

British Scriptural geologists in the first half of the nineteenth century: part 9. James Mellor Brown (1796?–1867)

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In 1838, James M. Brown wrote a 56-page pamphlet entitled *Reflections on Geology*,¹ in which he critiqued the geological views of William Buckland (expressed in his 1836 *Bridgewater Treatise*)² and John Pye Smith (expressed in a letter in the December 1837 issue of *Congregational Magazine*).³ Brown opposed the unbiblical philosophical grid, rooted in Germany and France, used by the leading British geologists to interpret the geological evidence. He showed that the inferences of these geologists were unconvincing and not logically necessary. He criticized the way Buckland and Smith, in their attempts to harmonize Genesis and their geological theories, twisted and ignored the Scriptural data. Brown would not tolerate such trifling because he was convinced that the Bible was the inspired Word of God. He concluded that their views were ‘a direct and real, though disavowed attack on the Mosaic narrative of the creation’. As a faithful pastor of rural parishes, Brown was motivated to write against the theories of Buckland and Smith out of a genuine concern for the spiritual condition of his people and for sound teaching of Scripture.

Biographical sketch

James Mellor Brown was born in about 1796 in one of the British colonies.⁴ He obtained a B.A. and from 1831 to 1833 was incumbent of the Anglican Church in Hylton, Durham, where parish records indicate that he was a very conscientious pastor.⁵ On 25 March 1839, and 3 December

1839, respectively, he became the rector of Isham Superior and its twin parish of Isham Inferior, near Kettering.⁶ He served this combined parish at St. Peter’s Church for the next 27 years until his death on 10 February 1867, just weeks after his wife, Elizabeth, passed away on 13 January 1867. He was replaced as rector by his son Abner Edmund Brown, who had taken over many of the pastoral duties during the last couple years of his father’s life, presumably because of his ill-health. He had two other sons—Henry, who became rector of Long Stratton, Norfolk, and William Mellor, who evidently died in his teen years.

Whether Brown was a high churchman or evangelical is difficult to say. He endeavoured to draw dissenters back into the Anglican Church, which in his view was the only place they could be in apostolic succession for the right administration of child baptism and the Lord’s Supper.⁷

One of Smith’s objections to the Scriptural geologists was that a person would be qualified (in the 1830s) to discuss geological questions only if he was well acquainted with the principles of chemistry, electricity, mineralogy, zoology, conchology, comparative anatomy, and even mathematics.⁸ Brown appears to have read at least some of the geological writings of Buckland, Sedgwick, Conybeare, Cuvier and Agassiz,⁹ and he accurately summarized the most important points of the geological theory he was criticizing.¹⁰ But he made no claim to have any scientific competence. Nevertheless, he insisted that his critique of geological theories was justified:

‘It will be readily conceded, that to prosecute the study of geology advantageously, some insight into most of the natural sciences is necessary. But when this assertion is intended to deter men of good common sense from giving their opinion upon geology in its connection with the Scriptures, the position may be safely questioned. It would be just as reasonable to maintain that a minute acquaintance with the principles of surgery and morbid anatomy was requisite before a man was qualified to say whether a leg of mutton was tainted, and ought to be sent from table. Or that an honest countryman was unfit to sit in the jury box, because he was ignorant of the English law reports or Coke upon Lyttleton. In the controversy between geologists and the Sacred Scriptures, nothing more is required but an acquaintance with the common laws of evidence, and a knowledge of the distinction between divine and human testimony.’¹¹

As a fellow clergyman with Buckland and Smith, he therefore felt qualified to criticize their views of Earth history.

The relation between Scripture and science

Brown believed that the Scriptures were the inspired, infallible Word of God and that their meaning, including the early chapters of Genesis, is to be derived from the

‘plain grammatical sense’, the ‘plain and obvious sense’ and ‘the plain simple language’ of Scripture. Only in this way can they be ‘viewed as a safe guide for plain minds; and such are those of the majority of mankind’. His reaction to Smith’s view of the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture reveals most clearly his own view. He stated, ‘I am well aware that a canon for judging of the inspiration of Scripture has been proposed which neutralises every argument on the subject of geology that can be drawn from the Sacred Writings’. For example, some were saying that the prophecies of Isaiah 11 are metaphorical; others said that any historical passages related to geology are not inspired but must be tested in the same way that Hesiod or Herodotus are. But Brown objected,

‘A rule of interpretation which strips away the sanctity of so many passages entirely, and admits a wide exposition of others, provides a copy of the Scriptures well suited to modern science. Among those writers who have endeavoured to adapt the oracles of God to the exigencies of philosophy, Dr J. Pye Smith holds a prominent place. Not only has he passed judgment upon an entire book of Scripture, the Song of Solomon, and excluded it from the pale of Inspiration; but it appears that he is prepared to withhold the sacred character from all “matter merely genealogical, topographical, numerical, civil, military, fragments of antiquity, domestic or national;” and has come to the conclusion, that “the qualities of sanctity and inspiration belong only to the religious and theological element diffused through the Old Testament.” ... This is expurgation which may well make a plain reader of the Bible stand aghast. This is excision of at least half the Scriptures. It is impossible not to feel amazed at the nerve of a critic, who in the face of the appalling anathema which denounces [*sic*] vengeance for every mutilation of Scripture, can thus rend away passage after passage, on a scale of such magnitude.’¹²

In this state, he said, the Bible would be unfit for the common man and the Roman Church would be vindicated in keeping it out of his hands. He continued, ‘If the Scriptures be, indeed, a heap of mingled wheat and chaff, as now affirmed, a benefit would be conferred on the world by the man who should winnow it effectually, and give the chaff to the winds’. He then suggested that Smith undertake a red and black edition so the poor could easily know which parts of the Bible to trust: black would mean inspired and red would indicate uninspired. He had no doubt that Genesis 1–3 would be in red.

His view of the precise relationship between the Bible and science was not clear. In a vague reference to the Galileo affair he wrote,

‘Because, in two or three passages, the Scriptures speak of the sun rising in the east and setting in the west, philosophers immediately appeal to

the Copernican system to demonstrate that the sun neither rises in the east nor sets in the west. If it is said that “God hath made the round world so sure that it cannot be moved”, they summon the same authority to prove that the earth revolves on its own axis, and is in a state of unceasing motion. Upon this it is forthwith concluded, that the Sacred Writings only use a popular language in matters of natural science; that their assertions in such cases are not absolute truth; and that they were never meant to give us instruction in astronomy or natural history. Having invalidated their authority in one point, it is easy to set it aside in others. If, for example, Scripture says, that the Lord rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah; [*sic*] the philosopher maintains that this is only the Oriental style of describing a volcano. If the rod of Moses divides the Red Sea; this is only figurative of the ebb and flow of some extraordinary tide. And thus Neology bursts in upon Scripture, and sweeps away natural facts and miracles alike. If the veracity of the Divine Word is to be thus laid in one scale, and philosophers and their systems in the other, I am prepared to adhere to the statements of revelation, and patiently await that day when God will vindicate and interpret his own words.’¹³

Brown is difficult to interpret in this section of his argument. Given that he believed in volcanoes and extraordinary tides (they were part of his view of the Flood), we cannot be certain that he actually rejected the Copernican view of the solar system, as his words might suggest. He was not any less ambiguous later, however, when he contended that physical science should not be independent from the Bible and that the Bible did not contain scientific errors, although he apparently did not want to say that the Bible is a scientific textbook.

‘Perhaps in the commencement of the last century, the Scriptures were by some writers¹⁴ erroneously looked upon as a book of physical science, and *designed* to afford us secular as well as divine knowledge. It may be wise to avoid their error: but let us not “mistake reverse of wrong for right”, nor forget that whatever statements the Scriptures make, however general, however cursory, are made upon the authority of Him who cannot be ignorant of the facts, and who will not mislead the children of men, nor suffer the authenticity of His Word to rest on carious evidence.’¹⁵

Brown never really answered the fundamental question of how the interpretation of Scripture and nature were related to each other. Nor did he defend his belief that the literal interpretation of Genesis must be the correct one. But he was convinced that the rejection of the literal interpretation of Genesis would undermine faith in the teaching of the rest of the Bible.

Attitude to science and geology

Contrary to the assertion by Smith that Brown believed that geological investigation was ‘not a subject of lawful inquiry’, ‘a dark art’ and ‘a forbidden province’, Brown was not hostile toward science in general or geology in particular. He certainly did not ‘denounce geologists along with their evil works’, as Millhauser put it.¹⁶ Brown emphasized this more than once in his short essay.

Regarding the often supposed war between science and religion he wrote, ‘Religion, it has been frequently said, has nothing to fear from science. There is one sense in which this is true, and another in which it is false. It is one of those sophisms which silence a man without convincing him’. He believed that Christians need not fear science because God’s Word stands forever and God does not shun investigation of nature, but rather encourages it, as illustrated in the case of Job (Job, chapters 38–41). Also, Brown argued, Scripture seems to challenge the infidel to investigate nature, and throughout history sceptics have launched various attacks to try to separate the physical-historical statements of Scripture from the moral doctrines, as contemporary geologists were doing. These attacks, he said, were by vicious atheists, sporting fools, mistaken and imperceptive people, or others who actually thought they were serving God as they unconsciously destroyed the foundations of the faith. Brown assured his Christian readers that although all these attackers were, consciously or unconsciously, instruments of Satan and their efforts had a tendency to overthrow the Christian religion, they would never ultimately succeed. So in this sense science was no threat to Christianity and Brown could encourage his readers, ‘let the researches of science be pushed to the extremities of nature, wherever a door may be opened to the sober-minded student, and his progress shall be hailed with delight’. In a more particular statement about the value of geological study he said, ‘For our admiration and instruction, the Almighty has been pleased to preserve specimens of the Ante-diluvian world. . . . Fossils are the lithographic prints of ancient botany and zoology.’

On the other hand, Brown did feel that certain scientific theories did pose a danger, both for the individual Christian and for the nation. He wrote,

‘I am prepared to show that in this sense religion has much to fear from philosophy [*i.e.*, natural philosophy or science], not its facts, but its theories. Whenever those theories invalidate the historical or the physical statements of Scripture; or even when they interfere with our sober and commonly received views of it, they are pernicious. They tend to unsettle men’s minds as to the veracity of the Sacred Writings. They shake the confidence with which the simple and unlearned repose upon them. Simple minds feel unable to untwine those threads of error which they are told run throughout the book; and they cannot distinguish that inspired portion which they ought to hold fast from those uninspired

statements of science and history which they are assured they may safely let go. Thus doubt and distrust enter their minds, and never again can they rest with that unquestioning reliance upon the Word of God which they once felt. The sacred volume is no longer to them a rock which cannot be shaken. To this it may be added, that these theories, where they are admitted, disturb the learned and acute mind still more powerfully than the illiterate; for the thinking, reasoning man naturally argues, that if one statement of Scripture has been questioned, so may another, and another; and that if historical or physical facts can be disproved, whatever doctrines or precepts rest upon them must give way likewise. Thus scepticism takes gradual possession of the soul. If natural facts cannot be admitted on the mere warrant of inspiration, by what law of evidence, it may be asked, can we be compelled to believe, on the same authority, those which are supernatural? When science has once begun to tamper with Scripture, it is vain to say that it will restrict itself to physical statements, and abstain from the consideration of miracles. Men will no more stop half-way in an argument because you wish them, than a rolling stone will check itself at your bidding when half way down the hill.’¹⁷

In this regard, he was concerned about what he perceived to be the significant deistic, and even atheistic, influences of the French school of geology: ‘it is to be feared that the malaria of French philosophy has sometimes milder-dewed the more healthy character of English science’. He stressed therefore that it was not the facts of geology that he was disputing, but ‘we protest against the inferences of geology being called by the name of facts’. He then illustrated his meaning with two examples. First, the statement ‘primary crystalline rocks never contain organic fossils’ was open to observational test and seemed at the time to have been verified. So he accepted it as ‘fact’ and encouraged the accumulation of more of the same. Second, however, the statement ‘primary crystalline rocks existed 10,000 years before the Lias’ was nothing more than an inference, which also flew in the face of the ‘authenticated fact’ that ‘in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is’ (Exodus 20:11). He refused to allow his geological opponents to call such inferences facts.¹⁷

So we see that Brown was not antagonistic toward the study of science and geology. Neither did he vilify personally Buckland, Smith or any other opponents. At the beginning of his essay he said, ‘As a cabinet of facts in Natural History, skilfully arranged and beautifully polished, Buckland’s *Geological Treatise* is a noble work.’ After briefly summarizing Buckland’s gap theory he continued with this compliment of Buckland:

‘Justice requires it to be acknowledged, that whatever can be done by diligence and the powers of reasoning, to place his argument in the best light,



Courtesy TFE Graphics

William Buckland (1784-1856). Buckland authored the *Bridgewater Treatise*, a publication that diminished the influence of the Noachian Flood on world geology.

has been accomplished by the author. He makes his reader feel that the subject has engaged his anxious thoughts. If his argument fails, it is not from any deficiency in the advocate.¹⁸

Later he added that, ‘a museum of fossils is a field of rich and pleasing reflection to a thoughtful mind—and who could wish for a more agreeable and intelligent companion in his survey than the author of the *Bridgewater Treatise* on geology?’ So while Brown rejected the views of Buckland and Smith, he did not reject science or geology as legitimate fields of human endeavour, nor did he resort to *ad hominem* attacks against individual geologists, as a substitute for reasoned arguments.¹⁹

The above statements give us the proper context for understanding Brown’s remarks near the end of the pamphlet, which contain the words quoted out of context by Smith.¹⁸ Smith urged that a geology student should be modest and humble in his studies of nature. Brown quoted Smith at length and then turned the words to apply to Smith himself.

‘The writer of this pious and judicious caution is too shrewd not to have perceived that it has a double edge, and cuts two ways; and methinks it

strives with tenfold keenness the man who would push aside the plain statements of Scripture, when they interfere with his favourite systems and theories. The above passage [Smith’s long quote] is exactly the ground on which a religious man would wish to take his stand in opposing the visionary yet dangerous speculations of modern geology. Such an one is not so foolhardy as to argue against facts; neither would he discourage the solution of difficulties in any way that is reasonable and good. He cultivates in himself, and hails in others, the spirit of humility and modesty; and he ever keeps in view the most valuable axiom of human science, that man is ignorant and weak. He feels it his duty to be thankful for what he is permitted to know; submissive where God has been pleased to set a barrier to further knowledge; “and where he can’t unriddle, learns to trust.” He looks abroad, and sees himself surrounded with mystery in the works of Nature, of Providence, and of Grace; but those mysteries disturb him not. It is his privilege to say, such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it! Man cannot by searching find out God: man cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection!

As it is honourable to man to investigate every subject of lawful inquiry, so it has always been held alike dangerous and disreputable to pry into that which has been shrouded from us by Higher Power. It has even been called a “dark art,” which would attempt to scan the curtained future or the curtained past. And surely a humble mind will be ready to confess, that events which took place before the birth of man, or the date of revelation, belong to a forbidden province. What can be the effect of such inquiries upon the mind but presumption, ending, perhaps, in infatuation! and if danger attaches to one branch of science more than to another, we may easily believe that it is in cases where the arrogance of superior intellect, or the wantonness of literary recreation, leads men to lay unhallowed hands upon the Ark of God, and to rifle with the last refuge of millions, the only sanctuary for the wounded spirits of their fellow-creatures.²⁰

So it was not the study of geology itself, with its present application to improving the economy and general standard of living of Britain,²¹ which Brown thought was ‘unlawful inquiry’, a ‘dark art’ and a ‘forbidden province’. Rather, he opposed what he considered to be the unbridled philosophical speculations of geologists about the pre-human and pre-revelation past, which were in direct contradiction to the Scriptural testimony of God on the subject.

In Brown’s view, the deistic or atheistic philosophical speculations in geology, and other sciences, were a part of a war that was going on. It was not a war between geology and Christianity, or even science and Christianity. Brown

believed that the real conflict was of a spiritual nature, between the forces of Satan and those of God, though many people were not aware that they were being used by Satan in this battle. Brown brought this idea out explicitly in a footnote, where he strongly criticized a view of Baden Powell, Oxford Professor of Geometry, yet without assailing his intelligence or professional qualifications.

‘A doubt has, I believe, been already raised on the common parentage of the human race, among others by the Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford; but with this salvo, that he does not consider it as invalidating the doctrine of Original Sin. This affords another illustration of men who pull down the bulwark, but disclaim any intention of endangering the citadel. The Trojan Horse, drawn within the walls of the devoted city by friendly hands, is a standing emblem of men acting under the unsuspecting guidance of the Evil One.’²²

Criticisms of Buckland’s and Smith’s theories

Three main issues attracted Brown’s attention: the laws of nature, the interpretation of Genesis 6–9, and animal death before the Fall of man. First, we consider the laws of nature as they relate to a reconstruction of earth history. Brown did not deny the notion of the uniformity of the processes of nature (particularly geological processes), but rather questioned the uniformity of rates and intensities of those processes. What is significant is that the argument he used against Buckland was essentially the same as that used initially by the catastrophists against Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1830–1833). Brown wrote,

‘I would put it to any man of candour; I would put it to Dr. Buckland, to say, whether the known laws of nature are not capable of accelerating speed and augmented energy? And whether there is any difficulty in believing that these laws *could* be so far increased in power and velocity as to produce the same effects in 6000 years, for which he now estimates 60,000 or 600,000 to be necessary?’²³

He used several analogies to demonstrate how difficult it was to calculate the time required for a particular event or process in the past. One analogy was the time required to travel from Birmingham to London: 25 hours on foot, 12 hours by horse and 8 hours with a relay of horses. No one would have thought it possible to make the trip in 2.5 hours, before the invention of the steam engine. Another analogy was that if an observer were ignorant of the existence of steam engines in the mines of Cornwall he would conclude that the work accomplished in a certain time period was done by two million men or 360,000 horses (the equivalent work of the engine). In like manner, Brown reasoned, if the earth indeed was once igneous, God could have rapidly refrigerated it, instead of slowly as Buckland and others assumed.

Furthermore, Brown queried, are *fossiliferous* forma-

tions like the transition, secondary and tertiary now forming? If the answer was yes, then he wanted to know where the fossil remains of Noah’s Flood of 4,200 years ago are. If the answer was no, then he reasoned that the force or intensity of the laws of nature had radically changed at the time of the Flood so that extrapolations into the antediluvian past based on present day rates of processes are erroneous and useless.²⁴

Brown’s second criticism of the old-Earth geological theories was their shallow interpretation of Genesis, especially the account of the Noachian Deluge. In Buckland’s *Bridgewater Treatise* Brown could only recall two short references to Noah’s Flood,²⁵ which prompted him to respond, ‘Was it considered too paltry an occurrence to claim a serious discussion?’ But since Buckland was not the only geologist who casually dealt with the Genesis account of the Flood, Brown continued with a bit of irony,

‘In some other geological works, the Deluge, it appears, is either rejected altogether or viewed as a merely local inundation described in the exaggerated phraseology of the East. To deny the Flood entirely will probably be found the easiest course for geologists to pursue—it throws the question upon other grounds, and leaves them meanwhile an open field for the projection of new theories. But unless they wholly deny it, and treat the sacred oracles as an Eastern fable, geologists must dispose of this event with a little more ceremony than they have yet done. The Christian world has been so accustomed to attribute to that well authenticated occurrence all those marks of convulsion, distortion, and dislocation in the shell of the earth, and all those fossil relics of an older world, which surround us on every hand, that they cannot be expected all at once to wean themselves from their antiquated notions. The greater proportion will probably be found unwilling even to make the attempt. They will be content to live in their ignorance, and at last to go down to the grave with the impression that no greater physical event than the Flood ever did occur in this world, or ever shall, till that day comes when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up” [II Peter 3:10].’²⁶

Brown went on to affirm the universality and violence of the Deluge and to criticize Buckland’s superficial exegesis of Genesis 6–9.

‘To affirm that the Deluge was not universal, is forcibly to contradict that record, which declares, that “the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered” [Genesis 7:19]. Dr Buckland, speaking for himself and other geologists, expresses a hope, that it may be shown, “that there is no inconsistency between their interpretation of the phenomena of nature, and of the Mosaic

narrative;” but I have not as yet seen in what manner he proposes to reconcile a partial and local inundation with the above passage of Sacred Scripture. To say, again, that the Deluge is *inadequate* to account for the phenomena exhibited by the stratified rocks, is to anticipate the point at issue. If the geologist *imagines* that their enormous thickness, or their manifold subdivisions, or their regular and numerous succession of strata, furnished with series of organic remains, is irreconcilable with what he believes the Mosaic Deluge capable of producing, his opponent is equally at liberty to imagine the reverse. It is not the original production, but the disruption, of those mineral beds and enormous masses of rock which has been attributed to the Deluge. And who can say, that this stupendous event was not accompanied by earthquake and volcano, to an extent sufficient to occasion that wild chaos of confusion which the strata of the earth exhibit? Let the geologist demonstrate to us that it was not the swellings of that mighty flood which, in one place, heaved up the granite foundations of the world to the surface of the earth; and in another, buried the shores of some ancient sea, and the adjacent soil, with its forests, and all its inhabitants, under continents of clay and rock, there to petrify into shelly marble or harden into coal. Let him say, why the saurian races, which had fulfilled their purposes in the world, and were not wanted for the new, might not have been then swept away; and why that guardian Power which sheltered Noah in the storm, might not have lodged the bones of his guilty contemporaries “in dark unfathomable caves of ocean,” or in the hollow womb of America, beyond the reach of the antiquary and geologist.²⁷

Buckland asserted that the Flood was a ‘comparatively tranquil inundation’ in which the rise and fall of the waters would have been ‘gradual, and of short duration’ and so ‘would have produced comparatively little change on the surface of the country they overflowed’. To this Brown responded, continuing from the above quote,

‘Of course, of an event which no eye hath seen—in all

likelihood, not even the eye of Noah—every mind must form its own conception; but I must own that the idea of *tranquillity* has seldom characterised my imagination of the Flood. When “the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened” [Genesis 7:11], I can only accumulate ideas of horror, of wide-spread agitation, and of the blackness of darkness. When, at length, the waters having executed the judgments of an avenging God, “prevailed 15 cubits upwards, and the mountains were covered” [Gen. 7:19]; when the globe had become one shoreless ocean, and the fountains and deeps were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained, and the sun again shone forth, I can believe that, for a little season, all was calm—the calm of universal death—save where the peaceful wave rippled against the sides of the Ark. But when subsequent to this, and in order to abate the flood, “God made a wind to pass over the earth” [Gen. 8:1], and that world of waters was put in motion, the idea of agitation becomes terrific. He who has ever witnessed it may think, perhaps, of the Bay of Biscay,²⁸ when the furious west rolls the waters of the Atlantic into its rocky basin, and the waves run mountains high, and “swallow navigation up;” but what similitude can this petty emblem afford of that scene, when “the waters returned from off the earth, in going and returning” [Gen. 8:3]; when the Pacific and the Atlantic were mingled in one billow, surging against the Alps, the Andes, and the Himalayan chain, and sweeping at



‘I must own that the idea of tranquillity has seldom characterised my imagination of the Flood. When “the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened”’²⁹

a single reach from the foundation to the summit of the everlasting hills?’²⁹

From this reasoning Brown was adamant: ‘The assertion will bear repetition, that geologists have never yet grappled with the subject of Noah’s Flood; and ere we can listen to a Hindoo or Chinese chronology of hundreds of thousands of years, that event must be unanswerably disposed of.’ We see then that Brown contended that Genesis 6–9 was a description not of a natural event in the course of God’s providential ruling over creation, but of a unique, global, violent, miraculous and penal act of divine intervention in history. To ignore or superficially treat the Biblical record of this event, was intolerable for anyone who wanted to declare the harmony of Scripture and geology or that geology did not contradict or undermine the teaching of Scripture, as Buckland, Smith and others did.

Brown’s third criticism concerned what to him was probably the most offensive part of Buckland’s thesis: the progressive process of creations and destructions, and all occurring before the creation of man and his Fall in sin. Such a view, Brown believed, was contrary to Scripture, which spoke of the original Creation as being perfect with a complete life chain, and contrary to the nature of God, because ‘even for a student of Natural Theology, such a scheme [of successive creations and destructions over long ages] seems to be a bungling contrivance’ and ‘a point blank contradiction’ to Exodus 20:11, which says God made everything in heaven and Earth in six days. ‘If He did not make the saurian races whose bones are now in our museums, in one of those six days, then, unquestionably, we are misled by Scripture’, wrote Brown.³⁰

Both Buckland and Smith dealt in particular with the question of animal death before the Fall of man.³¹ They argued that animal death was not related to any penal act of God, but was evidence of God’s overflowing goodness and the means of extending the animal kingdom through the supposed millions of years of creations and revolutions. Brown objected by saying that 1) Scripture always speaks of death as punishment and the greatest of evils, never as a natural blessing—neither for man nor for beast, 2) God made death the penalty for sin and a penalty which involved the innocent in the punishment of the guilty.³² Furthermore, he felt the reasoning of Buckland and Smith was equivocal.

‘When the geologist admits the existence of infirmities and struggles—the infirmities of old age and the struggles for food—may we not suspect a sophism in his argument? Are not these to be viewed as evils? And if so, they must be either the result of Satanic agency, or the punishment of sin. If the violent death of those creatures is only the less evil of the two, still it is an evil. Whichever line the reasoner chooses will lead him to the *punitive* character of death; general good at the expense of individual sorrow and suffering. God, we are taught, overrules individual evil for general good; but does the geologist mean to affirm, that God appoints evil,

that good may come of it, to any but the sufferer? When God appoints natural evil, it is either a *remedial* process for the good of the individual, or a salutary *beacon* for the good of others.’³³

So the views of Buckland and other geologists regarding death before Adam deeply troubled Brown.

‘And it is a point worthy of our most serious reflection, when men, who are known to be public teachers of morals and religion, place a subject of such incalculable importance as death in a light which essentially varies from that in which it is placed by Him [God].’³⁴

Conclusion

Though Brown was not fully competent in geology, even in his own estimation, it is false to caricature him as anti-science or anti-geology. It is also false to accuse him of *ad hominem* attacks. Rather he opposed the unbiblical philosophical grid, rooted in Germany and France, being used by the leading British geologists to interpret the geological evidence. Furthermore, he showed that the inferences these geologists’ drew from the facts were not logically necessary and unconvincing. Finally, he was critical of the way opponents, such as Buckland and Smith, handled or ignored the Scriptural data in their attempts to harmonize Genesis and their geological theories. This trifling of the Scriptural data could not be tolerated because Brown was convinced that the Bible was the inspired Word of God. He believed that the meaning of Scripture generally, and the Genesis account of the Flood and the origin of death in particular, was unambiguous. From Brown’s perspective it was inexcusable and unpersuasive to claim to believe that the Bible was the Word of God, as Buckland and Smith did, while giving such a shallow interpretation of the relevant texts. For this reason Brown concluded that their views were ‘a direct and real, though disavowed attack on the Mosaic narrative of the creation’. As a faithful pastor of rural parishes, Brown demonstrated a genuine concern for the spiritual condition of his people and for sound teaching of Scripture. It was these spiritual convictions, seen clearly also in his book on geology, which motivated him to write against Buckland’s and Smith’s theories.

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1. Brown, J.M., *Reflections on Geology*, James Nisbet, London, 1838. Hereafter cited as *Reflections*.
2. Buckland, W., *Geological and Mineralogical Considerations with Reference to Natural Theology* (‘Bridgewater Treatise’), 2 Volumes, London, 1836.
3. Smith, J.P., Suggestions on the Science of Geology, in answer to the question of T.K., *Congregational Magazine*, N.S. I:774–776, 1837.
4. Personal correspondence on 7 November, 1995, from Mr Alan Jenkinson, a retired member St. Peter’s Church and local history expert, based on Census lists for 1851 and 1861.

5. Brown, Ref. 1, title page. This says he was 'late incumbent of Hylton, Durham'. The parish records provide the exact years, according to Canon John Ruscoe, the present vicar, in a phone conversation on 3 November 1995. Regarding his degree, he is not listed as a graduate of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oxford or Cambridge, and all other records about him that I have been able to find give no information on his early life or education.
6. Longden, H.I., *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy (From 1500)*, II: 251, 1938.
7. Brown, J.M., Address to the Parishioners of Isham Superior and Isham Inferior, W. Dash, Kettering, 1840.
8. Smith, Ref. 3.
9. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 38. He particularly noted the influence of the French on English geologists and commented on the ability of Cuvier and Agassiz to reconstruct creatures from a single fossil tooth or scale.
10. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 17. Those points which he listed were: 1) the gradually cooled, once igneous Earth became habitable over hundreds of thousands of years, 2) the water-laid series of strata each took untold years to reach their present state, 3) the fossil sequences indicate successive distinct creations or progression of life from 'less perfect to more perfect forms' and 4) no fossil humans have been found. Therefore, according to old-Earth theory, the fossil-bearing strata were all deposited before man and the present Earth cannot be 6,000 years old.
11. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 51–52.
12. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 49–50. In a footnote he referred to Rev. 22:18–19 and to Marcion, the second century heretic, who rejected the whole Old Testament and every passage in the New Testament which referred to the Old.
13. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 6–7.
14. He gave no names.
15. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 35.
16. Millhauser, M., *Just before Darwin: Robert Chambers and the Vestiges*, Wesleyan University Press, Middleton, p. 55, 1959.
17. Millhauser, Ref. 16, pp. 12–13.
18. Millhauser, Ref. 16, pp. 3–4.
19. His writing style was similar to his Address to Parishioners (1840), where he sought to encourage dissenters to return to the Church of England. He wrote on page 9 of that work, 'as I shall have occasion to speak of subjects where there may be disagreement of opinion between us, I solicit your forbearance and candid attention to my remarks, assuring you that I have no feeling but of earnest desire to promote the spiritual good of the parish.'
20. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 52–54.
21. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 37. Though positive about the benefits of geology, he expressed the concern that increased affluence could produce detrimental effects on the moral strength of the nation, as acquisition of the gold of Peru and Mexico had done in Spain.
22. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 24. Brown's language may be compared to that of Smith, his critic, who condemned Powell's view of Genesis 1–11 as poetry rather than history. Smith called such an idea 'rash and harsh' and 'deeply injurious to the cause of Christianity' and which 'cannot but be revolting to the calm judgment of any man; as well as to the enlightened piety of a reflecting Christian.' See Smith, J.P., *The Relation between the Holy Scriptures and Geological Science* (often referred to as *Scripture and Geology*), London, pp. 203–204, 1839.
23. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 19.
24. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 20–25.
25. Brown cited Buckland's Bridgewater Treatise (Ref. 1), I:16, 95, which are also the only places I found it. On p. 95 Buckland's comments were in a footnote, where Buckland mentioned 'two great historical and natural phenomena' (Noah's Flood and one other widespread geological revolution, which he insisted should not be equated with the Flood but occurred before it). Brown asked (footnote, p. 29), 'Which two? The Mosaic Deluge is one. Which is the other inundation to which the term historical can be applied?' Though Buckland is a bit oblique, the context of his words in the two-page footnote suggests, to me at least, that Brown was correctly interpreting Buckland's use of the word 'historical' to mean 'within the time of recorded human history.'
26. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 29–30.
27. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 30–31. The only other reference Brown made to the problem of the lack of human fossils is found on page 36. There he stated that since the antediluvian world population was likely centred in the Near East, we ought to look for human fossils there before drawing general conclusions. Buckland and others rejected the evidence of the Guadalupe fossil man postulating that he was the remains of a massacre in 1710 and that the limestone bed in which the fossil skeleton was found, could have been produced in 40–50 years. Brown objected that this was inconsistent with the assertion that it takes 10,000 years or more to form a fossiliferous strata. Brown asked, if the strata could form in a half century in Guadalupe, why not elsewhere?
28. This is on the west coast of France and is an area notorious for its severe storms.
29. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 32–33.
30. Brown, Ref. 1, pp. 26–27.
31. Buckland, Ref. 2, I:chapter 17; Smith, Ref. 3, Vol. I:765–776.
32. Here he cited the book of Jonah and Romans 8:19–23.
33. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 44 (footnote).
34. Brown, Ref. 1, p. 45. Buckland sought to answer this criticism in a published sermon in 1839, An Inquiry whether the Sentence of Death pronounced at the Fall of Man included the whole Animal Creation or was restricted to the Human Race.

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