ordained and set apart for the work. But now the vested rights are become common property; and the people are beginning to discuss the dangerous question of "every man his own minister," to transact his own religious affairs. It would, indeed, be no surprising thing, if, in the end, the Churches should see fit to take the spirits into their own care. They will do so, rather than that the alternative should be their own ruin. The instinct of self-preservation, to which a sect is always
true, will guide them in this, as it does in all matters that touch them nearly. Well, let it be so. The inevitable day will come at last; and the stars from their serene and silent spaces shall yet shine upon their desolation. The winds shall seek for them and they shall be no more; and their great names shall be forgotten, while one man, of the "prophets whom they have killed"—one man who is faithful to the light within him, shall outlive them all. For, let them say what they will, this, and not any of the ancient dogmas they dispute about, is the whole duty of man — with the most serene confidence to cleave to the eternal rectitude as "the sure ladder that leads up to man and to God"—to take no thought for the morrow, whether of this world or of that which is to come, as knowing well, that the morrow will take thought for the things of itself.