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The Bishop and the Bible.

We copy the following very timely article from the London *Baptist Magazine* (March). It is from the pen of Rev. Dr. Cramp, of Acadia College; and is highly spoken of by our brethren in Great Britain.

Bishop Colenso has written a book. Its subject, the Bible; its object, to prove that the Pentateuch, a part of the Bible, is "unhistorical," that is, in plain English, is not true. This is a moral phenomenon, and it is noticeable for various reasons. The author of the book is a clergyman of the Church of England, and of course a thoroughly educated man. He is known to be particularly "quick at figures." He is also a D.D., and ought therefore to be well-versed in theology. He is a bishop, to whom is entrusted the responsibility of ordaining ministers, and of overseeing them after they are ordained, so that they may be kept free from errors well as from sin—an important duty, for error often leads to sin, and sin confirms many a man in error. And he is a missionary bishop, having been actually in the missionary field about nine years, engaged in translating the Scriptures, preaching, taking care of the clergy, and other appropriate labour. These facts must be borne in mind by all who would judge rightly of his book.

To such a man the credit and authority of the Scriptures ought to be especially dear, as it should be taken for granted that he has studied the whole question of the evidences, and familiarised himself with every part of the controversy respecting them. Having "read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested" the divine volume, and acquired firm conviction of its truth, and the utmost reverence for its teachings, it might be reasonably expected that he would not only be a staunch friend of the Bible, but a fearless advocate and a stout-hearted champion, ready to accept the challenge of any foe that might present himself. And if doubts and difficulties should be encountered in the course of his inquiries, would not a man holding such a position pause long and seriously before he committed himself by publishing conclusions which, though better informed and more sagacious critics might easily show to be unfounded, would meanwhile occasion deep distress in many minds, and probably unsettle the faith of some? Would he not confer with more learned brethren, lay the whole case before them, and wait till they had answered all his questions, but failed to satisfy him, before he rushed into print and proclaimed himself, albeit a bishop, an unbeliever?

The recklessness of his procedure is astounding. One might have supposed that even if, ultimately, the course he has adopted had been determined on, he would have first considered some preliminary topics, not unworthy of discussion: Whether Moses was the author of the Pentateuch—the indications of authenticity—in what parts of the collection, and to what extent, if at all, ancient documents were made use of—the time of the publication of the work—the additions made to it by other writers, and many inquiries of a similar character, might have engaged his attention. And when all such problems had been solved, in would have been pertinent to study, with serious diligence, the design of the Mosaic dispensation; and of the system of government and religion established thereby. If, as is generally believed, the ceremonies instituted for Jewish observance were typical, and therefore prophetic, symbolising great principles, to be at some future time clearly and fully developed; if the whole system, though in itself temporary, was intended and adapted to prepare for "a better covenant;" and if, therefore, the law and the gospel are inseparably connected, both being of God, and the former paving the way for the latter, would not a devout and discreet man tremble at the thought of propounding views which would strike at the root of the whole? For it is most manifest that if the veracity of Moses as a historian can be successfully impugned, his pretensions as a prophet and a divinely-commissioned

lawgiver cannot be upheld. And if Moses be rejected—WHAT THEN?

We may well shudder at the sight of the gulf into which the bishop would plunge us. Passing by the testimony of poets and prophets, most of whose sublime songs and predictions are built upon the facts of the Mosaic history, and would be bereft of their vividness and glory if those facts should be ignored, let us ask in what manner the Lord Jesus Christ referred to his great human predecessor, and whether there is any ground for believing that he received the records contained in the Pentateuch as truthful. The evidence on this point is abundantly clear and conclusive. We gather from the history of our Lord's career as a public teacher of religion, that he recognised the Divine authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, and quoted them as the word of God. The Old Testament was the Bible, to use the modern phrase, as far as it had been then written; it consisted, at that time, of the same books as now, the Apocrypha not being included; it was the Bible which the Saviour read, and to which he constantly appealed. Now, the writings of Moses form an important part of that volume—so important, that the remainder would be unintelligible without them. The Lord admitted, on various occasions, the authority of the prophet-lawgiver (see Matt. xxii. 24—33; xxiii. 2—3; Mark vii. 10; x. 3; xii. 26; Luke xvii. 26—29; xx. 27; xxiv. 27; John vii. 22, 23); he adverted to the gift of the manna and the erection of the brazen serpent in the wilderness as well-known facts; and in accusing his countrymen of disbelief in Moses's writings (John v. 44—47), he charged them with a crime of no small malignancy. If we examine the epistolary portions of the New Testament we meet with frequent notices of the events and laws of the Mosaic dispensation. The Pentateuchal history is everywhere treated as genuine and authentic, full of instructive, admonitory, and encouraging fact (see 1 Cor. x. 1—11; Heb. xi. 1—29; 2 Pet. ii. 4—8; Jude 7); and the reasoning in the epistle to the Hebrews in particular, is founded on the requirements of the Levitical code, which had been in existence and operation, according to the statements of the national historians, for 1,500 years.

We review the history. Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt, and conducts them to Mount Sinai, where they receive God's law and the institutes of his worship, then first appointed. There, and as they proceed through the "great and terrible wilderness," they are miraculously sustained and miraculously guided. They reach the borders of the promised land, but are sent back again "because of unbelief." For forty years they wander there, and endure some sore judgments of God on account of their sins. At length they are found again within sight of the long-expected inheritance. But Moses is not permitted to lead them any further. He, too, has transgressed. His brother Aaron, who shared in the transgression, is dead already, and his own death is near at hand. He calls the people together, recounts the Lord's mercies, admonishes them to obedience, gives them a solemn charge, and invokes the Divine blessing. The law, together with the "statutes and judgments," is placed in the hands of the priests for safe preservation, to be read in the audience of the people at appointed times. The lawgiver then ascends the mount, beholds, "the good land that is beyond Jordan," and dies. Joshua succeeds him, and leads the hosts to victory.

Through all the succeeding ages of the nation's history, the wondrous scenes of Egypt, of Sinai, and of the wilderness, are celebrated in triumphal odes, and regarded as themes of joy, confidence, and hope. The name of Moses is honoured and revered by every Jew. His histories are read with profound attention—his laws are sacredly observed. Even the heathen have admired the wisdom and righteousness of Divine enactments. And still, though the civil and political arrangements exist no longer, and the ceremonies have ceased because they have fulfilled their mission, and the blessings which they typified are now fully enjoyed, the dispensation, as a whole, is contemplated as a marvellous manifestation of Divine goodness and truth, successfully accomplishing all the ends for which it was designed,

remaining as a perpetual monument of God's loving kindness, watchful care, and all-wise providence.

The Bishop of Natal dashes all this to the ground. Certain narratives of Moses, he says, are not historical. Moses, therefore, is not to be trusted. If we cannot rely on his testimony, what can be said for his mission? Is a false witness to be regarded as an inspired prophet? Can such a man be a lawgiver of a nation, under appointment from God himself? And if, as a necessary consequence, the system of polity and religion founded by him, or in his name, or said to be so founded, is shown to be an imposture, a fable, a nonentity, what becomes of Christianity, which presupposes, all along, the Divine origin of the Mosaic institute? The whole is a tissue of uncertainties. There is firm footing nowhere. We are afloat on the ocean of infidelity, without rudder or compass, the sport of every wind, and in sure and certain expectation of ruinous shipwreck.

To come to particulars. Doctor Colenso maintains the following position:—That the numbers reported in the Pentateuch are altogether incorrect—"of no statistical value whatever;" that there could not possibly have been so many Israelites as are said to have gone out of Egypt; that their flocks and herds could not have found subsistence in the wilderness; that the court of the tabernacle was too small to accommodate the whole congregation, who were required to assemble there at specified times; that the extent of the camp must have been so great as absolutely to preclude the observance of those laws which enjoined certain things to be done outside of it; that the priests were far too few for the performance of the onerous duties imposed upon them; that turtle-doves and young pigeons could not have been found in such quantities as the various enactments of the law called for; that the celebration of the Passover, according to the statute, was impracticable; in short, that the entire history abounds in absurdities, especially as far as numbers are concerned, and is therefore worthless.

An examination of all these assertions in detail, would require far more space than can be allotted to the subject here; but so many replies have been already published, that the readers of the *BAPTIST MAGAZINE* can be at no loss in obtaining satisfaction. Some general observations, however, may perhaps be of service.

1. It seems very strange that Bishop Colenso, and other writers on the sceptical side, should forget the peculiar character and style of the writings which they so boldly assail. The author gives an account of events in which he was personally concerned, and in narrating which he shows such a knowledge of persons and places, and adduces so many minute particulars, which an eye-witness only could have known and observed, that an impartial reader cannot but confess there is an air of truth and naturalness that invites confidence. *The writer was there.* He testifies what he saw and heard, and tells us what he did, and what he ought not to have done, with simple-hearted honesty. And the present state of the countries spoken of in his works agrees wonderfully with his descriptions, as is acknowledged, year after year, by the indefatigable explorers of this age, of various creeds and nations. We may sometimes find it difficult to understand the narrative, owing to the distance of time and the obscurity that arises from notices and allusions to which there is no key; but surely it is excessive rashness, to say the least, to refuse belief of the story on that account. The writer was on the spot; he writes from the stand-point of his own observation. Critics who have to look back 3,300 years should be sparing of their contradictions of such a man's testimony.

2. Nearly akin to the last is another remark. In perusing the books of the Old Testament we are perpetually compelled to lament our ignorance of circumstances. It is for the most part a skeleton history. Leading facts are given. An outline is sketched; but we want the filling up. We feel confident, in innumerable cases, that it has not been thought fit, doubtless for some good reason, to communicate knowledge which, were we in possession of it, would clear away many difficulties, and materially

lessen the number of insoluble problems. This observation will also apply to the evangelic history. (See John xx. 30, 31; xxi. 25.) It is applicable to all ancient books. Many passages in them which were perfectly intelligible to contemporaries are now veiled in impenetrable obscurity.

3. It must not be overlooked that the Mosaic legislation was not confined to the then existing state of the people. It did not respect the encampment only, and the wandering condition of the Israelites. Moses was legislating for future centuries, and for a settled government. Many of his injunctions, therefore, could be but imperfectly obeyed, and some of them not at all, while they were in the wilderness. It was not till they were quietly fixed in their own country that the institutions of their lawgiver could be fully carried into effect. These considerations will dispose of some objections which would otherwise appear formidable.

4. While there is a human as well as a Divine element in the sacred books, and the writers were left to themselves, so far as to embody in their compositions their personal and national characteristics, on which account there is a singular diversity of style and manner, we should carefully guard against a forgetfulness of the very serious and important purpose which the entire revelation was intended to subserve. Without committing ourselves to any theory of the mode of inspiration, it is a Christian verity that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and that the whole Bible is God's book. In whatever sense it is so considered, even on the lowest view that may be legitimately taken, the sacred volume should not be subjected to the same treatment as merely human writings. It does not stand in the same category. There is a free handling of ancient authors, confessedly admissible, and even necessary, which must not be allowed in the case of the writings of the Old and New Testaments. If Christianity be true, we must receive the Old Testament, the Bible of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an important portion of "the Holy Scriptures," as containing true history and a faithful disclosure of the mind and will of God, so far as then known. We are not at liberty to treat it as we treat Homer or Herodotus. We may correct the text by the usual appliances of sound criticism (and a judicious settlement of the text is much needed), but its truth is to be taken for granted. We may not receive one statement and reject another, according to our prepossessions or fancies. The Divine system rests upon the facts. If the facts did not take place, or the record of them is of suspicious credibility, the system is exploded. These thoughts should teach us caution and modesty.

5. There is a serious defect in Dr. Colenso's publication. He makes no allowance for the miraculous. The flocks and herds, he tells us, could not have been sustained in the wilderness. We know that they could not, *as the wilderness now is.* But there is great probability that in former times the state of that part of the country was very different, and there was fertility where there is now barrenness. (See Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," Part I.) Not to insist on that, for it is unnecessary, are we not bound to conclude that in some extraordinary manner provision was made for this emergency, and that, as the manna fell from heaven, and the water flowed from the rock, verdure sprung up in unlikely places, and there were "fruitful seasons" that "filled their hearts with food and gladness"? At any rate, we learn that when they finally reached the borders of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, with the half tribe of Manasseh, "had a very great multitude of cattle" (Numb. xxxii. 1), and that, on that account, territory was assigned them on the east side of Jordan, where there was pasture ground to an indefinite extent. We know not how the flocks and herds were preserved, but there are the facts, testified by an eye-witness; and when we remember that God was with the host all the time, and that the whole transaction was of a miraculous nature, we cannot be at a loss. He "suffered not their cattle to decrease." Why, instead of quibbling at matters of arithmetic and geography, and the like, does not this writer confess the presence and power of the great God, and reverently listea