

**THE SEMI-BARBAROUS  
HEBREW AND THE  
EXTINGUISHED  
THEOLOGIAN. AN ESSAY**

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The Semi-Barbarous Hebrew and the Extinguished Theologian. An Essay by Thomas Gribble

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**THOMAS GRIBBLE**

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It may be a rather troublesome, though not perhaps an unsalutary, bent of mind in some of us which forbids the ready dismissal from the sphere of thought of any idea or statement disagreeably tending to unsettle our cherished conclusions. At first we may try to forget what has startled or dismayed us; we may idly hope to sleep the impression off; we may pretend to think there is not much in it after all. But in the end this will not do. Sooner or later we are forced to rouse ourselves. We find it high time to see exactly how we stand. We must estimate the effects of the shock, and ascertain whether we are unhappily on the wrong line, and therefore liable to annihilation from the next great blow, or whether we are really progressing in the right direction, only with not quite sufficient speed. And it is possible that by instituting a survey of this kind we may have the satisfaction of discovering that as yet nothing but an encumbrance or two has been struck off, though rudely, and may venture to trust that some judiciously placed

guard or defence may be applied, which, like a friendly buffer, may qualify the impact of any impinging force yet to come, and make it even serviceable to us in our onward way.

It may be surmised that initiatory remarks such as these could only have been made by one who had been subjected to some mental collision both dismaying and arousing. And even so it was. Professor Huxley's instructive volume of *Lay Sermons, Addresses, &c.*, had been conducting me delightfully from one interesting point of view to another. I was flattering myself that I might make some real progress by its help; when my train of thought became violently interrupted. I had come suddenly upon the spot whereon had been constructed a block of hindrance well designed for the prostration of the feeble-minded and the alarm of the torpid. And on that stumbling-stone were inscribed the following very vigorous and awakening words:—

The myths of Paganism are as dead as Osiris or Zeus, and the man who should revive them in opposition to the knowledge of our time would be justly laughed to scorn; but the coeval imaginations current among the rude inhabitants of Palestine, recorded by writers whose very name and age are admitted by every scholar to be unknown, have unfortunately not yet shared their fate, but even at this day are regarded by nine-tenths of the civilised world as the authoritative standard of fact, and the criterion of the justice of scientific conclusions, in all that relates to the origin of things, and among them of species. In this nineteenth century, as at the dawn of modern physical science, the cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew is the incubus of the philosopher and the opprobrium of the orthodox. Who shall number the patient and earnest seekers after truth from the days of Galileo until now, whose lives have been embittered and their good name blasted by the

mistaken zeal of bibliolaters? Who shall count the host of weaker men whose sense of truth has been destroyed in the effort to harmonise impossibilities—whose life has been wasted in the attempt to force the generous new wine of science into the old bottles of Judaism, compelled by the outcry of the same strong party?

It is true that if philosophers have suffered, their cause has been amply avenged. Extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules; and history records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed, if not annihilated; scotched, if not slain. But orthodoxy is the Bourbon of the world of thought. It learns not, neither can it forget; and though at present bewildered and afraid to move, it is as willing as ever to insist that the first chapter of Genesis contains the beginning and the end of sound science; and to visit with such petty thunderbolts as its half-paralysed hands can hurl, those who refuse to degrade nature to the level of primitive Judaism. (pp. 304, 305.)

Now I readily admit that I was bewildered on reading this. It behoved me, therefore, to see if I were not afflicted with other sad symptoms indicated in the diagnosis of orthodoxy here presented to us. But I soon began to reflect that the highest authorities differ sometimes, and that of all the varieties of animated nature existing, the only one with the constitutional habits of which Professor Huxley was likely to be imperfectly acquainted was that of the sub-family 'Orthodox.' He has had under inspection, it may be, two or three of its fossils armed with palæologic tusk, or horn, or hoof; but it does not accord with modern philosophy to take the relics of bygone ages as adequate illustrations of a now existing genus. Have we not been lately taught that the structure of such creatures even as alligators has demonstrably