

Two letters by Henry Saltmarsh – 32 years apart, contrasting tones.

To the Editor: Adelaide Advertiser, 18th May 1864, p3
SCRIPTURE AND SCIENCE.

Sir— I have watched with much interest the discussion carried on in your Open Column arising out of a lecture delivered lately by His Honor the Chief Justice on geology, &c., and I fully expected to hear from the teachers of the people some explanation or reasonable argument, and not mere declamation; some reason why Scripture and science should or should not agree. As I have not seen such explanation as pleases me, I beg leave to submit a few thoughts of my own on the subject. I have often felt a difficulty in reconciling the account of the Creation, in the 1st of Genesis, with the knowledge of things at the present day. I suppose Scripture was never present to teach science, but a higher kind of knowledge. I think the difficulty lies in our being taught to regard all Scripture (or the Bible) as the Word of God, and that it consequently must be infallible in every particular, and that only a certain class of persons (self-styled the Church) have the right to interpret it, for they say unless you believe as we do you cannot be saved, thereby limiting the power of God by confining a man's belief to one particular view of Scripture against the evidence of his senses. Surely it cannot affect a man's faith whether he believes God made the earth in six days or as many thousand (but the establishment of a Sabbath is another thing), for "We stand by faith, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God." My notions about the earth are that it has had life and growth imparted to it when called into being by its great Author; that it is developing itself by its self-sustaining power at the present time, and I think I can find support for such an idea in the Scripture: see Gen. i, and Rom. viii, 22. I need hardly say we live in different times to those when the Mosaic account of the Creation was written, and the times to which it points. It is not necessary for anyone to say to us, "the Lord made heaven and earth, &c., in six days, and rested on the seventh, and hallowed it," &c., for we have had God revealed to us in a more excellent manner; but such writing has served its purpose by teaching man- kind two main ideas, namely the greatness and power of God, &c., and setting apart a day of rest for the contemplation of himself, and for the effects of such teaching read the whole history of the Jews. It appears to me the teaching of Scripture has been progressive, and as it has been written and preserved by men, it must of necessity partake of the infirmities of men; but the spirit of its teaching has approved itself to man in all ages, and will to all time. I would uphold the inspiration of Scripture with all my might, at the same time I would allow to all teaching that has for its object the ennobling and raising of man to a higher standard of excellence, to be in-spired also. In conclusion, Mr. Editor, I will just say this, the Scripture was written for man and not for a class, and we are bound to judge of it by the light that is within us, not to accept the dictum of those who are interested in upholding particular views, but to "search for ourselves." Now, Sir, there are numbers of people like myself who follow laborious employments, who have not much leisure for reading anything beside the weekly paper; who have neither the means nor opportunity of obtaining scientific works; consequently we are quite mystified by quotations from such works as Dr. Candlish's and others by some of your correspondents, but are quite capable of estimating at what they are worth, plain statements from a plain man like themselves. If this should be the means of causing any such to think for themselves, my object will be gained. For to have progress we must make exertion. But an indolent assent to anything and everything is like mental death.

I am, Sir, &c., HENRY SALTMARSH. Waterside, Milang, May, 1864.

To the Editor: South Australian Register, 26th February 1896, page 6

Sir — If Methodists and the many different offshoots of Methodism are really in earnest about organic union there is a sure and ready way of accomplishing not only organic union but what is far better, a unity upon the name of Christ — a unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. Despite the efforts of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, and his able ally, the Editor of the Review of Reviews, there does not seem much prospect at present of forming a united body of Methodists. Why? Because of the legislative powers assumed by the different conferences of the different bodies. And if they should be able by legislation to form an organic union, what will it amount to? Merely a Methodist organization. I do not deny the right of the so-called clergy to legislate for their own body of followers, but I do deny the right of any body of men to legislate for the Church of Christ, for we have a complete manual of legislation in the new covenant by Christ and His apostles ordered in all things and sure. The way, then, would be, let those Methodists who have the smallest modicum of faith (if only like a grain of mustard seed) in Jesus the Christ unite on that name. Repent ye of your Methodism and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts ii., 38). This by the authority of the Lord Jesus the Christ. (John iii, 5). By so doing you may take upon you that name from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. You can then do without the legislative power of the so-called clergy, who have divided the Church into two classes: who have robbed their fellow believers of their birthright in order that they may have the sole right to be paid for ministering in holy things (Rev. xiii, 17). Send out capable preachers to invite sinners into the kingdom, and govern the Church by approved elders; see Tim. and Titus. You will then accomplish a unity approved by God, not of Methodists, but of Christians (John xvii., 11-26).

I am, Sir, &c., HENRY SALTMARSH. Point Sturt, February 20.
