

**THE SCRIPTURES DEFENDED;
BEING A REPLY TO BISHOP
COLENZO'S BOOK ON THE
PENTATEUCH AND THE BOOK OF
JOSHUA**

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The Scriptures defended; being a reply to Bishop Colenso's book on the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua by J. M. Hirschfelder

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J. M. HIRSCHFELDER

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SCRIPTURES DEFENDED;
BEING
A REPLY TO BISHOP COLENSO'S BOOK,
ON THE
PENTATEUCH AND THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT,
CONVERTING THE SOUL:
THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD IS SURE,
MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE.

Psaln xix., 7.

FOR VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, TILL HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS, ONE JOT
OR ONE TITTLE SHALL IN NO WISE PASS FROM THE LAW, TILL ALL BE FUL-
FILLED.—*Matt. v., 18.*

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PREFACE.

When I published the first of the following series of articles I had no intention of undertaking the responsible and laborious task of writing a full reply to Bishop Colenso's book on the Pentateuch, my object was merely to allay the excitement which the announcement of such a heretical work from the pen of so eminent a prelate was then creating. From extracts which had appeared in some of the leading journals, it was impossible not to perceive that a fatal blow was aimed at the Scriptures, and consequently at Christianity; and the instrument being wielded by an eminent mathematician and dignitary of the church of England, it is not to be wondered at that the minds of the lovers of the Bible should at first have been somewhat disturbed. Indeed, for a time, the chief topic of conversation was Bishop Colenso's new book: and thinking that, under the circumstances, a few general remarks bearing upon the subject might not be unwelcome to the public, I determined, as the book had not yet reached this country, merely to throw out a few observations, showing how strange it was that the almost numberless commentators and critics, both ancient and modern, should not have perceived those discrepancies, if such had existed, which the Bishop of Natal professed to have discovered in the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua.

When the book at last came to hand, and I saw the subjects which were taken up, and the manner in which they were treated, and being likewise informed that the book met with an unprecedented sale here, I felt it my duty to refute it with as little delay as possible. There appeared to me great danger that the conscientiousness which the Bishop seemingly evinces in having undertaken this responsible work—showing no concern whether the step he had taken would affect him in a pecuniary point of view or not—and the

positiveness and assurance which he displays in setting forth his views as being unmistakeably correct, as well as the plausible manner in which his arguments are laid down, might at least tend to impress many, who were not capable of judging of the correctness of his views, with erroneous ideas, if not convert them altogether to his novel doctrine. As impressions when once formed are not easily eradicated; and remembering that Solomon said "a word spoken in due season, how good is it"—Prov. xv., 23—it occurred to me that the readiest and surest mode of preventing any wrong notions being adopted would be to publish a number of short articles, as too long a time would necessarily have to elapse before a complete answer to the book could be brought out, and as the former mode would insure likewise greater publicity; I had no difficulty in carrying out this plan, as the columns of the *Leader* were kindly placed at my service, that journal rendering thereby a service to the cause of religion which, I am sure, the public will know how to appreciate.

Being repeatedly requested to publish the articles which appeared in the *Leader* in a book, I have determined to comply with the wishes so frequently expressed, and at the same time seized the opportunity not only to add important arguments, but also numerous notes, which I hope the reader will find both useful and interesting.

Having now briefly stated the reasons which induced me to undertake so responsible a task, I shall in the next place offer a few cursory remarks on Bishop Colenso's book itself.

In writing my replies, it was of course necessary to examine carefully all the statements and arguments which Dr. Colenso brought forward, and whilst thus engaged the question would frequently present itself to my mind—had the Bishop really any conception of the magnitude and seriousness of the work which he has taken upon himself to perform? I must confess I could hardly bring myself to believe that any one who called himself a Christian could possibly have given expression to such views as are set forth in the

book, which simply reduce the writings of Moses to the level of the extravagant tales of the impostor Mohammed. It is vain for Dr. Colenso to conceal his real design by such language as the following: "And the truth in the present instance, as I have said, is this, that the Pentateuch, as a whole, was not written by Moses, and that, with respect to some, at least the chief portions of the story, it cannot be regarded as historically true. It does not, therefore, cease to 'contain the true word of God,' with all things necessary for salvation,' to be 'profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness'"—page 55. The covering is artfully woven, but the texture is too fine and transparent to answer the purpose. We are to believe that the accounts of the creation, the fall of man, and the deluge, are nothing but fictions; that the whole narrative of the Exodus, including the giving of the Mosaic law, is only an idle tale; but that, notwithstanding all this, the Pentateuch still contains "all things necessary for salvation." Truly, the man that can persuade himself to adopt such a creed must possess extraordinary powers of imagination. I need hardly say that it is altogether against the plain teaching of Scripture, but it is even opposed to common sense. Dr. Colenso does not point out to his readers the portions of the Pentateuch which, according to his [opinion, "contain the true word of God," he merely asserts that there are some; but I would ask Dr. Colenso by what process was he enabled to discover the genuine from the spurious portions? I maintain, that if the Pentateuch contains "absolute, palpable self-contradictions," as the Bishop will have it, then it is beyond the power of the finite understanding of man to find out which is fictitious and which is true. We have here no alternative; we must either receive the whole Pentateuch as the inspired Word of God, and as *absolutely true*, or reject the whole as *absolutely false*. If we deny the truth of the principal events recorded in the Mosaic writings, what proof have we that there ever existed such scriptural personages as are mentioned there? It will, perhaps, be said that

the traditions of nations in all parts of the globe testify to their having existed ; but do they not also speak of the principal events which are immediately connected with their names ? What tradition makes mention of Noah and is silent as to the deluge ? Among what people is the name of Moses known, without its being known as that of the great leader and law-giver of Israel ?

Bishop Colenso, however, evidently foresees what the adoption of his novel views regarding the Pentateuch must necessarily lead to, and that is nothing less than *the rejection of the whole Bible as an inspired book*, and he seems to prepare the way for such a result. It is impossible not to perceive the drift of such language as the following :—" Our belief in the living God remains as sure as ever, though not the Pentateuch only, but the whole Bible were removed." And a little farther on he says, " But there will be others of a different stamp—meek, lowly, loving souls, who are walking daily with God, and have been taught to consider a belief in the historical veracity of the story of the Exodus as an essential part of their religion, upon which, indeed, as it seems to them, the whole fabric of their faith and hope in God is based. It is not really so : the light of God's love did not shine less truly on pious minds when ' Enoch walked with God ' of old, though there was then no Bible in existence, than it does now. And it is perhaps God's will that we shall be taught in this our day, among other precious lessons, not to build up our faith upon a book, though it be the Bible itself, but to realise more truly the blessedness of knowing that He himself, the living God, our Father and Friend, is nearer and closer to us than any book can be"—pp. 53, 54. Or, in plain language, that we may have a religion without a Bible, and consequently without a Saviour, and without any divine laws for our guidance, but which may, notwithstanding, be acceptable unto God. Such, reader, are the doctrines promulgated by Bishop Colenso, and well may he exclaim, " What the end may be, God only, the God of truth, can foresee"—p. 46.

There are many instances on record in biographies of scientific men, of many years, if not of whole life-times, being spent in the investigation of subjects before they were finally ushered into the world; and this was particularly the case in the promulgation of some new hypothesis which conflicted with long established systems, or commonly received opinions. If such, then, has been the practice in dealing with secular matters, how infinitely more careful ought he to be who deals with subjects appertaining to the sacred Scriptures and religion. The ancient Rabbies had a wholesome maxim, warning the wise men to be careful of their words, lest the disciples who came after them might discover the place of bitter waters, (*i. e.* false doctrine,) and drink of it, and die, and the name of heaven be thereby profaned. It might reasonably be expected that the novel views with which Dr. Colenso has startled the religious world, are at least the result of many years of careful and serious study of the subject, seeing how deeply they affect the Bible and the Christian religion. Such, however, is not the case, for he distinctly tells us that "in January, 1861," he had "not even begun to enter on these enquiries," though he "fully intended to do so," on his "return to Natal"—p. 12. The opinions which Dr. Colenso has adopted, therefore, do not even come to us with the recommendation of having been deliberately and carefully considered, but are seemingly only of a mushroom growth; and the attentive reader will, no doubt, pause here and ask himself whether it is likely that if such "discrepancies and palpable self-contradictions" existed in the Pentateuch they could possibly have escaped the notice of the thousands of critics and commentators, many of whom spent their whole lives in the study of Scripture, and other branches of learning immediately connected with it.

Again, it might reasonably be expected that in such a serious and momentous undertaking, Dr. Colenso would have first sought the opinions of some able men, before he "launched" his "bark upon the flood," which might unexpectedly carry him into a tempest-tossed ocean of doubt and