



The Colenso Society  
32 Hawkestone Street  
Thorndon Wellington 6011  
8351

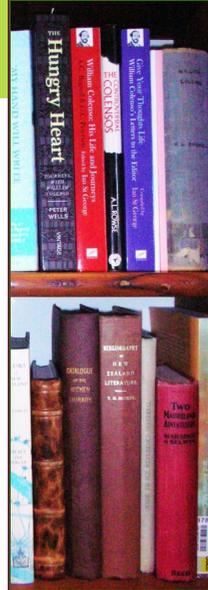
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# eColenso

## Sulphur for lumbago

### ***William Colenso to John Drummond 1 July 1881:***

I was... grieved, at finding that you, too, had *known* the pains and trouble of lumbago; I have suffered a good deal from that foe—"off & on" (as sailors say)—throughout many years, which has caused me to be very careful now—hence it is, that I am seldom seen in town without my little cloak on my arm, not for rain, but to put over the back of a *hollow* back chair should I sit down on one. You will have to be careful of sudden exposure to draughts—&c., especially that part of the body (loins). A very good thing is to use, or wear sulphur in your boots—about a tea-spoonful in each boot, renewed now & then. I have used it, and found great benefit, so did Garry when working as a Smith at Havelock, and so did Dyer the "bus-man" and others. I wore it in my slippers also, it goes into the body, & causes ones clothing to have a disagreeable Sulphur smell, & turns *the silver in your pocket, watch, &c, black;*—



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*eColenso* is a free email publication which might be forwarded to interested others. Contributions on William Colenso should be emailed to the editor, Ian St George, [istge@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:istge@yahoo.co.nz).

***Colenso to Drummond 14 August 1881:*** I was greatly pleased in finding you had got relief from using Sulphuric.

### ***Pliny's Naturalis Historia***

The use of sulphur for lumbago dates from Pliny the Elder, whose *Naturalis Historia*, published AD 77–79 is one of the largest single works to have survived from the Roman Empire and purports modestly to cover all ancient knowledge. Pliny wrote that Wool dipped into a mixture of oil, sulphur, vinegar, pitch, and soda cured lumbago. Mind you he listed a few other cures for back pain, clearly distinguishing the orthodox approaches from those of “magicians”...

For pains in the side, the heart of a hoopoe is highly esteemed; ashes, too, of burnt snails, that have been boiled in a ptisan, snails being sometimes applied in the form of a linament, alone. Potions employed for this purpose have a sprinkling in them of the ashes of a mad dog's skull. For the cure of lumbago, the spotted lizard from beyond seas is used: the head and intestines being first removed, the body is boiled in wine, with half a denarius of black poppy,\* and the decoction is taken in drink. Green lizards, also, are taken with the food, the feet and head being first removed; or else three snails are crushed, shells and all, and boiled with fifteen peppercorns in wine. The feet of an eagle are wrenched off in a contrary direction to the joint, and the right foot is attached to the right side, the left foot to the left, according as the pains are situate. The millepede, which we have spoken of as being called the "oniscoa," is a cure for these pains, taken, in doses of one denarius, in two cyathi of wine. The magicians recommend an earth-worm to be put in a wooden dish, which has been split and mended with iron wire; which done, some water must be taken up with the dish, the worm drenched with it and buried in the spot from which it was taken, and the water drunk from the dish. They assert, also, that this is a marvellously excellent cure for sciatica.

Homeopathy makes solutions of sulphur compounds, dilutes them till only water remains, and supplies them for backache to this day.

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\* Half a denarius was perhaps half a pennyweight or 750mg of poppyseed, containing hardly enough opiate to have any real analgesic effect.



The Bush road, 1884



In the Seventy Miles Bush  
Wood engraving 1890, from Cassel's *Picturesque Australasia*



Napier 1875

Ann Collins emailed,

2014 is John William Colenso's 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday and there is an exhibition in his old college at Cambridge.

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/news/private-collection-of-cambridges-heretic-bishop-goes-on-show>

37 Phillimore Gardens  
Kensington W.  
Dec. 23. 1874

My dear Dean of Westminster  
I am much obliged by the copies of  
your sermon.

I hope that the copy of the "Remarks"  
intended for the Queen reached you  
today. I have put on paper in the  
enclosure two <sup>approbations</sup> ~~remarks~~ which I should  
wish to send of Her Majesty's  
approval - & which please convey,  
if you have not already so,  
in your own words or in mine,  
as you think best. Good bye.

Ever yours sincerely  
Geo. Natal

Bishop John Colenso first courted controversy with the publication in 1855 of his *Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Polygamy*, which we mentioned in the December 2013 issue of *eColenso*. It appears from the above that he gave a copy to Queen Victoria during his visit to England in 1874 to present his account of the Langabelele affair to the Colonial Office.

The Bishop of London forbade him to preach, but the Dean of Westminster, AP Stanley, invited Colenso to preach in Westminster Abbey. Colenso declined.

Queen Victoria, as monarch, was the head of the Church of England.  
She probably didn't think it was very funny.



Ridley Latimer Colenso  
Collection of Hawke's Bay Museums Trust, Ruawharo Tā-ū-rangi, 3674

I told you I  
wasn't well



I understand it isn't true Spike Milligan's headstone carries that epitaph, because local rules insisted the inscription be in Gaelic. But it's a good line, hinting at a mad hypochondriacal pleasure in being proved right by being dead.

Colenso wrote a lot about his illnesses, and sometimes I have wondered how much of it reflects the introspection of the high-performing perfectionist and how much of it was real.

He had written to the CMS in London early in 1839, "though (I was) brought very low, (God) was with me, He rebuked the disorder, and, contrary to my expectations, He has restored me to health, and permits me to labor a little longer in His Service. Two months however, passed by before I recovered my strength."

A half-yearly report to the Church Missionary Committee at Paihia by Dr SH Ford covers December 1837 to June 1838, and gives independent confirmation of the severity of Colenso's illness: "Mr. Colenso has been visited with a severe attack of the prevailing influenza, attended with symptoms of irritation about the head, which caused us for a time much uneasiness. We attribute to God, however, that he has been once more restored to comparative health."

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# Scaling the heights

**W. Colenso 1845. Journal, 10 February.** This morning... we, who had remained, agreed to proceed towards the summit.... Hour after hour, however, passed in arduous toil (the forest being so filled with decaying trees and prostrate limbs and tangled herbage) before we gained the top. In our ascent we passed over two of the worst of the “passes,” and they are bad indeed, frightfully so,—as if an avalanche of half the mountain’s side had suddenly slipped down into the distant gorge below. The Natives informed me, that the bones of a taua (i.e. a fighting party) lay bleaching at the bottom; they having attempted the pass when snow lay upon the ground, through which they were carried down and miserably perished! The river which ran bounding through the narrow valley was so distant, that we could not hear it. The pass is never attempted in the winter season, nor yet in windy weather. The lovely appearance, however, of the table-land on the summit, richly repaid the toils of the ascent, for never did I behold in New Zealand such a profusion of Flora’s stores....

**JW Colenso 1855. Ten weeks in Natal. p84–85** At the foot of the heights we came upon a kraal.... And then came the scramble and the struggle, up this lofty and difficult hill, which was covered thick with shrubs and trees, with occasional patches of bare grass, to the summit. My brave horse did his part well : but, at last, I was obliged to dismount and lead him, the path being almost perpendicular at times, with huge blocks of stone to climb, and all slippery with the rain of yesterday. What a collection of rare beauties might a good botanist make here ! But I had no time for such pursuits : and turned away unwillingly from many a lovely flower, which has never yet graced the garden or greenhouse of England. It must have taken us, I think, an hour and a half of stiff exertion to climb this steep....

*Full many a flower is born to blush unseen. Is a floral paradise at the end of an arduous climb a metaphor for heaven?  
Or would Doctor Freud simply say a staircase is a staircase, and it is unsurprising that it climbs to ecstasy?—Ed.*

# Bagnall meets Petersen

5 Mahina Bay,  
EASTBOURNE,  
Feb. 10th, 1943.

Dear Mr Petersen,

*Mr Johannes Andersen in the course of a recent conversation informed me that you were working on a life of Colenso. He would by now, I understand, have told you that I am engaged on a similar job. Pleasing as it is to have our judgements on what would be a worth while biography thus confirmed it is unfortunate that the energies of at least two people should by a coincidence be similarly employed. It is, I suppose, the price we must pay for our brief history that such a situation should arise in a field which is by the standards of the old world absurdly small.*

*I am uncertain of the scope of then work you are doing and of the progress which you have made. I contemplated a full length biography written with what scholarship and style I could muster for what I intended to be my historical premiere." From the time when I first assisted Meade to plot his tracks for the as yet unpublished Centennial Atlas I was attracted by the personality and achievements of this vigorous but fractious cleric. Some years ago I saw Mr Martin Simcox and obtained for the Library the privilege of copying the bush diaries and other material.*

*The presence of much Colenso material in the McLean papers convinced me that there was an abundance of primary material for a first class biography and I began to collect material bearing on his life. As a trumper and amateur botanist I have covered much of Colenso's ground although I have yet to cross the Ruahines by his particular route, and to do the Ruatahuna- Whakatane River trip.*

*The material I still have to cover is fairly large, however, in volume. This May I am going down to the Hocken to look through the papers there covering the Missionary period and I am writing to Kew on the off chance of blitz and evacuation having spared Allan Cunningham's diaries and the Hooker correspondence. I am now in the middle of the fatiguing newspaper conning stage.*

*It is a peculiar aspect of a man of strength and energy living in an expanding age and society that he was at his peak about 1865, thereafter in science failing to make the most of his opportunities and earlier advantages. Out of place in politics which he abandoned in '66 the publication the previous year of the Exhibition essays on the Maori, and Botany of the North Island mark the high water mark of his influence. Of course one is apt to overlook the great age to which he lived yet by comparison with Cockayne or Best he went to seed somewhat sadly, especially*

*in his heterodox species mongering. However, you know all this and more.*

*The question concerning what action, if any, we should separately or jointly take in this matter is one much more readily resolved by conversation than by correspondence. I felt that I should, however, let you know as soon as possible my position and the work which I had done.*

*I have seen little in the way of book bargains lately; the hunting for some time to come will, I think, be poor.*

*I am*

*Yours sincerely*

*A.G. Bagnall.*

*P. O. Box 103,  
Palmerston North.  
14th. February, 1944.*

*Dear Mr. Bagnall,*

*I received your letter, for which many thanks.*

*When Mr. Anderson was in Palmerston North a few weeks ago I mentioned to him that I was working on Colenso and asked his interpretation of a Maori place name mentioned in one of the pamphlets. When he was back here the other day he said he had spoken to you and discovered that you were on the job too. This is, no doubt, a bit disconcerting to both of us, but, as you say, it is at least interesting to know that the old chap and his extraordinarily colourful life have made the same appeal to us. However, it seems to me that although we might tackle the job from different angles and in different styles, there is hardly room for two biographies.*

*Like you, I have for many years been keen on tramping, and it was through reading Colenso's accounts of some of his journeys that I first became interested in him. Despite the variety of his associations, interests and accomplishments Colenso's name is little known, except to the student, and I have always felt sure that a full biography should not only prove acceptable, but a worth-while contribution. I found that even in Napier, where he lived for over 50 years, he is known only to the old identities who refer to him, and in no affectionate sense, as 'the old devil.' Their recollections seem largely confined to a guerilla warfare he carried on with small boys who were in the habit of invading the grounds of his house.*

*I also am busy collecting material. I have written to England in an attempt to unearth further detail of his early life, family background, etc. I have had Mr. Simcox's diaries, correspondence, etc. for some time. I have checked up most of the references, I think, to Colenso in the existing works, and made a fairly comprehensive study of all his own published writings. Some time ago I was in touch with the Hocken Library but have not as yet been able to get down there. I saw Miss Woodhouse (?) last year and checked over what material you have at the Turnbull,*

*and hoped to work through it during the present year. Like you I have not done the Ruahine or Urewera trips, nor have I followed Colenso's Te Reinga route. I had tentative plans for the Ruahine trip this year. I have often been on the tops a few miles south of Mahuru, but have never actually crossed in Colenso's route. While in Napier during the Xmas vacation I unearthed an account written by a member of a party who did so about 1913. I am looking forward to making the Ruatahuna-Whakatane River trip. I have made several excursions in those parts during the past few years. A party from one of our tramping clubs followed, without knowing it, what was roughly Colenso's route from Ruatahuna out some years ago.*

*My original idea was a full biography. Examination of the disappointing latter part of his life, with its record of domestic trouble, dismissal from the C.M.S., moral lapses, and political failure, and personal unpopularity resulting from what appears to have been increasing mental instability, then led me to consider confining myself to his "Journeys and Adventures" dealing mainly with the early period at Paihia and Waitangi (Napier) and his journeys. Later, however, it seemed to me that although the latter course would show the old chap in the kindest light and cover what, to all intents and purposes, was the portion of his life that matters most, it would not present a true picture of his annoyingly complex character. I then reverted to the original idea of a full biography.*

*I must admit the botanical aspect has bothered me. I am, though interested in plants N.Z., no botanist. I am greatly interested in your enquiry for Cunningham's diaries. I hope you are successful in picking up something good.*

*Apart from personal interest there does not seem much sense in us duplicating our work, and, like you, I think the best thing would be for us to meet and have a talk over the matter. I think the job should be done, whether you do it, or I do it, or we collaborate. I cannot, however, say just when I shall be down your way. I have a rather exacting practice here and the travel restrictions are rather bothersome. However, I may be able to manage it in about a fortnight's time. Perhaps we could meet if I let you know just when I shall be in Wellington.*

*In the meantime, kindest regards,  
Yours sincerely,*

*(Signed GC Petersen)*

Within a few months they were writing often, referring to Colenso affectionately as "Billy". The history of Bagnall and Petersen's collaboration is fully accessible through their collected letters in the Turnbull Library.

Their dismissive attitude to the achievements of Colenso's later years is reflected in the slight attention given in their biography to those years. More aware now, perhaps, of the true motives of Colenso's critics—the squatters, the politicians, the church leaders, the big city scientists—we can perhaps discern the quality of his contributions more clearly.

Among the GC Petersen papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library is an extract from a letter from Sophie J Colenso to William Colenso (the nephew of Rev William Colenso). Ann Collins has identified the *literae personae*: Sophie Jeanette Colenso née Frankland was the wife of Francis Ernest Colenso (“Frank”), the second son of the Bishop of Natal. She was the daughter of Sir Edward Frankland, DCL, FRS. One of her brothers was Frederick William Frankland who came to New Zealand, and the letter-within-a-letter is from his wife (Sophie’s sister-in-law) Miriam née Symons. Miriam was a native of NZ; her father’s first wife was Māori and she was brought up with a half-brother from that marriage, hence perhaps her interest in Wiremu Colenso.

Sophie wrote,

Sat 17 1932

*Dear Cousin Will*

*I have just received a letter from my sister-in-law, Mrs F.W. Frankland, who lives in Wellington New Zealand, & I will copy from it a few lines which will interest you.*

*“I am most interested in what you wrote about meeting Frank’s cousin William Colenso. Can it be the daughter of Ridley Latimer Colenso (no, for he only had one daughter who died when little more than a child. SJC) who has married the half Maori son of the Rev. Wm Colenso?... I forgot to say that the Mrs Colenso I met on the steamer when we were returning from Napier on our ‘reading trip’ (this would be about 1880, SJC) was the native wife—quite a handsome woman with curly hair: she and I sat together in the tiny tug boat which took us out in the stream to join our steamer ‘Wanaka’ bound for Wellington. Mrs Colenso & I had cabins opposite each other.”*

*Can you tell me how the Rev Wm Colenso got to be so rich? For Ridley Latimer was undeniably a wealthy man—was the half-Maori brother left quite badly off? I suppose there had not been a divorce between your great uncle & his first wife, so that the Maori would not be his legal wife?...*

Petersen wrote to a Mr Colenso on 17 May 1946 (WC’s nephew had died in 1942),

*I am a little mystified by Mrs. Frankland’s reference to meeting a Mrs. Colenso, a Maori lady, on the steamer between Napier and Wellington in 1880. I cannot think that this was Willie’s mother, who was legally married to Hamuera and would not, in any case, assume the name of Colenso. Last Christmas I was at Napier and there visited an old Maori chief, Paraire Tomoana, who knew Rev. Colenso. I asked him whether he knew Ripeka (Willie’s mother) and he said he did and would tell me all about her. However Maori ceremony and courtesy demands plenty of time before one can get down to business and I had perforce to listen to everything else Paraire wanted to tell me and by the time I could pin him down I received a message I was wanted elsewhere and had to leave, promising to call again. Unfortunately I could not do so before returning to Palmerston North, and I noted in the paper the other day that the old gentleman had passed away. A wonderful opportunity lost, for I doubt whether anyone else has the information.*

Sad but true. But who was that lady?



### EARLY WARNING

MTG Hawke's Bay, the Victoria University of Wellington  
and the Colenso Society, partners in the Colenso Project,

invite you to clear your diary for the

**weekend of 18–20 November 2016**

for the

## **Second Colenso Conference**

Friday evening: Happy Birthday Billy

Saturday: papers

Sunday: field days

