



THE LIFE
OF
JOHN WILLIAM COLENSO, D.D



1864.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY J. E. MAYALL.

Ever yours affectionately
W. Pattee

THE LIFE
OF
JOHN WILLIAM COLENZO, D.D.

Bishop of Natal.

BY THE REV.
SIR GEORGE W. COX, BART., M.A.

RECTOR OF SCRAYINGHAM.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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**RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,
LONDON AND BUNGAY.**

PREFACE.

THE life of Bishop Colenso has been, and will be, more momentous in its issues than perhaps any other life in the present century. That it should be so is only the fitting recompense of his work. From first to last he sought with a single heart for truth and righteousness as the pearl of great price. From first to last he was thankful that in the Divine ordering of things he had been enabled to search for this truth in a Church which encourages its members to seek it resolutely and to proclaim it manfully as the first of all duties.

My motive in undertaking to write his life has been to lay before the world, for his words and his acts generally, a full and complete vindication. It would be ridiculous were I to affect ignorance of the character and purpose of the opposition shown to him by members of certain schools or parties. This opposition was based, professedly, on the ground that he was a traitor to the promises made at his ordination and consecration, a rebel against the laws of the English Church, an apostate from the faith of the Church Catholic and from Christianity.

It is time that this contention should be brought to an end. These charges were made by men who steadily refused

to avail themselves of the legal process which would have issued in a judgement of the Supreme Court of the Church of England ; and, on behalf of the Bishop of Natal, I maintain that in his writings, and in his teaching generally, he was entirely faithful to the promises which he made when he received the ordering of deacon, of priest, and of bishop ; entirely faithful to his duty as a Christian and a member of the Church Catholic ; and, more especially, that his books are in complete accordance not merely with the letter of the standards of the Church of England but also with their spirit. For every proposition of the least importance in his books a full and decisive justification is furnished by the series of judgements which have issued from the highest courts of the Church of England. Englishmen do not speak of the need of establishing their claim to rights acknowledged and secured to them by the Great Charter ; and I am in no greater degree called upon to claim for the Bishop of Natal's conclusions or teaching the sanction which has been already extended to them by the highest tribunals of the Church of England. The charges brought in irresponsible fashion against the Bishop of Natal have been bandied about long enough. The Bishop's conclusions and teaching have been brought to a legal issue in cases already decided by the tribunals of the Church of England ; and they are, in fact, as far removed beyond the reach of censure as are the writings of the most illustrious and the most orthodox of the divines of the English Church.

In so saying, I am speaking, strictly and deliberately, of the whole of the long series of his works. No one, I dare to say, can pretend that of the convictions or conclusions avowed at any time by the Bishop of Natal some or any have in this memoir been designedly withheld. My examination of his published works is, I believe, so minute and thorough that attentive readers of these pages will be placed on the same

level with those who have worked their way patiently and laboriously through them all. But as his conclusions with regard to the composition and growth of the Books of the Old Testament have most roused the antagonism of traditionalists generally, it may be well to specify the most important among them, and the most pregnant with momentous consequences for the future.

These I believe to be the following ; and they are given, as nearly as possible, in the Bishop's words.

(1) That only a very small portion, if any, of the Pentateuch can have been composed or written by Moses or in the Mosaic age.

(2) That Moses may have been the real guide of the Israelites from Egypt to the borders of Canaan, or a personage as shadowy and unhistorical as Æneas in the history of Rome or our own King Arthur.

(3) That Joshua seems to be an entirely mythical character.

(4) That there are two or more different and self-disproving accounts of the Creation, Deluge, and other events or incidents in the Book of Genesis.

(5) That the priestly legislation of the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers belongs to the time of, or to a period subsequent to, the captivity of Babylon.

(6) That the Book of Deuteronomy was composed in the reign of Manasseh, or in that of Josiah.

(7) That the Books, so called, of the Chronicles were written at a time later by some centuries than the Babylonish exile.

(8) That the history of these Books of Chronicles is not, as it professes or is supposed to be, a trustworthy narrative, but a fictitious story, put together for a special purpose.

The holding and teaching of all these and other like propositions are in every respect warranted, justified, and

covered by the judgement delivered by Dr. Lushington in the Court of Arches ; in other words, by the judgement of the Archbishop of Canterbury—a judgement which, not having been reversed on appeal, is law.

This judgement, in the case arising out of the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, declares that “it is open for the clergy to maintain that any book in the Bible is the work of another author than him whose name it bears,”—the true meaning of these words being, the judge adds, “that the clergy are at liberty to reject parts of Scripture, upon their own opinion that the narrative is inherently incredible ; to disregard precepts in Holy Writ, because they think them evidently wrong.”

It is unnecessary, therefore, to say that by virtue of this judgement the clergy of the Church of England have the right to maintain the propositions already cited from the works of the Bishop of Natal. But, in affirming this, I do not restrict myself to the mere assertion that the teaching of the Bishop of Natal is in full accordance with the law of the Church of England. I assert, further, that only in men like him the Church of England has the true supporters and friends who can guide her safely through the troublesome times which all must feel to be near at hand.

I claim therefore for him a genuine and hearty loyalty for the Church of England, for which throughout his whole life he worked and fought, under the assurance that she has a Divine mission, to which it is impossible for us to set bounds. For him the fact of her comprehensiveness, constantly broadening and always more and more beneficent, was the justification of all efforts for making it complete. It is this comprehensiveness which won for her the enthusiastic devotion of his friend Dean Stanley, and added strength to the faith which carried his thoughts onward to her distant future. This devotion and this faith, which the Bishop shared most

fully, had their centre in the conviction that the Church is a living society under a living Head. Against both the Dean and himself insinuations or charges of unfaithfulness to their trust were lavishly thrown out. To these accusations Dean Stanley replied by boldly insisting that his own belief was not only in strict accordance with the legal requirements of the National Church but also in complete harmony with its spirit, and, what was of infinitely higher importance, with the spirit of Him on whom its life depends. In every writing of the Bishop of Natal we have the same firm conviction. But although he had the deepest sense of all that is good in the English Church, he did not idolize it. No Church can be either infallible or faultless ; and the Church of England makes no profession of being either the one or the other. But that the Church of England would survive the changes in store for her, and be the stronger for them, he had the profoundest assurance, because he felt that she was charged with a message of living truth.

In short, whatever may be said of the Dean may be said not less truly of the Bishop. With his friend the Bishop shared the conviction that "Underneath the sentiments and usages which have accumulated round the forms of Christianity there is a class of principles, a religion as it were behind the religion, which, however dimly expressed, has given them whatever vitality they possess." Both the Bishop and the Dean felt assured that the sentiments and usages of the great society which forms the Church of England must, like those of other Churches, have vitality, so far as they have any, by virtue of this religion which underlies them all.

Of the way in which the Bishop of Natal's work, taken as a whole, was received by those who felt, or declared, it to be their duty to oppose him, I have felt myself bound to speak with the utmost plainness. Wherever I have met with mis-

representation or evasion, shuffling, equivocation, subterfuge, or downright falsehood, I have not looked about for qualifying phrases which may tend to leave on the reader's mind the impression that a thing is not what it is. If in some instances this plainness of speech should seem to affect the personal character of any of his antagonists, the blame of it must lie on the evil of the systems which those antagonists have been resolved, at all costs of truth, honesty, and Christian love, to uphold as absolutely faultless and perfect. The measure in which this fatal resolution threatens to sap the very foundations of morality in what is called the religious world, and has lured into falsehood men otherwise upright and honourable, is appalling indeed; and until this plague of unvaracity is arrested, it is vain to look for a healthier state of things. Suspicion, mistrust, and a crowd of feelings of still darker hues, are the necessary fruits of insincerity and falsehood; and insincerity and falsehood are sins into which men must fall who are determined to assert that things are faultless which are full, to say the least, of flaws. On those who have committed themselves to such a course, and who obstinately adhere to it, it is not for us to pronounce judgement. Of the systems which they uphold we are bound to use words which it shall be impossible for any to misunderstand or misinterpret.

For the Bishop of Natal the battle with intolerance and superstition in England was followed by a warfare not less harassing and wearing against national wrong-doing in Southern Africa. In the day of his unreasoning resentment against the Bishop's critical method, Mr. Maurice had charged him with holding "the accursed doctrine" that "God has nothing to do with nations and politics." By a wonderful ordering, the man whom, because he showed that the narrative of Exodus was not history, Mr. Maurice accused of taking away from Englishmen all ground for looking to God

for the destruction of tyranny, was the only Englishman who gave up time, rest, peace—was ready to give up everything—if he could but obtain bare justice (apart from Christian gentleness and mercy) for injured natives or tribes in Southern Africa.

The history of the battle which he fought on behalf of men who had been, as he succeeded in proving, and as the British Government allowed, grossly wronged, is given, so far as it was possible to give it, in his own words. The Bishop's letters to his friends form a record, complete from every point of view, of the Zulu War with its antecedents and consequences; but of these letters some extracts only can be given here. It would, indeed, be impossible to do justice to the series addressed to his friends in England, and in particular to Mr. Chesson, without giving them all at full length; but enough is here laid before the reader for the purposes of a vindication which is to justify his political not less than his theological or religious action.

In this portion, especially, of the work, I owe a deep debt of gratitude for aid received from the Bishop's family. This help has been bestowed as a labour of love, and with a firm and glad trust in the final victory of truth over falsehood of right over wrong. The cause for which this work has been taken in hand is the one thing for which they desire to live; and I am thankful that I have been spared to accomplish a task needed for the attainment of the end which they, and I, have most at heart,—the end which brings with it the vindication of his whole life. To his wife and to his children these pages may, I trust, serve as an earnest of the great reparation which will, I do not for a moment doubt, be made by his countrymen to his work and to his memory.

The Bishop of Natal was happy in having the entire confidence and the unswerving devotion of every member of his

own family. Throughout the whole of his career, from the early Cambridge days onwards, his wife was as fearless and as earnest in seeking and acting on the truth as he was himself,—as ready, for instance, if need were, to abandon everything in order to share with him the work of a Christian mission in lands beyond the pale of civilisation,—as determined, not merely to search for, but to speak out, the whole truth, without regard to consequences. Of his children, the one who left her home in Natal last year, to help me in the preparation of the chapters relating to the dealings of the English Government with native tribes, has been taken to the happier home in which they who part here are reunited. Thousands for whose welfare she shared her father's toil and self-devotion will remember with lasting thankfulness the name of Frances Ellen Colenso.

Of the part taken by his eldest daughter, Harriette, in the great work of his later years no adequate description can be given. It is enough to say that there was no sacrifice of time or strength ever called for which she did not make joyfully, and without the consciousness that she was making any sacrifice at all. With wonderful patience and fortitude she bore up against the mere physical toil of the work, heavy even when the Bishop was at hand to guide and counsel. With endurance even more wonderful she has persevered since his death in the prosecution of his great task of obtaining justice for the weak and helpless, or, where it was too late to hope for justice, of resisting the progress of wrong, and of protesting against the cynical indifference to human suffering which has marked the dealings of the British Government, or of some at least of its highest officials, with native tribes.

That I have been enabled to have my part in vindicating his life's work in the sight of all English-speaking men, and, I trust, of many more, is to me a matter of abiding thankfulness

and joy. Most of all, am I thankful that I have had the happiness of close friendship with him for more than twenty years, and that during all these years I have been gladdened by the consciousness of a singular harmony of thought and method with a mind never thrown off its even balance, and of entire accord with a heart for which truth was more precious than life.

GEORGE W. COX.

SCRAYINGHAM RECTORY,
December 10, 1887.

“YOU need *boldness* to risk all for God—to stand by the Truth and its supporters against men’s threatenings and the devil’s wrath. . . . you need a *patient meekness* to bear the galling calumnies and false surmises with which, if you are faithful, that same Satanic working, which, if it could, would burn your body, will assuredly assail you daily through the pens and tongues of deceivers and deceived, who, under a semblance of a zeal for Christ, will evermore distort your words, misrepresent your motives, rejoice in your failings, exaggerate your errors, and seek by every poisoned breath of slander to destroy your powers of service.”—
SERMON PREACHED AT THE CONSECRATION OF BISHOP COLENZO, *St. Andrew’s Day*, 1853, by SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, *Bishop of Oxford*.

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