

**THE PENTATEUCH AND
BOOK OF JOSHUA
CRITICALLY EXAMINED**

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The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined by John William Colenso

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BY THE
RIGHT REV. JOHN WILLIAM COLENSO, D. D.,
BISHOP OF NATAL.

'We can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth.'—*St. Paul*, 2 Cor. xiii. 6.
'Not to exceed, and not to fall short of, facts,—not to add, and not to take away,—to state the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,—are the grand, the vital maxims of Inductive Science, of English Law, and, let us add, of Christian Faith.'—*Quarterly Review*, on 'Essays and Reviews,' Oct. 1861, p. 369.

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P R E F A C E.

THE circumstances under which this book has been written, will be best indicated by the following extracts from a letter, which I addressed some time ago, (though I did not forward it,) to a Professor of Divinity in one of our English Universities :

‘My remembrance of the friendly intercourse, which I have enjoyed with you in former days, would be enough to assure me that you will excuse my troubling you on the present occasion, were I not also certain that, on far higher grounds, you will gladly lend what aid you can to a brother in distress, and in very great need of advice and assistance, such as few are better able to give than yourself. You will easily understand that, in this distant colony, I am far removed from the possibility of converse with those, who would be capable of appreciating my difficulties, and helping me with friendly sympathy and counsel. I have many friends in England ; but there are few, to whom I would look more readily than to yourself, for the help which I need, from regard both to your public position and private character ; and you have given evidence, moreover, in your

published works, of that extensive reading and sound judgment, the aid of which I specially require under my present circumstances.

' You will, of course, expect that, since I have had the charge of this Diocese, I have been closely occupied in the study of the Zulu tongue, and in translating the Scriptures into it. Through the blessing of God, I have now translated the New Testament completely, and several parts of the Old, among the rest the books of Genesis and Exodus. In this work I have been aided by intelligent natives; and, having also published a Zulu Grammar and Dictionary, I have acquired sufficient knowledge of the language, to be able to have intimate communion with the native mind, while thus engaged with them, so as not only to avail myself freely of their criticisms, but to appreciate fully their objections and difficulties. Thus, however, it has happened that I have been brought again face to face with questions, which caused me some uneasiness in former days, but with respect to which I was then enabled to satisfy my mind sufficiently for practical purposes, and I had fondly hoped to have laid the ghosts of them at last for ever. Engrossed with parochial and other work in England, I did what, probably, many other clergymen have done under similar circumstances,—I contented myself with silencing, by means of the specious explanations, which are given in most commentaries, the ordinary objections against the historical character of the early portions of the Old Testament, and settled down into a willing acquiescence in the general truth of the narrative, whatever difficulties might still hang about particular parts of it. In short, the doctrinal and

devotional portions of the Bible were what were needed most in parochial duty. And, if a passage of the Old Testament formed at any time the subject of a sermon, it was easy to draw from it practical lessons of daily life, without examining closely into the historical truth of the narrative. It is true, there were one or two stories, which presented great difficulties, too prominent not to be noticed, and which were brought every now and then before us in the Lessons of the Church, such *e. g.* as the account of the Creation and the Deluge. But, on the whole, I found so much of Divine Light and Life in these and other parts of the Sacred Book, so much wherewith to feed my own soul and the souls of others, that I was content to take all this for granted, as being true in the main, however wonderful, and as being at least capable, in an extreme case, of *some* sufficient explanation.

'Here, however, as I have said, amidst my work in this land, I have been brought face to face with the very questions which I then put by. While translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded, but intelligent, native,—one with the docility of a child, but the reasoning powers of mature age,—look up and ask, 'Is all that true? Do you really believe that all this happened thus,—that all the beasts, and birds, and creeping things upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs, and entered into the ark with Noah? And did Noah gather food for them *all*, for the beasts and birds of prey, as well as the rest?' My heart answered in the words of the Prophet, 'Shall a man speak lies in the Name of the Lord?' Zech. xiii. 3. I dared not do so. My own knowl-

edge of some branches of science, of Geology in particular, had been much increased since I left England; and I now knew for certain, on geological grounds, a fact, of which I had only had misgivings before, viz. that a *Universal Deluge*, such as the Bible manifestly speaks of, could not possibly have taken place in the way described in the Book of Genesis, not to mention other difficulties which the story contains. I refer especially to the circumstance, well known to all geologists, (see *LYELL'S Elementary Geology*, pp. 197, 198,) that volcanic hills exist of immense extent in Auvergne and Languedoc, which must have been formed ages before the Noachian Deluge, and which are covered with light and loose substances, pumice-stone, &c., that must have been swept away by a Flood, but do not exhibit the slightest sign of having ever been so disturbed. Of course, I am well aware that some have attempted to show that Noah's Deluge was only a *partial* one. But such attempts have ever seemed to me to be made in the very teeth of the Scripture statements, which are as plain and explicit as words can possibly be. Nor is anything really gained by supposing the Deluge to have been partial. For, as waters must find their own level on the Earth's surface, without a special miracle, of which the Bible says nothing, a Flood, which should begin by covering the top of Ararat, (if that were conceivable,) or a much lower mountain, must necessarily become universal, and in due time sweep over the hills of Auvergne. Knowing this, I felt that I dared not, as a servant of the God of Truth, urge my brother man to believe that, which I did not myself believe, which I knew to be untrue, as a matter-of-fact,

historical, narrative. I gave him, however, such a reply as satisfied him for the time, without throwing any discredit upon the general veracity of the Bible history.

'But I was thus driven,—against my will at first, I may truly say,—to search more deeply into these questions; and I have since done so, to the best of my power, with the means at my disposal in this colony. And now I tremble at the result of my enquiries, rather, I should do so, were it not that I believe firmly in a God of Righteousness and Truth and Love, who both 'IS, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' Should all else give way beneath me, I feel that His Everlasting Arms are still under me. I am sure that the solid ground is there, on which my feet can rest, in the knowledge of Him, 'in whom I live, and move, and have my being,' who is my 'faithful Creator,' my 'Almighty and most Merciful Father.' *That Truth* I see with my spirit's eyes, once opened to the light of it, as plainly as I see the Sun in the heavens. And that Truth, I know, more or less distinctly apprehended, has been the food of living men, the strength of brave souls that 'yearn for light,' and battle for the right and the true, the support of struggling and sorrow-stricken hearts, in all ages of the world, in all climes, under all religions.'

[The letter then proceeded to state some of the principal difficulties in the account of the Exodus, which are set forth at full length in this volume, and concluded as follows.]

'Will you oblige me by telling me if you know of any books which to your own mind deal with these questions satisfactorily, or, rather, will you kindly direct Messrs. — to send to me the book or books you may recommend, with

others which I have ordered from them? Among the rest, I have sent for HENGSTENBERG'S book on the Pentateuch, which I see commended in a remarkable article in the Quarterly on 'Essays and Reviews.' That article, however, appears to me to shrink from touching the real question at issue, and, instead of meeting the essayists with argument, to be chiefly occupied with pitying or censuring them. Certainly, there are not a few points on which I differ strongly from those writers. But I cannot think it to be a fair way of proceeding to point out, as the *apparent consequence* of the course they are pursuing, that it will necessarily lead to infidelity or atheism. It may be so with some; must it therefore be so with all? The same, of course, might have been said, and probably was said, freely, and just as truly, by the Jews of St. Paul and others, and, in later times, by members of the Romish Church of our own Reformers. Our duty, surely, is to follow the Truth, wherever it leads us, and to leave the consequences in the hands of God. Moreover, in the only instance, where the writer in the Quarterly does attempt to remove a difficulty, he explains away a miracle by a piece of thorough 'neologianism,'—I mean, where he accounts for the sun 'standing still,' at the word of Joshua, by referring to 'one of the *thousand other modes*, by which God's mighty power could have accomplished that miracle, rather than by the actual suspension of the unbroken career of the motion of the heavenly bodies in their appointed courses,' which last the Bible plainly speaks of to a common understanding, though the writer seems not to believe in it.*

* So, too, Archd. PRATT writes, *Scripture and Science not at variance*, p.