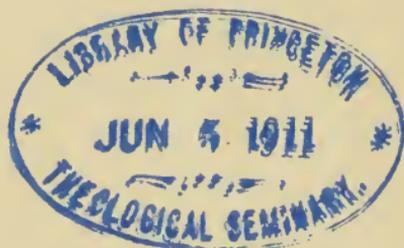


PROPHECY

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN



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PROPHECY

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN

CONSIDERED IN A SERIES OF
WARBURTON LECTURES AT
LINCOLN'S INN

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SOMETIME PREACHER OF LINCOLN'S INN

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WARBURTON LECTURES ON PROPHECY

INTRODUCTION

THESE lectures were preached in the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn, on the foundation of Bishop Warburton, in the course of the years 1894 to 1898. Their publication has been delayed, partly by the constant pressure of public duties, and partly because I wished to consider whether the development of the criticism of the Old Testament would materially affect the traditional point of view from which, in the main, Scripture prophecy is here treated. The result has been to give me reason for satisfaction that I have improved upon the Horatian rule of reserving serious writings for at least nine years. The course of archæological discovery since these lectures were preached has, without exception, tended to confirm the historical

truth of the Old Testament Scriptures, from the Book of Genesis onwards; and the remarkable lectures delivered last year by Professor Kittel of Leipzig to the National School Teachers of Saxony¹ exhibit a remarkable reversion towards old views from the theories which were popularised twenty years ago. Those theories, of course, still find their adherents in various degrees, but each year seems to cut the ground from under them. Every year seems to afford new encouragement to those who have all along ventured to retain the conviction, that it would ultimately prove that there is good foundation for the universal and continuous belief of the Jewish and Christian Churches, for about two thousand years, respecting their sacred Scriptures.

I am happily able to appeal to an unimpeachable authority in starting from that belief. Dr Sanday, the eminent Margaret Professor at Oxford, has told us in his *Bampton Lectures*, pp. 392-393, that the view of the Holy Scriptures which was prevalent

¹ A translation has just been published by Messrs Williams & Norgate, under the title of *The Scientific Study of the Old Testament, Its Principal Results and their Bearing upon Religious Instruction*: 1910.

in this country about fifty years ago was substantially the same as that which is exhibited in early Christian writers about the year 200 A.D., and moreover that, in respect to the Old Testament, it was the same as that which prevailed in the time of Christ; so much so that one of the chief supports on which it rested was the extent to which it is represented in the teaching of our Lord and of the Apostles. Now, quite apart from the Divine authority which is thus given to the traditional belief respecting the Scriptures, I would submit that as a mere matter of evidence that is a fact of momentous importance. At the time of our Lord, and consequently before it, the Jews regarded the books of the Old Testament, as we now have them, as containing the inspired record of their history, and entertained the same general view of that history which has prevailed in their own Church and the Christian Church until quite modern times. Now, a part of that view was that the ceremonial as well as the moral law of the Pentateuch, the portion of the Pentateuch now called "P," and the Book of Deuteronomy, proceeded at least in the main from Moses himself. But the critical theory

which has been generally accepted of late is that Deuteronomy must be ascribed to about the year 600 B.C., and that P, or at least a great part of the ceremonial law, was drawn up during the exile about 500 B.C., so that we are required to suppose that the Jews of the generation into which our Lord was born had somehow been persuaded that laws and writings which were only some 400 years old were really 1000 years older. I ask whether that is conceivable? Is it conceivable that an acute, tenacious—to use the description of them in Deuteronomy—a “stiff-necked” race had allowed a whole code of laws, and the solemn enforcement of those laws on alleged Divine authority, to have been imposed on them as having been given by God to Moses, when they were really no older than times which had been in the memory of their great-great-grandfathers?

That single consideration seems to me to render the prevalent critical theory quite inconceivable, but I must needs carry the same consideration further. The theory is beyond dispute absolutely contradictory to the view of the Old Testament history which is represented by the Old Testament itself. It is the view that, broadly speaking,

the prophetic period of Israel's religious development is anterior to the legal period. But there can be no doubt that the effect and the intention of the Old Testament is, again broadly speaking, to teach that the legalistic period preceded the prophetic period, and that the work of the prophets was in great measure to recall the people to the principles of the law of Moses and of the Patriarchs. Now I ask once more with confidence whether it is conceivable, on the ordinary principles of human evidence, that any nation, and especially the Jewish nation, can have allowed their whole historic tradition to be falsified—falsified not merely in respect to some details or secondary points, but in respect to its main course and its cardinal characteristics? This theory rests upon the supposition that the final compilers of the Pentateuch presented to their nation, and successively imposed upon it, a view of its religious development which was the direct opposite of the facts. Could this have been possible, or is it reasonably probable?

The matter may be considered from another and an even more solemn point of view. The account given of the course of the history of Israel in the Pentateuch, and

in the rest of the Old Testament, created the Jewish religion, that ancient and solemn religion under which our Lord Himself lived, which was in full force before His time, and which has sustained the religious life of that great and sacred race down to the present day. But, if this theory be true, that religion was from the first based on a deliberate falsification of sacred history at its very centre. It has been a charge advanced by some unbelieving writers that religion was the invention of priests. If this theory could be established, that charge would be proved in the case of the sacred religion from which Christianity sprang. If a theory, however plausible in some respects, brings us face to face with consequences of this character, is it not surprising that earnest Christian men, like many supporters among us of these theories, do not feel compelled to recognise that they must have been pursuing a mistaken track, and that there must be something wrong in the German leadership which has led them into so strange a position?

But it might possibly be objected to part of this argument that, though such a falsification of tradition is inconceivable in modern

times, it was possible in days when it was not customary to keep written records. But when were those days? Certainly not within the period of history which extends from the days of Abraham to the days of our Lord. It has been proved of late that during the whole of that period writing was in common use, even for private transactions, and that records of public events were carefully preserved in the civilisation amidst which the people of Israel lived. I venture to doubt if the theory in question could possibly have arisen if the facts which have come to light in our generation had been known in the days of the scholars with whom it originated. An extraordinary revolution in this respect has come to pass within our own generation. Ten years after I entered Holy Orders the first volume of *The Speaker's Commentary* was published, in which the introduction to the Pentateuch was written by a very eminent scholar of that date, Bishop Harold Browne; and at the outset of his introduction he finds it necessary to discuss the question whether the art of writing was in use so early as Moses. That was a point for argument even in the year 1870. But what is the

case now? Every scholar has on his table a complete code of laws, comparable in extent and character to one of the books of the Pentateuch, which is ascribed to King Hammurabi or Amraphel, who lived about 2000 years B.C., and who was probably a contemporary of Abraham. But if a complete code of laws could be inscribed on stone in the days of Abraham or near his time, how many centuries before him must not the art and practice of writing have existed, so as to have attained the flexibility and the accuracy required for such a purpose? But, if so, it is at least a perfectly unwarrantable supposition that written memorials of important occurrences did not exist from Abraham onwards, particularly of events at the time of Moses and Joshua, and throughout the whole course of Israel's history in Palestine.

But we are told that the Pentateuch has been analysed into some half-dozen documents which are assigned by the majority of scholars to dates which vary from 850 B.C. to 300 B.C. Be it so. Whatever may be my own reserves on that subject, it is quite unnecessary, for this argument, to question the literary opinions on such a point of eminent

critical authorities. The question I ask goes behind that literary theory. The real question is whether these writers of the year 800, or any later date you please, were writing on the basis of mere loose popular reminiscences, or whether it is reasonable to suppose that they possessed ancient documents and memorials, which had been handed down to them from former generations. Or, to put the matter in another form, since it is certainly possible that such materials existed, since it is admitted even by the most hypercritical scholars that at all events ancient ballads and sayings had come down from a distant antiquity, is there any justification for assuming that these writers were not able and desirous to act the part of faithful historians and chroniclers, so as to hand on to us, in the language and form of their own day, the recorded traditions of their nation?

The present bishop of Bristol, whose authority as a historian is well known, has drawn a most interesting parallel between the ancient Books of the Scriptures and our own Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. That Chronicle, which is an invaluable record of early English history from the first Saxon times in England

to about the year 1150, was first collected and brought into its present form by Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, about the year 900, and was continued under his successors. No doubt he brought the ancient records into a somewhat new form, and their style varied as time went forward; but thus collected, thus edited, thus perhaps varied in style, they are treated by all historians as a faithful record of the many centuries of our history to which they relate. Similarly with the Jewish records, with the Pentateuch, as well as with the later historical books, criticism is no doubt justified in its view that, in speaking of the Books of Moses, we are not to be supposed to imply that they were entirely written by him, any more than the Psalms of David are all to be ascribed to David, or the Proverbs of Solomon entirely to Solomon. It is a fair, and a very interesting, subject of critical enquiry how much of the Pentateuch can be directly ascribed to Moses himself, and how far it has been compiled from other documents. But that does not determine the question, which is the main question, whether those documents contained true history, and whether, in substance, the view which the Pentateuch, as a

whole, presents of the history of the people of Israel up to the time of the conquest of Canaan is a true history. That which the old view of the Jews, the traditional view of both Jews and Christians, asserted is, that it is true history. It asserted also, and it clings tenaciously to the belief, that the compilation was made under the superintending influence of the Spirit of God, Who, without superseding all the characteristics of human agency, guided the writers to the essence of the history, gave them the prophetic instinct which led them to trace and disentangle, with so sure a hand, the history of the Children of Abraham and Israel from the mass of the confused life around them; until Saint Matthew was also divinely guided to announce the fulfilment of the history of 2000 years by commencing his Gospel with the announcement, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Let it be added that every discovery of the last few years has either given greater probability to the traditional view or has removed difficulties from it, like the grand discovery of the antiquity of writing. I cannot but mention one. It has been con-

cluded from the discovery of the Book of the Law under Josiah that the Book of Deuteronomy, to which that description is supposed to refer, was therefore written about that time. But it was recently announced by Professor Naville that a record of Thothmes III., 1500 years B.C., has been discovered, showing that, during structural alterations in the Temple of Denderah, he had found in a brick wall the great Rule of the Temple, or in other words its Ceremonial Law ; so that there is a distinctly parallel case to the discovery of the Book of the Law of the Jewish Temple, in its reparation under Josiah ;¹ much in the same way, it may be supposed, as we, in the present day, place in the foundation stones of our buildings documents of contemporary date. The possibility is thus proved, by independent historical fact, that the Book of the Law found in Josiah's time was an ancient, and not a recent, book.

I have no hesitation, therefore, in offering

¹ See *The Discovery of the Book of the Law under King Josiah ; an Egyptian Interpretation of the Biblical Account*, by E. Naville, Hon. D.C.L., &c. ; translated by M. L. M'Clure, with an Introduction by Professor Sayce : S.P.C.K., 1911.

a broad and confident opposition on principle to the critical views which have been in favour of late; not from the slightest hostility to criticism in itself, but because I am deeply convinced that those views rest on a totally mistaken, and in the strict sense of the word, preposterous application of criticism. I doubt not that criticism will in the end render not less service to the understanding of the Old Testament than to that of the New, as in many respects it has already done, but a criticism which, in the phrase of Dillmann (one of the greatest of Old Testament critics), turns the whole Old Testament topsy-turvy: "Alles auf den Kopf stellt," is not to be regarded as an established hypothesis. Dillmann also said of an English book which directly opposed these theories, Professor Robertson's *Baird Lectures*, that it "hits the nail on the head," and until that contention is answered, the old belief holds its ground.

I must add that spiritual principles and truths of the most vital consequence are involved in the conflict between these two theories—that which is presented as the critical theory on the one side, and the

theory of the Bible on the other. The narrative of the Bible represents God Himself as the great Author and Inspirer of His own revelation, not leaving men gradually to find Him out, as they would discover principles of science, or of ethics, or of theology, but as Himself finding them out, entering personally into relations of covenant with them at the very outset of the revelation in the person of Abraham, and leading them on by successive words, prophecies, rebukes, deliverances, to know Him better, to trust and to follow Him. The other view represents men as struggling for centuries with crude thoughts of God, without any sure, clear, or authoritative revelation from Him. It is all the difference between a natural evolution and a positive supernatural education.

The language for instance, which is common under the new theory respecting the imperfect morality of the Old Testament misstates the question. There is, indeed, an imperfect morality in the men of the Old Testament, but there is nothing imperfect in God's messages to them, in His guidance of them, in His education of them. Under the old belief of the Church we see God from the first, with our first parents, with Noah, with

Abraham, with Moses, with the priests and the prophets, and we hear His voice in distinct, positive, definite words, appealing to their consciences, and, in the order and the method recorded and described, opening their minds and hearts and evoking their faith and love.¹ It was by those successive revelations, as described in the Bible, in that order, that Apostles like St Paul and St Peter, following our Lord Himself, realised the hand, the arm, and the voice of God. If they were wrong in their conceptions of the order of that revelation, their authority as spiritual teachers is dangerously, if not fatally, shaken. But I submit that we have abundant reason, in the best criticism and in the most striking discoveries of our day, for adhering firmly to the old belief, and for trusting the Bible's own account of the history of God's people;—for believing, in short, in the words of the psalm,—“In the covenant that He made with Abraham, and the oath that He sware unto Isaac, and appointed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting testament.”

¹ See Dr A. B. Davidson's *Old Testament Prophecy*, Lecture II., p. 20.

In this belief, an endeavour is made in the following lectures to enter into the real meaning of Prophecy, in the Old and New Testament, in accordance with the inspired teaching of the Scriptures; and I shall be thankful if they contribute in any degree to vindicate the ancient belief of the Jewish and Christian Church, and to show, in a memorable phrase, that "it is not after all so certain that there is nothing in it."

CANTERBURY, *December* 1910.

H. WACE.

I

THE PROPHEPIC CHARACTER OF THE JEWISH AND CHRIS- TIAN RELIGIONS

“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning ; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.”—ROM. xv. 4.

IT is specially instructive that one of the Collects of the Advent season is a prayer for the due use of the Holy Scriptures. Having regard to the Epistle for the same Sunday, it cannot be doubted that this is due to the fact that the season is pre-eminently marked by prophetic associations. It reminds us of the most important of all prophecies which still remain to be fulfilled—that of the second Advent of our Lord. There is not, perhaps, a greater instance of the essentially supernatural and miraculous character of the Christian revelation than the fact that one of the very corner-stones of our faith

respecting the future, which we reassert whenever we recite the Apostle's Creed, is a prophecy respecting an event wholly out of the range of our natural faculties, and of the most distinct and definite character. It is a prophecy that our Lord will return in glory and power to judge the quick and the dead. The Christian life depends no less on that prediction respecting the future, than upon the facts of our Lord's life when He was upon earth. He and His Apostles have assured us that He will so come again, in like manner as He was seen to go into heaven, in order to assert in a final judgment the truths and the laws He has given us for our guidance; and that Judgment may be regarded as the effective sanction of the Christian law. But this is no surmise of our natural faculties; no ordinary reasoning could suffice to give it validity, as a great truth on which our action must be founded. It is a simple prediction of plain matter of fact, resting solely upon the word and promise of our Lord Himself and His Apostles.

The case, as we are reminded throughout the Advent season, is precisely similar to that of our Lord's first coming. That

coming had similarly been predicted and looked forward to, though, from the nature of the case, with less definiteness than the second coming can be foreseen. But here also certain assurances had been given which were sufficiently plain in their broad outlines; and as these were exactly fulfilled in the first coming of our Lord, so are we encouraged to believe that the predictions of His second coming will be similarly fulfilled. Such is the practical argument of St Paul in the fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in assuring us that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." He is dealing with what was the great difficulty to the Jews of his time—namely, the admission of the Gentiles to all the privileges of the chosen people of God; and he is supporting himself and them, amidst the opposition and misunderstanding they had to encounter, by reminding them that this admission had been distinctly predicted in their Scriptures, and that the wonderful development of the kingdom of God which they were witnessing was thus, beyond all doubt, in harmony with the

Divine will and purpose. Without this evidence from previous prophecy, the difficulty of breaking through the inveterate prejudice of the Jews of the Apostle's time might, indeed, have been well-nigh insuperable; and accordingly almost every argument addressed by the Apostles to the Jews at the foundation of the Christian Church is based upon prophecy and prophetic history. The memorable argument of St Stephen, which formed the very basis of St Paul's subsequent thought, simply recounts those facts of past Jewish history and prophecy which bore upon the charge against him, with the view of showing that they involved the principles which he was proclaiming. The essence of the early Christian argument is thus an argument from prophecy, and it is upon the fulfilment of that prophecy that the Apostles took their stand in appealing to their own countrymen.

An argument which held this momentous place at the foundation of the Christian Church can never be otherwise than of the highest importance to us, and it is well to endeavour, from time to time, to refresh our apprehension of its overwhelming force. It may be of advantage at the outset to observe

that it is in great measure independent of discussions respecting the exact interpretation and applicability of particular texts. There is one fact which, taken by itself, is sufficient to establish and illustrate the prophetic character of the Old Testament, and which was the main element in the preaching of the Apostles. This is the undoubted fact, that when the Apostles preached to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, every Jew knew sufficiently what the word "Christ," or "Messiah," meant. The Apostles did not go to the Jews to tell them that our Lord had come to assume new functions of which they had no conception ; but that He had come in a character, and had assumed an office, of the nature of which they were well aware, and for the realisation of which they were looking forward with the utmost eagerness. Our Lord's position differs essentially, in this respect, from that of all other great religious leaders, such, for example, as the Buddha, or Mahomet. They created their own positions. The idea of the Buddha was initiated by Sakya Muni ; and although Mahomet's idea of his office was in some degree due to Jewish tradition, still, in its specific character, it is

the result of his own action. But the idea of the Messiah, with the conception of the Messianic office, existed, beyond all question, long before our Lord came; and its sole ultimate source was the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The origin of the idea is to be found nowhere else; but there, as a plain and broad matter of fact, it exists; and it had been consolidated into a great living ideal in the minds of men who derived their religious beliefs from the Old Testament, and from the Old Testament alone.

For the purpose of this aspect of the argument there is no necessity to enter into critical questions, as to the date of the various parts of Isaiah's prophecies, for example, or of the Book of Daniel. Two facts alone are sufficient to enable us to establish the prophetic character of this great conception — one, the fact of the existence of the whole Old Testament in at least the third century before Christ; so that translations of great parts of it were completed and in use among Jews in various parts of the ancient world at that date; the other, the fact of the expectation of the Messiah having been produced by it. That the Septuagint translation began to be pro-

duced in the third century and was completed in the second is beyond controversy ; and we have in our hands not less conclusive evidence of the interpretation which was placed by Jews, before the birth of our Lord, upon the general tenour of these sacred Scriptures. Out of them, long before His advent, had arisen a whole literature of Messianic expectations, and the very air of Jewish thought was full of anticipations of His coming.

This fact is so important that it is no wonder some rationalistic critics have endeavoured to dispute it. If it could be shown that the belief in a coming Messiah was an after-thought of the Christian Church, great suspicion would justly be thrown on the interpretation of the Messianic prophecies. It would be easy to urge that the meaning assigned to them by Christian divines is not one which would naturally have been suggested by them, but has been forced into them in the interests of the Christian argument. It is therefore deserving of particular notice that these attempts to dispute the existence, before the time of our Lord, of Messianic hopes and Messianic interpretations of prophecy are

rejected by the writer—himself sufficiently rationalistic in tendency—who is recognised among scholars of all schools as the greatest living authority on the circumstances of our Lord's time—I mean Dr Schürer, the author of the great work on the history of the Jewish people in the time of our Lord, of which the fourth edition was completed in 1909. He says (vol. ii., p. 589) that “in reality the Messianic idea had never entirely died out, at least not in its more general form, as the hope for a better future for the people. In any case, in the last centuries before Christ, and particularly in the time of Christ, it became again very active, as indeed is shown by the course of the Gospel history. Without Jesus doing anything for its revival, it appears as in full life among the people. Moreover, in the last centuries before Christ it appears, as a rule, not only in its general form as a hope for a better future for the people, but specifically as a hope for a Messianic King.” From the interesting historical sketch in which he justifies this statement it will be sufficient here to quote two references. He says (p. 593) that “the stream of Messianic prediction is poured forth in rich fullness in the

oldest Jewish Sibylline verses, which appeared about the year 140 B.C." But in the Psalter of Solomon, which he assigns to the time of Pompey (63-48 B.C.) he says (p. 597) that "the form of the Messianic King appears in fuller colours and in sharper outlines. These psalms are particularly instructive in one point—namely, that the author emphasises not only that God Himself is Israel's King, but also that the kingdom of the House of David will not cease before God. . . . He hopes that God will raise up a King out of David's House, who will reign over Israel, annihilate his enemies, and purify Jerusalem from the heathen. . . . Apparently what is expected by the author is not, in a general sense, God-fearing Kings from the House of David, but one unique King—the Messiah, endowed by God with wonderful powers, who is holy and pure from sin, whom God has made mighty and wise by the Holy Spirit, and who consequently will smite His enemies, not with external weapons, but with the word of His mouth."

This evidence affords a valuable confirmation, in the present day, of the fact that the appeal of the Apostles, as recorded in the

Acts of the Apostles, and of the Evangelists in their references to prophecy, is perfectly true to the ideas of their contemporaries. But the main consideration which arises upon such facts is that they appear to afford conclusive proof of the reality of Messianic prediction in the Old Testament. If the prophecies of the Old Testament were not Messianic, how came they to give rise, before the Messiah had come, to an expectation of His coming, and to a general apprehension of His office in its broad features? We may venture, in fact, to put the matter in this form—that our Lord came, not to create a new office, but to fill one which had been already created, and which was vacant. Thoughtful Jews looked forward to the coming of a perfect Prophet, Priest, and King, and the office of the first preachers of the Gospel was to show that our Lord's character answered, and more than answered, to these lineaments. In view of this broad fact, the general Messianic character of the Old Testament becomes independent of controversial details. One great central reality did, as a matter of fact, emerge, by the natural influence of the Old Testament Scriptures, and that reality is the great

character and office which our Lord claimed to fulfil.

This consideration becomes the more impressive when we bear in mind the continuous development of this conception. It does not depend upon a few specific passages, or even upon one or two authors, but is, so to say, the total result of a long and varied national literature. The Old Testament is the work of many different authors, who wrote in different ages and in different places. The lapse of time between Moses and Malachi is nearly a thousand years, or about the same period which separates us from Saxon times; and the books of the Bible arise gradually in the course of this long and varied succession of centuries. What an extraordinary thing it would seem to us if we had a national literature beginning with King Alfred, extending through Norman, Plantagenet, and Tudor times, all of which exhibited a general unity in the conception it presented of the destinies of our nation, and which pointed with more and more clearness to the appearance of a certain personage, with specific powers and offices, about our own time! But this, as is proved, not only by Christian, but by

Jewish testimony, is the case with the Scriptures. So the late Bishop of Durham, Dr Westcott, in a remarkable discussion, in his edition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, on the use of the Old Testament in that Epistle, observes (p. 480) that generally it may be said "that Christ and the Christian dispensation are regarded in it as the one end to which the Old Testament points, and in which it finds its complete accomplishment." That Epistle, as he shows, reviews with singular comprehensiveness the record of the revelation of the Old Testament, from Abraham to the later prophets, depicts by means of that record the personal Messiah with singular completeness of portraiture, and shows that every stage of the Old Testament history affords some anticipation of Him (p. 489). So when St Stephen begins his defence to the Jewish rulers, he goes back to the records of the patriarch Abraham, and traces through him, and through Moses, David, and the prophets, the thread of prediction, the prophecy of national destiny, to which his people clung. His argument would have had no weight had he not been appealing to promises which were fully admitted by those whom he addressed.

Their position, like his, was based on the conviction, which their history and their prophets had wrought in them, that from first to last they were the subjects of a special Divine dispensation, which assured them of a great office in the economy of the world, and of the advent of a great prophet like unto Moses, who would be their leader in the fulfilment of this destiny. Ancient patriarchal records, prophecies, psalms, national troubles and deliverances, all pointed to this great central promise, and were felt to possess by virtue of it an indissoluble unity. This, perhaps, is the greatest marvel of Old Testament prophecy. A single prediction, such as Isa. liii., is wonderful enough. But ten centuries of continuous prophecy, often unconscious — ten centuries of literature, springing from different hands in different countries and ages, all converging, as unquestionable matter of fact, in one central prediction, that of the Messiah—this is a prophecy which bespeaks the continuous action and inspiration of One, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Nor, although this great fact constitutes the chief point in the predictive character of

the Old Testament, must we forget that, apart again from controversial details, it is marked throughout by specific predictions of definite facts. Long before it could have occurred to any natural observation that the Jews were destined to play that momentous part in the subsequent history of the world, which we know now they have played and are still fulfilling, the sacred historian, in the Book of Genesis, picks out the thread of the Patriarchal history from the mass of the confused drama which the world presented; and from the time when Abraham appears in the narrative of that book, everything, throughout the Scriptures, is narrated in relation to, and in harmony with, the history of his race. The Jews might be crushed by the great Assyrian, or Babylonian, or Persian monarchies. It makes no difference to the point of view from which the prophetic historians survey the scene. They are inspired by an unwavering conviction that the stream of their national life is continuous and can never be broken, and that the destinies of all those mighty nations are of comparatively transient interest compared with their own. In spite of their apparent dissolution as a nation, we know how com-

pletely those hopes have been justified, and that while all the glory of man, by which they were surrounded at Nineveh or Babylon, has passed away like a dream, the Word of the Lord, spoken by apparently insignificant prophets, has endured for ever. Nor is it simply in the definite prediction of the importance of their race to the history of the world that prophecy is of this specific character. Through the darkest ages, when the seed of David had apparently disappeared, as the royal blood of many an ancient dynasty has been submerged in history, did the prophets persistently recall the old promises which had been made to David's house, and predict that the great king of their nation should be born of David's line. There can surely be no question that these definite and detailed promises have received in the coming of our Lord, and in the momentous office which, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, He holds towards the human race, a specific fulfilment of the most conspicuous and marvellous character. A great Ruler and Law-giver, Prophet, and Priest of the seed of David is now the most potent power in the history of the world, and all thoughtful eyes are

turned on His ever-growing influence and kingdom.

If, then, we find that the Scriptures have predicted, in long past ages, the main course and current of human affairs; that they have indicated where the centre of all human history would be found to lie; that they have designated, out of all the families of the earth, not merely the race, but the specific house, from which the King should arise who should be "a light to lighten the Gentiles"; if they have thus in the past been, in the words of St Peter, "as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts," what comfort and patience ought we not to derive from them in their assurances respecting those blessed realities to which they point us in the future! If St Paul, in the difficulties of his time, when the fulfilment of the promises made to his people was only dawning on his vision, could base his hope upon those Scriptures, what trust and what assurance ought we not to derive from them in our spiritual life! With what reverence ought not all their intimations respecting the future, as well as the past and the present, to be received; and with what

thankfulness should we not accept their guidance respecting our duties here and our destinies hereafter! In particular, what "comfort and patience" ought we not to learn from them with respect to those solemn and blessed realities which are associated with the promise of our Lord's second coming! We should surely be encouraged to live with the deepest confidence and hope in the prospect of His appearing hereafter as our Lord and Saviour, and at the same time "to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear," in the belief that He will then appear also as our Judge. In this faith in His prophetic word, we shall strive so to abide in Him, "that when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

II

THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

“He said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken : the God of Glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he dwelt in Mesopotamia.”—ACTS vii. 2.

THE speech of St Stephen is one of the most momentous documents in the Scriptures of the New Testament and in the early history of the Church. It was spoken by him at the time when the full scope of the Gospel was about to be realised, and when the Church was, consequently, on the point of taking a new departure ; and it was delivered in circumstances of peculiar solemnity and authority. The fact was beginning to be clearly recognised that the Gospel was independent of the Mosaic ordinances and ritual. Stephen's enemies understood him to say that “Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which

Moses delivered unto us." How much truth there was in that charge St Stephen was called upon to explain and to justify, and his endeavour to do so cost him his life. His martyrdom, at the close of his speech, was witnessed by St Paul, at whose feet the witnesses, by whom he was stoned, laid down their clothes ; and there can be no reasonable doubt that in the account of the speech and of the scene, which we have from the pen of St Luke, we have the very reminiscences of St Paul himself. We are specially assured of the supernatural spirit in which St Stephen spoke. At the commencement of his speech : "All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel," and at its conclusion : "Being full of the Holy Ghost, he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." The speech, therefore, must be taken as an expression, not only of the highest Christian thought, but of inspired Christian thought, at this crisis of the history of the Church, and as stamped, in a special manner, with the sanction of the Saviour Himself. No wonder that it became the seed from which the whole thought of St

Paul started, and that it thus proved to be the point of departure of Gentile Christianity.

Now, apart from the particular question then at issue, the general character of the argument in such a speech cannot but be of profound instruction. We see there what were the kind of arguments on which an inspired man relied when he had to justify, before representatives of the Old Law, the cardinal principles of the New Dispensation. We may observe, in the first place, and in passing, as a matter of great interest in relation to current controversies respecting the Old Testament, that speaking on the verge of heaven, and with the light of it shining upon his brow, St Stephen builds his whole case on the substantial truth of that account of the history of the Jews which is handed down to us in the historical books of the Old Testament. There may be one or two variations in detail, but the speech records the main facts in the story of Abraham and the Patriarchs, the bondage in Egypt and the deliverance, the giving of the Law by Moses, the entrance under Joshua into Canaan, and the establishment of the kingdom and the temple under David and Solomon, and treats them as primary

facts in determining the will of God and the duty of the Jews. In this primitive and inspired Christian argument, therefore, the recorded facts of Jewish history are treated as bound up inseparably with the truth of the Gospel, and any view of that history, and of the records of that history, which would undermine those facts would, at the same time, cut the ground from under St Stephen's argument.

But what I am more immediately concerned to observe, for the present purpose, is that the speech is based, not only upon the recognition of the truth of the received facts of Jewish history, but, still more, upon the truth that that history had been foretold by prophecy, and had been directed in accordance with that prophecy. The corner-stone of Jewish history, according to St Stephen, was a prophecy, and a very remarkable one. "The God of Glory," he says, "appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him: Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and dwelt in Charran; and from thence, when

his father was dead, God removed him into this land wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it—no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.” Then came a further prophecy—that this seed should be in bondage in a strange land 400 years. St Stephen goes on to relate how this promise was fulfilled, especially through Moses, and how the kingdom was at last established under David, and a temple was built by Solomon, which God condescended to accept as His abode. But St Stephen observes that, at the very time when these old prophecies were thus fulfilled, a new prophecy pointed forward to something greater and larger. It was Moses himself who said unto the children of Israel : “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me ;” and at the very dedication of Solomon’s temple, the King, in his grand prayer, acknowledged the truth that “heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee ; how much less this house that I have builded,” in accordance with the words which St Stephen quotes from Isaiah : “Heaven

is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me, saith the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?" As the prophecy, accordingly, had pointed forward from Abraham for hundreds of years, through the bondage in Egypt to the settlement of his seed in Canaan, and to the establishment of God's worship there, so through the mouths of Moses, David, and Solomon, by whom those prophecies had at last been realised, did it again point forward to the appearance of a greater prophet, and to the recognition of the truth that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

The cardinal principle, therefore, on which St Stephen rests his case is that, from the commencement of their history and at its great crises, the Jews had been granted prophetic indications of the Divine Will for the future, which were sufficient for their guidance if they had been received honestly and without self-will. It was due to persistent obstinacy and malice that those prophecies were rejected, either in the first instance or in the result. "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did

so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers." The severity of the censure thus passed on the Jews is a measure of the distinctness and the authority of the prophecies which they thus rejected. It needed, according to St Stephen, no extraordinary subtlety, but only honest and good hearts, for the Jews to have seen, in the word of prophecy, an adequate assurance of the Divine Will as the facts foretold came to be realised.

Now, this inspired argument of St Stephen involves the principle, that the truth of Christianity can be evidenced from the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments; and in illustrating that truth we have but to vindicate St Stephen's argument, and to mark its application to other points besides those which were immediately within his survey. But it will be found to be of great importance, in the first instance, to realise distinctly the view of the nature and office of prophecy which is thus exhibited to us. The reality and the momentous nature of prophecy are sufficiently established by the

fact that our religion, as was well expressed by the late Dr Leathes in his Bampton Lectures, is "The religion of the Christ"—the religion, that is, of One who was, beyond all question, expected before He came, and the idea of whose office was deeply fixed in the mind of the whole nation of the Jews by the Old Testament Scriptures; though, when its spiritual conditions were really set before their eyes, they revolted from them. But the full force of prophecy, even in this cardinal instance—its function, and, if I may so say, its reasonableness—will be better understood if we contemplate its operation as a whole under the principle suggested and authorised by St Stephen, and if we regard it, not merely as pointing forward to one great event and serving one particular use, but as an essential and organic part of the Divine method of revelation, and of the providential government and guidance of God's people.

There has been a disposition of late to reproach Christian theologians of a former school with regarding prophecies as isolated miracles, proving a revelation by the mere manifestation of a supernatural marvel; and in the recoil from the supposed narrowness

of this view of the office of prophecy there has been a disposition to concentrate attention, almost wholly, upon the profound religious and moral instruction, or, rather, revelation, which the books of the greater prophets contain. Now, it is a misfortune, perhaps, of the present day that men find it more and more difficult to read what their predecessors have written; but in order to vindicate the older theology from any charge of narrowness of this kind, it is only necessary to refer to a once famous volume of Warburton lectures preached some seventy years ago by the Rev. John Davison. It is a volume illuminated by the best thoughts of the ancient Fathers, but affording an independent and most striking review of the whole range of Old Testament prophecy. There are few books equally instructive to an earnest student of the Scriptures; and though it now requires to be supplemented, or supported, on various points, in consequence of the discussions of the last fifty years on the authenticity and interpretation of the Scriptures, the main facts elucidated by the author afford an indispensable foundation for an adequate discussion of this subject.

Now, this authoritative writer commences

by noticing that the prophetic volume really distinguishes itself into two parts, which may be called the moral, or doctrinal, and the predictive. "Prophecy," he says,¹ "is not a mere series of predictions. Far from it. It abounds in matter of another kind . . . the most frequent subjects of the prophets are the laws of God, His supreme dominion and universal providence, the majesty of His nature, His spiritual being, and His holiness, together with the obligations of obedience to Him . . . and of justice and mercy to man. These original principles of piety and morals overspread the pages of the Book of Prophecy." But after an ample recognition of this vital part of the work of the prophets, we are reminded that the direct and proper evidence of the inspired origin of prophecy consists in the series and fulfilment of its predictions: "By which medium it is that prophecy bears its most emphatic testimony to the truth of the Jewish and Christian religions" (p. 68). But that upon which the author chiefly lays stress is the fact that Scriptural prophecy offers "a continuous and connected series of predictions." "It is not," he observes, "a collection of insulated predic-

¹ *Discourses on Prophecy*, 5th ed., 1845.

tions, but it is, in several parts, a connected order of predictive revelation carried on under distinct branches " (p. 69). As it thus embraces "not merely detached events, but a series and combination of them, the proof of a Divine foreknowledge dictating the whole will be the more conclusive." Thus, in the view of the older expositors of prophecy, in accordance with the spirit of St Stephen's defence, its primary value consists, not in the bare fact of its affording a manifestation of miraculous power or knowledge, but in its exhibiting manifestations of Divine prescience and Divine providence throughout the whole of a long and mysterious course of history, and being adapted to the exigencies of each successive period of that history.

It is notorious that some modern criticism professes to invalidate many of the documents and facts on which this ancient view of prophecy—a view as ancient, we have seen, as the first inspired utterances of Christian teachers after the Ascension—is based, and to its pretensions in this respect attention must be paid in the proper place. But let us be content for the present to have before us simply the case, so to say, of

Scripture prophecy, as generally stated by such a writer as I am quoting, in accordance with the best traditions of the Christian Church. That case is this—that from the first dawn, under Abraham, of that great dispensation of things which led up to the coming of our Lord and the establishment of the Christian Church, and which will be brought to a consummation at his Second Coming, the predictive voice of prophecy was heard at every considerable step in the development, giving such a degree of light on the future as was needed, in order that men might have sufficient encouragement for their faith in the particular duty or trial which was laid upon them; so that it is exactly described in St Peter's exhortation: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in your hearts."

First, in the case of Abraham, in order that he may have faith "to sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange country," he is given an assurance which embraces the twofold contents of all subsequent prophecy, temporal and spiritual—That his descendants should

inherit the land of Canaan ; and that in his seed should all nations of the earth be blessed. Beyond this he was only informed that his descendants would undergo a servitude of 400 years ; but, in the faith of these two promises, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Next, on the eve of Jacob's entry into Egypt, a vision is vouchsafed him, by which he is assured that his going there was under God's direction, and that he and his seed would be brought up again. Next, at Jacob's own death, when his descendants are about to enter on a long period of humiliation, he is inspired to give a prophetic sketch of their future prerogatives as distinct tribes, and they are thus assured of a special destiny being reserved for them all ; while at this stage, whatever interpretation may be given to a much-disputed text, it is at least clear that a special distinction is assigned to the tribe of Judah.

Prophecy then ceases until the moment arrives for Moses to come forward to deliver the people from Egypt. It is his mission to revive the old prophecies made to Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob, but to attach the permanent enjoyment of them to the faithful obedience to the Law which he is commissioned to declare. He leaves the people on the border of the promised land with a great destiny before them, and, at the same time, with a heavy charge and responsibility—the charge and responsibility of a Law, solemnly revealed by God, to be their guide and their protection throughout the temptations of their national career. At this time, accordingly, he is represented in the Book of Deuteronomy as endorsing that Law by a prophetic revelation of the blessings which would follow the people if they obeyed it, on the one hand, and of the punishments which would fall upon them if they disobeyed it—punishments which have, at all events, been fulfilled to the letter in the subsequent history of the people. About the same time, in the prophecies of Balaam—delivered, as they were, on the verge of the promised land—a vision is opened, which was undoubtedly cherished among them, of the rise of a Star out of Jacob, and of a sceptre out of Israel, and of the wide influence which was designed for them. With these prophecies the children of Israel settled in the promised land—prophecies

sufficient to assure them that they had been under the Divine guidance hitherto, and that that guiding hand was still over them, expecting their continued obedience, and opening a further destiny before them if they obeyed it.

After this, predictive prophecy is again silent for the 400 years previous to the time of Samuel, and this silence, as Mr Davison points out, corresponds to the fact that no new turn or prospect in their history was opened during that period. There was no change or movement in their course, and, consequently, no special Divine voice was required. But, at the time of Samuel that great change in their condition begins, which is marked by the establishment of the kingdom, and their subsequent coming into connection with the increasing movements and consolidations of the other kingdoms around them. The 500 years which follow Samuel are the years in which the nation is brought to its fullest development, and put to its great trial in its relations with the powerful monarchies, the seductive religions, and the corrupting civilisations around it. At this point, accordingly, to meet these emergencies, the predictive prophet reappears, and his functions attain their greatest height.

Every step and stage in the drama is attended by Divine voices, which, in the first place, mark out sufficiently the course immediately designed by the Divine Will, and, in the second place, indicate more and more clearly the ultimate destiny towards which everything is being directed. First of all, it is laid down as a fixed point in the subsequent development that David's house will be the permanent centre for the nation, occupying the throne provided his descendants are faithful, but in any case the centre of God's promises to the people. Next, the temple on Mount Zion is marked out as the local centre of God's providence. "Now," it was said, "have I hallowed this house, to put my Name there for ever, and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually." Accordingly, for the next 1000 years—until the Son of David was finally cast out from the Temple of Jerusalem by the malice of its priests—around that one spot of earth did the development of the Divine revelation turn; but even amidst the glorious scene of the dedication of the temple, a clear and distinct foresight of its ultimate doom is impressed upon the vision of Solomon.

From this point, as we pass through the subsequent disturbed history, it is unnecessary to recall in detail how every event—the rebellion, for instance, of Rehoboam; the successive disasters of the kingdom of Israel; the destruction of the house of Ahab; the final overthrow of Samaria, and the dispersion of the ten tribes—are all announced in solemn warnings by a succession of prophets, from Ahijah to Isaiah. Kings and people were warned beforehand of the consequences of their conduct, and those consequences were definitely, and not merely generally, predicted. In particular, the restoration of Judah, as distinct from the entire destruction which was to be the fate of Israel, is distinctly marked. In short, it does not seem too much to say, “that there was no one considerable ordinance or appointment of God under the first dispensation”—neither the gift of Canaan, nor the Mosaic Covenant, nor the Mosaic worship, nor the temporal kingdom of David, nor the Temple—which was permitted to pass away without definite prophecy (p. 224); and, further, that between the commencement of the monarchy and the return of the people from the

Babylonian captivity, there is no known event of any magnitude, by which they were affected as a people, which was not announced by some prophetic warning.

Finally, as the time approaches when the kingdom of Judah, no less than that of Israel, is to be overthrown, and the promises of God to His people are for a time to receive, to human appearance, a complete defeat, prophecy, which from the time of David and Solomon had commenced to point, with increasing clearness, to a Diviner kingdom and a more perfect temple, concentrates its light more and more on that great spiritual future; and as the temporal hopes of the nation are obscured, the spiritual glories of the Gospel, which were to arise upon their ruins, become more and more clearly revealed. In other words, it is at the moment when the promises of the first dispensation are visibly fading, and when the faith of those who believed in the promises given to Abraham and David must have been strained almost beyond endurance, that the words of evangelistic comfort begin to occupy almost the whole of the prophetic voice, and the vision is more and more clearly seen of those last days when "many

peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Then, too, amidst the suffering of the people, was seen the vision of that Great Sufferer who should bear their sins, and by whom their stripes should be healed. Finally, after the return from the Captivity, prophecy points forward to the return of the Lord to His temple; it predicts that then would be the great and dreadful day of the Lord—as it proved, indeed, to the Jews of our Lord's time—and that it would be preceded by the advent of one who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah; and thus, in the striking expression of Mr Davison, "resigning its charge to the personal precursor of Christ, Old Testament prophecy expired with the Gospel upon its tongue" (p. 347). Such is the living and original conception of the nature and office of ancient prophecy, as believed by the Church, and urged by ancient interpreters.

Now let it be asked whether this be not a very different conception of the nature and

office of predictive prophecy from the narrow notion of it, as of a set of fragmentary marvels, which has been sometimes erroneously attributed to ancient interpreters. In a subsequent lecture an endeavour will be made to illustrate more fully its importance as a proof and test of Divine revelation. But meanwhile, let us contemplate for a moment the grand spectacle which is presented to us by such a review. Let us conceive ourselves listening across a space of nearly 2000 years, from Abraham onward, to the Divine voice, heard behind the vast and mysterious scene of history, uttering the end from the beginning, pronouncing few, but pregnant, words of command and of warning to its chosen ministers at the great crises of their own destiny, or the destiny of their nation, or the destiny of the world; declaring to them that the way in which they were called upon to walk, though often dark and mysterious, was tending towards the vindication of righteousness, and the establishment of truth and justice on the earth; bidding them watch with their own eyes how those promises of righteousness were fulfilled, and so encouraging or warning them in every great struggle

and every moment of temptation. The historian, if gifted with a more than human insight, might possibly, from the mere facts themselves, trace backward the evidences of a Divine hand ruling this obscure drama ; but the devout student of the Scriptures is privileged in prophecy to hear the Divine Ruler issuing His commands, and thus to follow the history from within and from above, as it is being made. Much in the same manner may the natural philosopher laboriously trace back the stages of the Divine workmanship in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, while the Christian student is admitted to the very vision of the scene when the morning stars sang together, and hears simultaneously the utterance of the Divine voice and its fulfilment—"God said, Let there be light ; and there was light."

III

THE VALUE OF PROPHECY AS AN EVIDENCE OF REVELATION

“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.”—ST JOHN, xiv. 29.

THE final discourses of our Lord to His disciples afford a remarkable illustration of the practical value of prophecy as an evidence of revelation. Three times in these discourses does He impress on them the fact that He was warning them beforehand of what was about to come to pass, in order that, when it had come to pass, they might believe. The first instance is when He is referring to His approaching betrayal. “The Scripture,” He said, “will be fulfilled: he that eateth bread with Me, hath lifted up his heel against Me. Now, I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He.” The second instance is in reference to His approaching departure.

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto you. . . . And now,” He adds, “I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.” The third follows in the same discourse, when He is warning His disciples of the persecution which awaited them. “These things,” He said, “will they do unto you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things have I told you, that, when the time is come, ye may remember that I told you of them.” The Apostles were about to witness and to experience circumstances of the strangest and most painful nature. They were to see their Master, whom they believed in as the Christ of God, betrayed by one of themselves, and delivered over to a shameful death; and though He rose again and ascended to heaven in glory, yet when they came forward to proclaim His exaltation, they would be excommunicated by the leaders of their people, and whosoever killed them would think that he did God service. Their hopes and their convictions were thus to undergo a succession of the most grievous disappointments, and the most severe strain would be put upon their faith. What con-

siderations were to sustain them under it? Our Lord gives them various assurances of comfort; but the one which He thus reiterates three times over must have been intended by Him to be of special importance. This was, that nothing would happen to Himself or to them which He had not foretold. They might, therefore, be assured that it was compatible with other truths which He proclaimed to them, and particularly with their belief that He was their Divine Lord and Master. They would have good reason to feel that the trials which befell them, however distressing, were part of a dispensation foreseen and intended by their Master, and their confidence in Him and His guidance ought thus to be the more firmly established.

In these simple words our Lord has supplied the key to the question of the office and use of prophecy. In the two previous lectures the cardinal facts of prophecy and its general nature have been considered. It has been shown how, as a matter of fact, long before our Lord's appearance, it had pointed to the coming of a Person who should fulfil towards mankind the offices which He came to discharge, and also that it had not merely

pointed forward to this supreme fact, but that its voice had accompanied every step in the history of the people of Israel, from the time when Abraham was called to leave his Father's house, to the time when Malachi uttered the concluding predictions of the old dispensation. According to the conviction of the Jews of our Lord's day, as illustrated in St Stephen's speech, the whole life of the Jewish people depended on the truth that the God of glory had from time to time appeared to their fathers, declaring to them at once their destiny and their duty; and upon those revelations of prophecy St Stephen rested his belief in the truth he proclaimed, that our Lord had established a spiritual worship, which was independent of the local and temporary ordinances of the Jewish sanctuary. This was the settled belief of the Jews of our Lord's day, alike of St Stephen and the Apostles on the one hand, and of those who rejected their message on the other. The only point in dispute between them was as to the application of those prophecies, not as to their reality.

But let us next consider what is the use which such prophecies serve in the proof of

our religion. That they are of momentous importance to it would seem evident from the place which they fill in the sacred volume. Prophecy occupies a larger space there than miracles—it should rather be said than other miracles, for prophecy itself is a miracle, and a standing miracle. But, besides the great place which the books of the prophets hold in the records of the Divine revelation, it is a very striking fact, as Paley has observed, that in the preaching of the Apostles, as recorded in the book of their Acts and in their Epistles, much less stress is laid upon the miracles wrought by our Lord than upon the fulfilment of prophecy in His life, death, and resurrection. The miracles are referred to in passing as things well known. The Jews are reminded that our Lord went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed with the devil. But the main point on which an Apostle like St Peter lays stress is that “to Him give all the prophets witness.”

This fact suggests the main argument in a series of lectures on this subject, which are not less instructive than those of Mr Davison — the “*Propædeia Prophetica*” of Dr Lyall, sometime

Dean of Canterbury. He says¹ that Paley has correctly observed "that the Apostles must have taken for granted that the miracles ascribed to Christ were known to all their hearers; but he does not add that the medium of proof by which they endeavoured to demonstrate that those miracles had God for their author was altogether drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament" (p. 157). "The invariable purport of all their arguments, and which they kept always in view, was to prove that the Gospel which they preached was the subject of the *prophecies* with which the Jewish Scriptures were filled, and, so far as appears, it was only this which the Jews denied." He adds that "the early fathers of the Church do not found the controversy upon the miracles of Christ any more than do the writers of the New Testament. Both of them take these wonderful *facts* for granted, but, for the *explanation* of them, recourse is had only to the Old Testament" (p. 158). Take the leading fathers of the two or three centuries after the death of our

¹ The references are to the edition of the "Propaedeia Prophetica," published in 1885 by the Rev. G. C. Pearson, M.A., Honorary Canon of Canterbury.

Lord, and he observes with truth that, "while all of them, either directly or by implication, attribute their own conversion to the study of the Old Testament, not one—if we except Arnobius—appeals to the miracles as a proof of Christ's Divine authority" (p. 159). In short, the early apologists of Christianity, though alluding to the miracles of Christ as substantiating their belief, yet vindicate their belief itself, not on this ground, but on the fulfilment of the Hebrew prophecies. It was not, in other words, only the performance by our Lord of wonderful works, but the correspondence of those works, and of the claims by which they were accompanied, with the continuous series of prophecies throughout the course of Jewish history, which conclusively evidenced His Divine character and authority.

In illustration of this view of the importance of prophecy, it may be observed, in the first instance, that the simplest prophecies, if fulfilled, afford an unquestionable revelation more direct and more intelligible than any other miracles. Abraham, for instance, according to the Book of Genesis, received the promise that a son should be born to

himself and Sarah beyond the ordinary course of nature, and this promise was fulfilled. But its fulfilment at once afforded Abraham an assurance that he was in communion with a supernatural Being. Who that Being was, what was His character and will, he would learn by other communications, but the one fulfilled prophecy assured him that a Being had spoken to him in whose hands were the springs of his life, who compassed his path and his lying down, and who was acquainted with all his ways. The birth of Isaac, however marvellous or miraculous, if occurring without any explanation and standing by itself, would simply have told him that he was in contact with some mysterious force beyond the range of ordinary experience; but it would not of itself have revealed to him either the nature of the force or the character of his relation to it. But when it occurred in accordance with the promise which had been made to him, it at once revealed to him the fact that his life and his destiny were subject to the knowledge and control of the Being by whom that promise was made. As a general rule, in fact, it is not the miracle by itself, but the miracle combined with the command,

or the prediction, that it should occur, which constitutes the revelation. In the two combined we witness, not merely a supernatural manifestation, but the manifestation of a supernatural and intelligent will, and it is this which constitutes the essence of a religious revelation.

It was, we may observe, a mode of revelation which was peculiarly appropriate, and even necessary, to the foundation of religious life and faith in the world. It is possible in the present day, from our intimate acquaintance with Nature, for very powerful arguments to be constructed on a basis of purely natural theology to convince us that the world was made, and is sustained, by a Being of supreme wisdom and goodness. But in the early days of the religious history of mankind such arguments were scarcely possible; and the statement in the Epistle to the Hebrews was peculiarly true, that by faith it was believed that the worlds were framed by the word of God. But nothing could contribute more to produce that faith than that men should have tangible evidence that the course of their own lives and the destinies of their nation were foreknown to, and directed by, a living Being who, in all

His communications to them, spoke as the God of all righteousness as well as of all knowledge. A child in a distant country may never have seen its father; but if it receives letters from him from time to time, directing it what to do and telling it what provision will be made for it, and if the promises thus held out to it are fulfilled, it can have no doubt of its being under its father's guidance and control. The case of the Jews, from Abraham downwards, is closely parallel. They were under divine education, and they received communications from time to time telling them what was the destiny immediately intended for them, and imposing certain duties on them; and when they found those destinies realised—when, according to the promise, they were brought into Egypt; when according to the promise, they were brought out of Egypt; when, according to the promise, they were settled in Canaan; when the course of their history there was accompanied by successive predictions, which were successively fulfilled—there could be no doubt to the thoughtful Jews, and there can be no reasonable doubt to ourselves if we believe these facts, that a living God was among them, governing and directing them.

It was, above all things, the prophecy that revealed Him. It was this which revealed the design, the will, the wisdom, and the righteousness which were at work among them, and assured them that they were not in contact with blind forces, or with unknown gods, but with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It may be worth considering whether this does not afford, in great measure, an explanation of one of the most striking circumstances in the history of the Jews—the alteration in their religious character after the exile. Until the time of the exile they had been perpetually falling back into idolatry, but when they returned from the exile every trace of this tendency seems to have disappeared. They have become a nation of unbending believers in one God, the God of their fathers; and their danger lies no longer in a temptation to worship other gods, or to be false to their law, but in a contrary tendency, to exalt their belief and their obedience to the law into a new idolatry. Is it unnatural to suppose that the exile had been to them, as the fulfilment of prophecy, the final proof that the God of whom their prophets had spoken to them was the one

living God, and that their whole welfare depended, as had always been proclaimed to them, on obedience to His will and His law? The predictions of the exile, first of Israel and then of Judah, were the culminating prophecies in respect to ancient Jewish history; and their fulfilment, in all the bitterness of the terrible reality, was at least well fitted to set the seal upon all previous prophecies, and to stamp upon the mind of the Jew those truths respecting the nature and the will of the God of his fathers which a less severe discipline had been insufficient to teach him. At every turn of Jewish history the prophetic voice is heard bespeaking the loving guidance and will of God. Those voices, together with their fulfilment, afford the revelation of a living being as distinctly and unmistakably as any distant person not seen by ourselves—to take our Lord's image, as a king in a far country—is revealed by his commands and promises when we see them acted up to and fulfilled. To the Jews after the exile, to the Jews of our Lord's day, this revelation was complete; and nothing was so certain to them as that, at sundry times and in divers manners, God had spoken unto their fathers by the prophets, and that

they owed to Him and to His law their absolute allegiance and obedience.

Now, these considerations will further explain the reason why, as we have seen, the arguments of the Apostles are so predominantly concerned with the evidence of prophecy. It was their mission to proclaim a new dispensation, which would, in great measure, supersede the old. The truth was realised more and more by themselves and by others that, in accordance with the charge against Stephen, Jesus of Nazareth would change the customs which Moses, and God through Moses, had delivered to the Jews. Now, it may be admitted that it would have been possible for some stupendous manifestation to have authenticated beyond all doubt this assertion of the close and supersession of a Divine dispensation. It might even be argued that the miracles, the moral authority, and the resurrection of our Lord, did constitute such a manifestation, and were of themselves sufficient warrant for the abrogation of the Mosaic ordinances. That, indeed, would be a stronger argument to the Gentile than to the Jew, whose whole soul was steeped in the belief of the Divine character of those ordinances. But, at all events, it will be

seen that it adds enormously to the force of the works and words of our Lord if it can be shown that those works and words, and the revolution of religious practice which He and His Apostles proclaimed, were themselves not only not contrary to the old law and to the existing dispensation, but actually in harmony with them, and predicted by them as much and as distinctly as the previous revolutions in Jewish history from first to last. If this were so, then, though the Gospel might change the customs which God through Moses had delivered to the Jews, it was not the subversion of them, but the fulfilment of them. It put the coping-stone upon the great temple of Divine revelation, and revealed a perfect harmony from first to last in the Divine will and government. The Jew, after all, was right in demanding some momentous evidence before he consented to the supersession of the law, of which the Divine origin and authority had been stamped upon his mind by so terrible an experience; and it was at least a most merciful, if not a necessary, dispensation that that evidence should be afforded by the very prophecies to which he clung. If those prophecies and that law themselves predicted

the Gospel, and foretold the life, the death, and the resurrection of the Saviour, with the spiritual dominion which He was to establish, then the Divine character of the new dispensation was one with that of the old, the purposes and the will of God were unchanged, and the preaching of the Apostles was authenticated by the very Divine oracles to which the Jews appealed.

To quote the striking illustration of Dean Lyall (pp. 171-173), the case may be compared to that of an ambassador, who comes from a king in a far country bringing a communication to his subjects, which seems at first of so perplexing and unwelcome a character that they are inclined to doubt his credentials. But suppose, to quote an expression both of Isaiah and Daniel, a sealed document was in the possession of the people, which was not to be opened until such an ambassador arrived, and suppose that on its being opened and read it was found to substantiate the ambassador's credentials, no doubt of his authority would then remain. Prophecy was in the position of that sealed document—or perhaps, we may say, of a document in cipher—which could not be understood until the key was supplied. It

at once afforded the Apostles an adequate guarantee that, as the ambassadors of Christ, they were also the ambassadors of the God of their fathers and of the prophets ; and that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had sent them, no less than He had sent Moses formerly, with a commission from Himself.

In a word, prophecy, if not the only possible proof, is at least the best and most effective proof that the Christian revelation comes from that one living God who has manifested Himself to us by a continuous series of revelations from the early patriarchal ages down to the time of our Lord and of His Apostles. These things were told us before they came to pass, that when they did come to pass we might believe. Let me further point out that even if, as some writers, like Paley, seem to have thought, the evidence of prophecy be in some respects of less crucial importance to ourselves than it was to the Jews of our Lord's day or to those who lived in the infancy of revelation, yet it still affords a testimony to the primary and cardinal truths of revelation which is of supreme value. What is there for which men ask more

anxiously at the present day than for evidence of the presence, and of the action in the course of life, of a living and personal God? Some philosophers and men of science would relegate us to the bare acknowledgment of some supreme but unknown energy from which all things have ultimately proceeded; but they allege that there is no proof of its direct interposition and control in the course of the world of nature, still less in that of life and history. We are tempted, under the influence of this philosophy, to acknowledge a God as a hypothesis, an ultimate law, but to lose the apprehension that He is the Lord our God, and that we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. But if the facts of prophecy are true, they afford us the most direct and positive evidence of this cardinal truth. We hear in them the voice of a Being who has beset us behind and before and laid His hand upon us; who has declared beforehand, in all the great crises of the central history of our race, the end to which that history was tending, and the purpose by which it was governed. You listen to the declaration, before the event, of a deliberate and a righteous design in the history of the world, pointing forward

from patriarchal ages to the Christian dispensation under which we now live.

There has been much dispute whether the mere fact of the adaptation of the parts of a structure to one end constitutes an adequate proof of its being the product of deliberate design ; but if you add to such an adaptation the fact that the end was announced at the very commencement of the adaptation, and that each advance in the growth or development of the structure was similarly announced, and the explanation of its purpose given beforehand, there can then surely remain no reasonable doubt that the structure is the work of deliberate wisdom, and that we are in communion with the mind and will of the designer. The voice of such prophecy as that of the Scriptures is the unmistakable voice of the living Being, by whom the life and the history which it predicts are controlled, and it forces us to recognise, not merely the existence of God, but His living presence and action. Let me only add that it gives us an invaluable assurance that we ourselves in our daily lives are similarly in the presence and under the guidance of that living God. It affords us a sure and solid ground for our faith in the conviction of the

Psalmist : “ Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in Thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned when as yet there was none of them.” It must enable us to exclaim with him : “ Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there : if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.”

IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE

“Thy kingdom come.”—MATT. vi. 10.

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—MATT. iv. 17.

IN this and the succeeding lectures it is proposed to trace the development of prophecy from the seed sown in patriarchal times until it becomes the great tree under whose wide-spreading branches the Christian Church found its earliest shelter, and still finds an abiding protection. Such an attempt must of course assume the general historical trustworthiness of those early books of the Bible in which the truths of Jewish and Christian belief, and particularly of Jewish and Christian prophecy, are so deeply fixed; and this trustworthiness may in turn derive confirmation from the veri-

similitude of that development. Now, it will be advantageous in entering on this consideration of the course of prophetic development, to endeavour to take at the outset a general view of the manner in which the central idea and hope of all Jewish prophecy—that of the Messiah—was gradually aroused in the minds of the people of Israel. It appealed to the deepest and most familiar conception of our Lord's hearers, and we must bear this conception in mind if we would understand His position.

It is a trite observation that the Jews at our Lord's day were eagerly expecting the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom; but the full depth and import of this Messianic expectation is liable to be obscured, at least to some minds, by the undue importance attached to the controversial interpretation of some Messianic texts, and its intensely moral and practical bearing may thus be lost sight of. To appreciate it duly, it is to be remembered that the whole of Jewish history starts from a promise, and looks forward to a great hope. Independently of all questions relating to the date of particular parts of the Old Testament, it remains a fact that the

time cannot be shown in the history of the Jews when they did not look back to Abraham, and to the promises connected with his name, as the germ of all their life and the prophecy of its destiny. That in his seed all nations should be blessed—this throughout, was the corner-stone of Jewish consciousness. Their God is, from the first, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not merely in the sense that He had been the God of those patriarchs, but in the sense that His character and His purposes were those which He had revealed to them, and that His truth was bound up with the fulfilment of the hopes in which they had lived and died. The experience of the Jews is in this respect unique. Other nations have had great hopes in the future and have indulged in visions of a great destiny, at least for a time. But no other nation had its whole existence and its whole career based upon a specific promise, which enabled and compelled it to look forward to a definite destiny. How that destiny was to be fulfilled remained, indeed, mysterious to the last, and the mystery is still being gradually unveiled before our eyes. But that the promise subsisted as an immovable corner-stone, and

that the destiny would be realised, no thoughtful Jew for a moment doubted.

Their history, however, consists of the gradual unveiling to them of the meaning of this primary promise and prophecy. It is a prolonged answer to the question how the seed of Abraham were to be blessed, and how all nations of the earth were to be blessed in them. In patriarchal days no other blessing is discernible than that of a peaceful pastoral existence, endued with the simple wealth of that mode of life and with all the happiness of the family. But as soon as the sojourn in Egypt has fostered the children of Israel into a considerable nation, other necessities for the blessings of existence are felt to be requisite. Then they become sensible, by a bitter experience, of all the miseries entailed by injustice, arbitrary power, and the luxuries and vices which are indissoluble from an imperfect civilisation. The superstitious and cruel practices engendered by idolatry had brought the people under a severe and bitter bondage, and had in great measure broken their own spirit and corrupted their characters. Never in their long history could the blessing promised to their forefather Abraham have seemed further off

than towards the close of their bondage in Egypt. But the history of Moses is evidence of the fact that, in the midst of this bitter experience, the faith of the greater spirits in the old promise remained. As is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the faith which rose to so great a height in Moses animated his parents. For "by faith, when he was born, he was hidden three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." But above all, by faith did "Moses, when he was come to years, refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." After much trial he is at length rewarded by God's appearance to him in the character of "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," who would fulfil the promises which He had made to those patriarchs. In that character Moses was commissioned to go to his people, saying unto them, "The Lord God of your fathers hath appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you; . . . and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto a land flowing with milk and honey." It is the old promise,

recalled to their recollection with a new pledge of its fulfilment.

But the mode of its fulfilment adds a further momentous element in the experience and the intelligence of the Jews. They learn that, if they are to realise the promise made to their fathers, if they are to be blessed as a nation and to be a blessing, they need a deliverer, a personal deliverer—one who should, in the first place, break the power of their enemies, and, in the next place, be a guide and leader to them. This personal deliverer they were taught to see in God Himself, by the miracles, wonders, and signs which He wrought in Egypt, and which were performed in His name by virtue of its solemn invocation. But to their comparatively rude intelligence, this personal deliverance was in great measure embodied in the character of Moses, so much so that, when he disappears for a time while he was with God in the mount, they compel Aaron to make gods who shall go before them in his place. It is evident, even from this offence, how deeply their bitter experience in Egypt and their subsequent deliverance had impressed upon them this conviction of the need of a personal deliverer. They realise

that, as a nation, they cannot be safe unless there is someone at their head to unite them, to organise them, to provide for their protection.

At the same time, two supreme lessons are impressed upon them. They are given a code of laws. By circumstances of most solemn and impressive character, they are taught that they can have no blessing, either individually or nationally, except in obedience to laws imposed upon them by Divine authority. The full significance of those laws is beyond their comprehension. Such a law as that of the Sabbath could not, in the first instance at least, if at any time, rest safely on men's inherent apprehension of what is desirable. Other laws, if not beyond their comprehension, are at least in opposition to their passions and impose a severe curb upon their wills. But they are taught, amidst thunders and lightnings, that the blessings promised to their fathers can never be enjoyed by them except so far as they are in obedience to those laws. This leads immediately to the second of the two great lessons which are impressed upon them. They violate the laws which have been given them. They find them too

severe a strain upon their passions, their patience, and their faith, and they are taught at once, by the establishment of a solemn, and even terrible, ritual of sacrifices that they must either suffer the full enforcement of those laws upon them in punishments, and even in destruction, or some amends, some atonement, must be made for their violation. The torrents of blood which were shed in the ancient Jewish sacrifices had the effect of impressing on the mind of the people, in the most vivid manner, the imperative need of propitiation for the violation of law. Laws do not deserve the name unless they are avenged in one way or another ; and the Jewish sacrifices and the Jewish Priesthood, particularly the High Priest, are the appointed instruments by which, for temporary purposes, that atonement is made. Further, they are made to feel that they need the continued favour of God, and His constant protection, for their national and personal welfare, and, if this is to be enjoyed, that their continual sins need continual propitiation.

Thus, at this early stage of their career, certain necessities for the fulfilment of the patriarchal blessing are already deeply im-

pressed upon them. A personal deliverer to save them from their enemies, a law-giver to prescribe conditions of life, a judge to apply those laws, the prophetic spirit of a Moses to interpret them to their consciences, and finally a priesthood, with constant sacrifices, to offer propitiation for their sins—these, it will be observed, are no arbitrary requirements. They grow out of the inevitable experience of the nation, as it is seeking for the blessing promised to its fathers under the discipline of the Divine hand. Blessing can only be obtained on these terms and in this way. Surrounded as they are by enemies, liable to oppression and slavery, corrupted by sins, and hampered at every turn by their own ignorance and passion, they are brought to feel the indispensable necessity of the functions of deliverer, law-giver, prophet, and priest. All these conceptions, all these cravings, start into full vigour the moment the nation is full grown, and is brought into contact with the stern realities of existence.

These personal acts of salvation—for that is what they amount to—bring the people through the most critical period of their existence, and they are at length established

in the promised land. Here they seem in possession of all that is essential to the enjoyment of the blessing promised to their fathers ; all material necessities are provided for them in a land "flowing with milk and honey" ; the law, with adequate guidance in all the essentials of life, a priesthood, with an authoritative commission to mediate between them and God, and endued, as occasion arises, with supernatural capacity for interpreting His will. God was their living ruler ; and, had they realised His perpetual presence and rule among them, and lived in humble and faithful submission to it, the way was fairly open for the gradual and complete fulfilment of the promises made to their fathers. But they were unequal to this life of faith, and are consequently left to learn their necessities through further sad experience.

The next great point in this experience is the necessity forced upon them, by their difficulties and sufferings in the time of the Judges, of the continuous personal rule embodied in the office of a king. So far from there being anything necessarily wrong, there was profound truth in the craving, which they expressed to Samuel, that they might have a

king to reign over them. The error consisted simply in their failure to recognise the fact that they had such a king, that the Lord their God was their king, and that, if they maintained a due spirit of faith and obedience to Him, they enjoyed in the highest form all the blessing which a kingly rule could give them. But it was none the less a perfectly true experience that, if the nation was to be blessed, if the old promises were to be realised, if their God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and if their destiny had been truly prophesied by those patriarchs, a king, a living king, a perpetual king, they must have.

Now, it is a peculiar privilege in the experience of the Jews that, whenever a necessity for an office of this kind is apprehended, a character is granted to the nation who brings out the ideal of such an office with especial vividness. Moses, for example, was an ideal lawgiver and deliverer; Joshua was an ideal leader in war; Samuel exhibits the highest type of a judge. Accordingly, in response to this craving, the character of David arises, who, notwithstanding his grievous sin, nevertheless impressed upon the minds of the people the ideal

character of a king, and who has expressed that ideal in Psalms, which have embodied the highest hopes, not only of Jews, but of Christians, and of the noblest spirits in the world. No question of David's personal merits can obliterate or alter the fact that, in him and through him, the ideal of a righteous king is embodied, in a form in which it fascinates the eyes of all subsequent generations, or that his Psalms express in the loftiest strains the characteristics of a perfect rule. The 101st Psalm, for instance, is traditionally ascribed to him, and is regarded as embodying the functions which he felt to be entrusted to him as king. "I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing. . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: . . . A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. . . . Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me: . . . I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." It is peculiarly observable, with respect to the ideal of a king thus conceived by David, however imperfectly realised, that the concep-

tions of power and warlike success, which were the predominant characteristics of the royal office in other nations, are entirely subordinate to the office of asserting and maintaining righteousness. "Give the king thy judgments, O Lord, and thy righteousness unto the king's Son;" "he shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment"—such was the idea inherited by his son Solomon. Such was the further addition made by Jewish experience to their apprehension of the conditions for the fulfilment of their ancestors' blessing.

Two more requisites remained to be brought out into full consciousness by the national experience. As the kingly power failed, like all others in mortal hands, to fulfil its ideal, the prophetic office rose into still higher importance, as that of a living voice interpreting the law, and enforcing it upon the conscience. Finally, amidst their own sufferings and in those of their nation, the prophets discerned in clearer and clearer lineaments that vision which was not dimly foreseen by the prophet philosopher of Greece, of the sufferings of the true servant of God, the perfectly just and righteous man, the destined deliverer of his people. To the

later prophets the history of their people must have seemed like one long failure. All had been given in vain—the miracles and wonders in Egypt, the law, and the ritual; the grand succession of prophets, priests, and kings, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, all had apparently lived to no purpose; the people had utterly failed to realise their own ideals, and instead of the blessing promised to their fathers they were enduring the bitterest misery in a foreign land. Amidst this experience, the conviction seemed forced upon them of the need of an expiation for their sins, by suffering endured on their behalf by their best representatives; and of a servant of the Lord, who by his patient submission to sorrow and death would bear a more powerful and penetrating testimony to the will of God, than could be borne by any exhibition of power and awe. So the conception arises—not artificially by isolated and mysterious predictions—but naturally, continuously, and in the course of a living experience, of the realisation of the original promise of blessing in a Divine Kingdom, under the rule of a perfect Prophet, a perfect Priest, and a perfect King; who, in those various capacities, should satisfy the needs,

control the passions, and illumine the minds of his people, and overcome their enemies. His supreme function, it was felt by the most earnest hearts, would be that by all these offices, and not by one only, he would save his people from their sins, and establish a righteous rule, within them and without them. Accordingly, in the mind of an inspired man like Zacharias, the fulfilment of the ancient hope of the people is expressed in the words, "that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hands of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life."

Such in its main outlines was the Messianic hope of the Jews. At each period of the history, their greatest men are inspired with visions of the ideal after which they were craving; and the various traits of this perfect Prophet, Priest and King—in a word, of this Messiah, are revealed to them, and

are recorded in prophecy and song. It is of secondary importance whether particular texts have been rightly regarded, by Jewish or Christian interpreters, as specially applicable to the Messiah. The Messianic prediction, the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, is rooted in the very life, and in the intensest experience of the Jewish people. It was inevitable their literature should be full of it; and the spirit of Christ, which was given to their prophets, did but furnish the interpretation of these experiences, and assure the fulfilment of these hopes.

This, it may be said, is the sketch of an evolution—the evolution of the idea of the Messiah. But it is an evolution accomplished throughout by the hand and the voice of the Evolver. That, perhaps, would prove to be the real character of any other apparent evolution. It consists in the use and application of natural circumstances and natural developments to a fixed purpose, in the turn given at great crises to the play of natural forces, always with an eye to the end in view. In this case a Divine government led the people from one stage of experience to another; first into Canaan,

then into Egypt, then into Canaan again, then into their relations with the great monarchies of the East ; then into exile, and again to their own land for their final trial. But side by side with this governing hand was the guiding voice, illuminating by prophetic utterances the nature of each successive experience, and pointing forward to the future. Every one of the prophecies which we are considering has thus its roots in the past, its exhortation and encouragement for the present, and its hope and promise for the future. It has no private or isolated interpretation, and can only be understood in connection with that central idea and guiding light, the idea of the Messiah and the light of His countenance, by which the people of Israel were accompanied throughout their mysterious career. All this it is, moreover, all these varied offices, all this manifold salvation, for which it is our privilege to look to Christ. As He was with the Jews, revealing Himself to them throughout their long history, and by means of it, so let us be assured His hand and His voice are with ourselves ; and if we will open our hearts to Him, He will teach us more and more, by the

experience of our lives, to realise that He is ever present, as a living Saviour, leading us through all our trials, and even through all our sins, to rest, in entire faith, on His salvation.

V

THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH IN PROPHECY

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.”—HEB. xi. 13.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar.”—R.V.

THIS is a passage which exhibits in its highest form a characteristic method of scriptural argument—the argument from facts. In several critical moments in the Acts of the Apostles, for instance, as in the speech of St Stephen, or in St Paul’s defence of himself on various occasions, the argument consists of a simple exhibition of facts—of the past history of the Jewish people, or of St Paul’s actual experiences; and these facts, thus placed in their true bearings, are left to produce their natural result upon the mind, and to shed their illumination upon the question under discussion. It seems to

be of the nature of what is called, in modern scientific language, the argument from induction. The facts thus duly weighed may not afford a strict or logical proof, but they bring to light some law of the Divine action, or of human nature, and thus illustrate to us what are the realities with which we have to deal. "The analogy of religion, natural and revealed, with the constitution and course of nature," is an argument of the same kind. Such and such facts may be observed in the actual working of the world in which we daily live, and analogy leads us to anticipate their action in similar though wider spheres.

Thus the Apostolic writer, in this chapter, recalls to the Hebrews whom he addresses a long series of facts, illustrating the operation of the great principle of faith which he is urging upon them. They were on the eve, or in the midst, of a fiery trial, which would put to the severest test their allegiance to their new profession. They had need of patience, they had already endured a great fight of afflictions, and another was imminent; and the Apostle had resorted in the previous chapter to the most solemn warnings drawn from the perils and the punishment of apostasy. "It is a fearful thing," he had

warned them, "to fall into the hands of the living God." But having done this, he proceeds, in a spirit which may well be that of Barnabas, that "Son of Consolation" to whom this Epistle was in very early times attributed, to urge reasons for the deepest comfort and hope amidst any trials, however keen and bitter. For this purpose he concentrates into one chapter the spirit of all Hebrew history—or rather of the history of the servants of God from the beginning of the world—and thus impresses on his hearers the fact, that they are not called to any exceptional course of conduct or endurance, but only to act on that principle of faith, as distinct from sight, which animated all the great saints of the past whom they were proud to follow. "These all," he says, "died in faith, not having received the promises," but being assured that the fulfilment of them was reserved for them hereafter. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and so declared plainly that they were seeking another country.

Now it adds peculiar force to this record of facts and to this argument to bear in mind with what comprehensiveness it follows the whole history of the people of God from

the days of the patriarchs to the date at which the Apostle wrote. That to which the Apostolic writer calls attention is the fact that there has been a continuous history, stretching back to the very dawn of human life, far beyond even the commencement of Hebrew times, of men and women whose lives were guided, not by the circumstances around them, or the hopes which might be based upon such circumstances, but by the promise and prophecy of things afar off and as yet only heard of. It was not merely that a few individuals in successive ages had exhibited this life of faith—not only that, as in the heathen world, there had been bright luminaries of truth and faith, appearing at intervals to keep alive the torch of true life and thought. But there had been in the people of God a continuous succession of men, handing down from generation to generation the same hope, and building up their own lives and the lives of their children upon the same invisible foundation. It is the history of that Church of God which commenced with the faithful patriarchs, and of which the succession was continued in the line of Abraham throughout the Jewish people. One future hope animated this long

historic line of saints ; and a whole system of human life was continuously maintained, of which this was the organising principle.

To do justice to it, moreover, it must be remembered that this long history of faith, stretching back, if we go no further than the time of Abraham, for about as many centuries before Christ as we are living after Christ—for as we live in the twentieth century A.D. so he lived about the twentieth century B.C.—this long history had been to a large extent one of continuous disappointment. The experience of Abraham, called at the very culmination of his hopes to sacrifice his only-begotten son, and thus apparently to forego all visible realisation, or means of realisation, of the promise on which he had lived, is eminently typical of the whole history of the Church of God as here recorded. First of all a long, and apparently hopeless, bondage in Egypt of some four centuries—four centuries of absolute eclipse of every circumstance that could be deemed to correspond to the promises made to Abraham. Instead of any prospect of possessing the land of Canaan, his seed were bond-slaves in Egypt, under the tyranny of the mightiest military



power of the day. Then, when emancipated from Egypt, they were wandering for forty years in a wilderness. Then followed another 300 years of precarious independence and great national confusion under the Judges. At length the promise received some visible realisation in the brilliant period of the Jewish kingdom under David and Solomon. Yet this was but a brief gleam of brightness in the long agony of the people. The kingdom soon breaks up, and in less than three centuries both Israel and Judah became the prey of the great military monarchies of Assyria and Babylonia. They had apparently been placed in possession of the promised land only to be deprived of it again; and there was certainly no visible means of their restoration.

Yet the old hope was still kept alive and raised to even greater heights. The prophet Micah describes in one passage the circumstances of desolation which were imminent. "Therefore," he says, "for the iniquity of the people shall Zion . . . be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest." But having thus seen in prophetic vision, so soon to be realised, the

royal city of David with its palaces levelled to the ground and ploughed as a field, Jerusalem in ruins, and the sacred mountain of the temple of Jehovah no longer thronged by worshippers coming up from every part of the land, but lonely and deserted as the peaks of Hermon, the prophet immediately turns to another and more distant scene, to which he looks forward with a confidence undiminished by the bitter experiences of the present. "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off . . . for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it." It was in those dark and desperate moments of the Jewish state that these brilliant promises were proclaimed. They

are reiterated word for word by Isaiah, and through the five centuries which followed they were the beacon of the nation's hopes. Nothing sufficed to destroy their force and their encouragement, and we know, as a matter of fact, that at the time when our Lord appeared there were many devout souls waiting for the consolation of Israel, living on the inheritance of these promises.

But another still more bitter experience was to come. When the seed came to whom the promise was made, when the king of Israel, in whose person all these assurances were to be fulfilled, came to his temple, when the law began to go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, in that sense which has since been fulfilled so wonderfully in the Christian dispensation—the first experience was again one of bitter disappointment. “We trusted,” said the desponding disciples after the Crucifixion, “that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel”; and even those who believed in His Resurrection had still to endure the intense trial of seeing their Lord's hand withheld and His arm apparently shortened, and of being called upon to submit in their own persons to sufferings

and contempt like His own. It was in weakness and in suffering that for several generations the saints of the Christian Church carried on the tradition of the Jewish Church, finding no recognition in this world of their hopes, and seeking for another country.

It is essential, if we would appreciate the function of prophecy, that we should bear in mind the evidence thus afforded that the principle, by which the truth and trust of which we are the inheritors has been maintained in the world, has never been one of demonstration, but that of hope and faith, resting on promises believed to be divine. Even since the time when Christianity became predominant in a portion of the world, the condition of things around it and within it has been in a large degree too similar to that by which the Jewish Church was surrounded. The great promises of the New Testament have seemed but partially fulfilled. Wickedness has abounded, and the love of many has waxed cold; and it is even now a reproach against the Gospel that it spreads so slowly, and that its influence is so inadequate to its claims. Take external circumstances alone, and there have been

comparatively few periods of time, or regions of the world, in which those circumstances have been sufficient to lend substance to Jewish or to Christian hopes. Sometimes the apparent defeat of those hopes has been overwhelming; and there are not obscure intimations in the New Testament that a time is in store for the Christian Church when it may encounter external defeat and oppression, not dissimilar to that which the Jews underwent at the darker periods of their history.

What was it then that sustained the people of God through all the trials we have been reviewing? The very facts we have been considering remind us that it was not by the continuous manifestation of supernatural powers, or by frequent supernatural signs, that the faith of the ancient fathers was thus sustained. For long centuries, natural forces were left undisturbed and uninterfered with, to oppress and crush them. Circumstances, mere facts, were as adverse to their expectations as the ambassador of the King of Assyria once urged that they were. The text states what was the real source of their spiritual life. They lived upon promises. Prophets like Micah and Isaiah came to

them from time to time, with the declaration that the mouth of the Lord of Hosts had uttered such and such assurances, that He had renewed the promises of a thousand generations; and these promises became more and definite, as time drew on, until (as explained in the last lecture) a distinct expectation of a Messiah, to arise from the house of David and to be born at Bethlehem, and to be the deliverer of His people from all their evils, became the positive assurance on which they relied. But it was always a promise, no more, although authenticated in an increasing degree by the measure of fulfilment which had been realised in the case of the older prophecies. It was a promise uttered by the mouth of prophets who were often, like Micah and Jeremiah, in the most humble and humiliating circumstances, and in whose favour and attestation the Divine hand was but partially and occasionally exerted. But these prophets came to the people from time to time with the unqualified and unhesitating assurance that they brought a message from the Most High. "Hear, O heavens," says Micah's contemporary, "and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken. . . . The ox knoweth

his owner, and the ass his master's crib:" and it was Israel's part, likewise, to know their Creator, and to recognise their Master's voice. These were the promises which the true-hearted people of Israel gradually embraced, greeting them (as the text has been translated) from afar, and in which they found sufficient support through all their desperate trials. Through such a long period of distress, for instance, as the Captivity, there was nothing but these promises, handed down from generation to generation, to sustain the faith of the people. But they were sufficient. The people were convinced that they had the promise and assurance of the Lord God of their fathers, and they believed it and acted on it through any apparent discomfiture.

It is instructive to inquire, why did they believe it? There must have been something inherently convincing in the prophecy, or the mode of its deliverance, to produce so profound and enduring an effect. They believed it because it commended itself to them as the voice of God. The true hearts among them recognised, by that instinct which the prophet Isaiah compares to the instinct of animals towards their master,

man, that the prophet spoke the truth when he said that he brought a message from God, and that the promise they heard was a divine promise. As has been said, it was by no means always attested by miraculous signs. Such attestation was from time to time afforded as need might require. But for the most part, the prophet's witness stood, so to say, on its own merits; and just as we know the voice of our fellows when they address us, so those to whom the prophetic message came were able, in proportion to the soundness and purity of their moral and mental instincts, to recognise the voice which spoke by the prophets as that of God.

One characteristic of it we may at once perceive. It was invariably associated with the voice of their conscience. It was continually reasserting truths which they had been neglecting, and duties which they had been violating. It was the echo of that which they knew was the Divine voice within their own souls, and thus carried its authentication in their own hearts. Add to this that its threats and promises were, from time to time, sufficiently verified in experience to convince them that it pro-

ceeded from the ruler of heaven and earth, and these influences alone might have sufficed to induce them to submit themselves to it, in proportion to the truth and simplicity of their hearts. The voice itself was and is, in the first instance, its own witness. There is something in the voice of God which to an uncorrupt mind, in proportion as it is uncorrupt, is unmistakable. The words of Amos vividly express the main reason why the voice of God commands this belief and submission. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" The psalm quoted by the author of this Epistle warns men against hardening their hearts, and that dreadful possibility is in every man's power. But if a man's heart be not hardened, the word of God, the voice of God, will bespeak the awful being from whom it proceeds, as our voices betray our characters, or as the lion's roar bespeaks a mightier force than that of ordinary nature. Dryden has to some extent expressed this truth in his famous lines:—

"Then for the style, majestic and divine,
It speaks no less than God in every line:
Commanding words, whose force is still the same
As the first fiat that produced our frame."

The Bible and the prophets are thus their own best witness; there is a voice there which asserts itself above all the noise of doubt and controversy, and above all the contradictions of human arguments, and which compels men to recognise that they are in the presence of the living God. Then, as they listen, this voice reveals them more and more to themselves, penetrating their consciences, convincing them of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, and they tremble, and listen still further. This indeed is the characteristic which is always predominant in it. But it was these voices—often, as is vividly described in the case of John the Baptist, like the mere voice of one crying in the wilderness—by which the trust of the faithful was sustained through centuries of bitter disappointment; and it was the force of promises which enabled them to live a life of trust in the Unseen.

Moreover, as has been forcibly shown by one of the most eminent of recent writers on Old Testament prophecy in Germany, Dr Riehm, in his work on Messianic Prophecy, the assurances of the prophets were rooted in the fundamental conceptions and truths of Jewish revelation. The

primary truth, which was at the base of the life of the whole nation, and still more of every thoughtful Jew, was that God had entered into a covenant between the nation and Himself. To the nation that covenant had been sealed by the grand act of redemption from Egypt, which was to the Jew that which the redemption wrought by our Lord's Death and Resurrection is to ourselves; and God's relation to each Jew was stamped upon his very flesh by the sign of circumcision. The deep conviction created by that deliverance, and by this personal sacramental sign, dominated his whole existence; and, in proportion to his lofty and awful conception of the nature of God, he was assured that God must make that covenant, in an ever-increasing degree, a living reality. He might fail, but God would not; God had pledged His own honour and power to the fulfilment of all which that covenant implied; and consequently, when prophet after prophet renewed the assurance that God would fulfil it, the heart of the Jew responded with a deep Amen of belief and hope.

It was the same with the truth of the divine kingship over Israel. The con-

viction that the Lord their God was their king, if for a moment clouded when they sought for an earthly king, was never lost; and if God was their king, it was inconceivable that He should not in some way, and at some time, assert His kingship, manifest His power within Israel itself and to the world, enforce His laws, execute judgment and justice, and fulfil the ideal which the Psalms depict of the perfect king. Finally, the Jewish institutions, the institutions of the priesthood and of sacrifices, bear vivid witness to ideals, without the realisation of which they would have been almost mockeries. For this reason, as Riehm observes, the very disappointments on which I have dwelt became themselves roots of the faith of the people, and induced them to lend a ready ear to the assurances of the prophets. Such truths, such hopes, such ideals, as they had been granted could not be permanently disappointed; and consequently they clung with ever-increasing tenacity to assurances, marked by those divine stamps of which I have spoken, that they would hereafter be realised. Without such prophetic voices indeed the disappointment would have been too great; but when

they were met in their falls, their defeats, their despondencies, by gracious voices, which promised them deliverance and the fulfilment of their ideals, and when those voices had that divine tone in them which we have been considering, they could not but spring up at their encouragement and follow them. Thus it was, let me repeat, in all these ways, that these voices—sometimes, as has been said, like the mere voice of one crying in the wilderness—sustained the life of the faithful through those long centuries of doubt; and it was by the force of prophecies that they were enabled to endure, as seeing that which was invisible.

We are reminded, moreover, in to-day's Epistle that this characteristic of the life of God's ancient people is also the chief stay and comfort of the Christian life. "Whatsoever things," says St Paul, "were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope;" and so we pray in the Collect that "by patience, and comfort of God's holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which he has given us

through Jesus Christ our Lord." It may perhaps be questioned whether the difficulties of faith are not comparatively as great at the present time, in some respects, as in the days of the prophets. There is a greater revelation of the extent, the intensity, and the persistency of evil than was, perhaps, open to the eyes of any one at that time. On the other hand, the promises, on which the patriarchs of old relied, have received, in many respects, a fulfilment which affords us a stronger guarantee of their divine reality than any evidence they could then appeal to. It is probable that the call made upon faith has been much the same in every generation; the claims and evidences of faith, on the one hand, and its opposing difficulties, on the other, being adjusted to our capacities by God's merciful hand. But in the main, when confounded by the problems presented by the evils of the world or our own troubles, it is upon the promises of the Saviour and of his Apostles that we must rely; it is on them that we must ever fall back. The question of faith, both with respect to the general evidences of the gospel and with respect to our private trials, is ultimately this: Can we trust the Saviour's

promises in His word? Arguments on Christian evidences may be of value for the removal of preliminary difficulties, but they can never do more than bring us face to face with the Saviour Himself and His Apostles, and enable us to face the simple question whether we will trust Him; and then, to the Christian heart, the answer is always the same: "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Let me add, as this is the first Sunday in Lent, that it is our privilege in our private lives to use these voices for our elevation and encouragement, when, in the contemplation of the sins of which this season reminds us, we too feel our defeats and our failures, and our lamentable falling short of our ideals. We too are in covenant with God; we too have a Divine Lord and King who desires to bring us into harmony with His perfect rule; and for His own sake He will fulfil the promises and hopes He has held out to us, if we, in reliance on those promises, will but return to Him continually with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. Let us not be discouraged in our falls and failures; but, though our full deliverance from evil can

only be seen in the distance, let us be persuaded of those promises and embrace them, and in the persuasion of that divine embrace, renew our moral and spiritual life.

VI

PROPHECY AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—MATT. iv. 17.

IN the two preceding lectures, I have endeavoured to illustrate two critical points in the nature and the development of the main features of prophecy; first, the manner in which the vision of the divine kingdom and the Divine Messiah arose gradually, out of the actual experience of the Jewish people, in the various vicissitudes of their history; secondly, the manner in which the prophetic word interpreted that experience to them, step by step, sustaining their hopes and deepening their faith, amidst the various temptations, falls, and trials which they had to encounter. Under this combined influence of experience and prophecy, experience

supplying the materials which prophecy interpreted, the constituent elements of the great conception of a perfect divine kingdom, under a Divine Messiah, had combined to create a general expectation, which existed at the time our Lord appeared among the Jews. Step by step, they had learnt the necessity for their welfare, both individually and socially, of laws by which they should be directed and controlled, of a prophet to interpret those laws and bring them home to their conscience, of a king to enforce and uphold them, and to protect them by his power from their enemies, and of a priest to mediate between them and the lawgiver whom they have offended, and to make atonement by sacrifices for their trespasses and sins. All these offices, moreover, as was more and more clearly illustrated by the prophets, came to be recognised as essentially divine. God alone could be the true lawgiver of the people; God alone could adequately interpret His own laws; a Divine Saviour alone could adequately make atonement for their sins; and a Divine King alone could effectually, and with perfect justice, enforce His laws, and protect His people from the enemies and evils by which

they were surrounded. When, then, our Lord and his forerunner came forward to utter the final prophecy of the Jewish dispensation, and to announce that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, what they proclaimed was that these great offices were about to be fulfilled. The Divine King who, in the image of the parable, had, as it were, retired into a far country, was about to return. His laws were about to be enforced; they were to be explained and urged home on the conscience by a Divine voice; and the Divine priest would make an atonement for his people. The announcement of the approach of the kingdom of heaven implied that it was at hand in its reality and efficacy. Its laws would take effect, its judgments would be executed, and its mercies would at the same time be revealed.

Such was the prophecy; let us proceed to compare it with its fulfilment, and then consider some of the lessons the comparison affords as to the function and practical character of prophecy. As a matter of fact, what was it that ensued upon this announcement of our Lord? He at once proceeded by direct discourse, such as that in the Sermon on the Mount, by indirect instruction

such as that of His parables, to declare anew, and with more explicitness, the laws of the Divine Kingdom ; to illustrate with a prophetic force, never before or afterwards exhibited, their profound spiritual meaning, and to warn His hearers that their enforcement by Divine judgments was inevitable. He took up the old laws, the old Scriptures, treating them as the eternal expressions of the Divine will, and expounded them in all their spiritual breadth and penetration ; and He declared that the day was coming when He would enforce them, in this deep spiritual sense, against all who had not obeyed them in actual practice. "Not everyone" He declared, "that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of My Father that is in heaven." By such declarations and appeals as these, He brought home to the consciences of all classes the meaning and the severity of the Divine laws which they outwardly acknowledged. Some rebelled against such teaching, and some repented at it. The Scribes and Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, while many of the publicans and the sinners accepted it. But it was felt that the voice of God

was among them, wielding the two-edged sword of His word, piercing to the dividing asunder of the very soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. Here was the Divine Prophet manifestly standing before them, bringing home God's words and God's laws to their souls—a new power, in short, was among them, the great Prophet of the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

The manner, moreover, in which He was received, and its consequences, led to the manifestation of another grand element in the constitution of the Divine Kingdom. The people, as a whole, with their leaders, rejected Him, and thus committed the greatest sin which history records, a sin in which the evil of the human heart manifested itself in its worst and most fearful form. The Divine Prophet of all truth and justice had appealed to their hearts, and they had rebelled against Him. He had appealed in the most various tones, in language of persuasion, of expostulation, of indignation, of tenderness as well as of anger. Every word that He spoke breathed truth and light and love, but because this truth, light, and love rebuked the darkness and hatred of their own hearts,

they hated Him, and determined to drive it from them and to crush it. They took counsel to put Him to death. He was their King and their God, and it was in His power, instead of being crushed by them, to crush them. It was only to be expected, it would have been in accordance with all principles of justice, that they should be at once overwhelmed by his righteous judgments, and punished with everlasting destruction. When men reject truth and light itself as incarnate in our Lord, they oppose themselves to the eternal truth and will of God, and nothing remains in the ordinary course of nature, but that they should suffer the inevitable penalty. But, at this stage, our Lord, instead of defending and asserting Himself by power, chose, by an act of infinite condescension, to suffer His enemies to inflict their hatred and violence upon Him. Instead of putting them to death, He submitted to be put to death by them, and thus He himself suffered the penalty which their evil necessarily involved.

When truth and light and love are in deadly conflict with falsehood, darkness, and hatred, some terrible convulsion must ensue, some victim must be sacrificed. This was

what the greatest of the ancient prophets depicted so clearly in his description of the servant of God who was despised and rejected of men, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, who poured out his soul unto death, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. All the power of God was and is on the side of right and truth, but before asserting it by force our Saviour resolved to let the awful effect of sin and falsehood be directed against Himself, and thus to afford in His own person the awful example which justice required of the natural consequences of sin. He thus became at once the Victim and the Priest of a supreme and divine sacrifice for evil. Sin requires and extorts its sacrifices day by day, and some supreme sacrifice was needed for the sin of the whole world, exhibited, as that sin was in its highest form, in the rejection of our Lord by His own people. The incessant bloodshed, day by day and year by year, of the ancient Jewish ritual, was, after all, but too true an illustration, as we have lamentable reason to know, of that perpetual shedding of human blood, by which, under the present constitution of things, the progress

of the world is maintained ; and it was at the same time, the most impressive of all prophecies, in pointing forward to the shedding of that sacred blood, respecting which the Apostolic writer exclaims : “ How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ? ” This element, therefore, of the kingdom of heaven was also at hand, and was realised. After the prophet came the priest ; after the Sermon on the Mount, by a natural development, by the simple action and reaction of human sin and divine graciousness, came the sacrifice of Calvary ; and thus, less than three years after our Lord’s announcement that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, these momentous elements of the divine constitution of things were fully manifested. Henceforth the Divine Prophet, through His recorded words and by means of His spirit, has been ever exerting His penetrating and purifying influence upon our hearts, and the Divine Priest has made the one sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

There remains the third function, that of

the king. This office, moreover, our Lord conspicuously exerted during His life on earth. By His miracles, He manifested His possession of complete command over all the forces of nature. Even the winds and the waves, the constitution of the human frame, the spiritual and the natural world, obeyed Him, and He showed that He could command all the elements at His will. He established, moreover, a Society of which He was and is the Lord, and of which His will is the sole rule. After His death He rose again, declaring that all power was given unto Him in heaven and in earth; and His possession of the same power, after His ascension to heaven, was manifested by the performance in His name, by His Apostles, of precisely the same works of healing and of judgment as those which He Himself executed when He was upon earth. As a matter of fact, since that time, in His own words, the kingdom of God is preached and every man presseth into it. As a matter of fact, there has existed since that time a Society in which Christ is the recognised ruler, in which His will is acknowledged to be the supreme law, in which He is recognised as at once

the supreme Priest and the supreme Sacrifice, the mediator between man and God, and the propitiation for our sins—a Society which is united by His ordinances and inspired by His spirit, and which confidently looks forward to the future assertion of His final authority by a last judgment. It existed thenceforth as the greatest visible reality by which the world since our Lord's day is distinguished from the world before it. Though more or less disorganised by the sins of its subjects, and imperfectly realised, it is still a real Kingdom, owning the rule of one King, and looking to him for all the functions necessary for the welfare of the kingdom as a whole and its individuals in particular.

This was the sequel, and the immediate consequence, of our Lord's life on earth. It was this which followed in a few short years upon His proclamation and upon that of His forerunner. There is no clearer and more momentous example of the fulfilment of prophecy. A voice was heard in the deserts of Judæa proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; the prophet by whom it was uttered was soon thrown into prison and silenced; but

the message was reiterated by one whom he had announced as about immediately to follow him; it was repeated by that greater voice throughout the land of Israel, and in two or three years it was fulfilled to the letter; the long and eager expectations entertained by the Jewish people of the advent of their Prophet, Priest, and King were realised, and His kingdom was actually established in the hearts of men, and realised in a visible society.

Nothing can assist us so much to appreciate at once the reality and the spiritual character of prophecy, as to realise the relation between this culminating prophecy of the kingdom of God and its immediate fulfilment. We have only to recall the circumstances of the times in order to appreciate the supreme prescience which the prophecy reveals. Observe the strong contrast between the external appearance of things as they presented themselves to human eyes and the reality as proclaimed by our Lord. An uninspired observer of the world, at that time, would have had his attention chiefly engrossed by the vast historic drama which was being enacted—the complete establishment and extension

over the world of the Roman Empire ; in Judæa itself the confused political struggles between Herod and the Priesthood and the Roman Authorities ; and his attention would soon have been engaged by the external aspects of the terrible tragedy which followed, in the overthrow of the Jewish polity and the destruction of Jerusalem. The minds of men were, for the most part, engrossed in these external and temporal affairs. But what was really happening was that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. The Divine Lord, the King, the Prophet, and Priest of men, was displaying His authority, and exercising a ministry, which was to be the turning-point of human history ; and the fate of the Jews themselves depended upon the manner in which they received Him. Their rejection of Him was the consequence and the manifestation of that utter corruption of heart and mind, which produced those intestine dissensions which rendered them the inevitable prey of the Roman power ; and their sins thus drew upon them, in another generation, their natural punishment, in the most fearful sufferings. But little as it was recognised by the natural eye, whether of statesmen

or historians, the real key to the public and external history of the world lay in the manifestation and operation of that Kingdom of God, which attracted so little attention in the world around. The one message which required attention, and which would have saved the Jews, even at that moment, was the message of repentance, in view of the appearing of that kingdom. Could they have bowed their hearts before their Lord as their prophet and their priest, even at that moment—even at that last hour if the hearts of the disobedient had turned to the wisdom of the just, their sins might have been checked before they had reached so fearful a development. But because they neglected this deep spiritual message, they were necessarily given over to increasing corruption, until their doom fell upon them.

So had it been throughout the long years of their history as the people of God. To an external observer in the days of the prophets, the great monarchies with which they were surrounded, the mighty powers of Egypt, or of Babylonia, or Assyria, were the main factors in the history of the time. But voices like those of John the Baptist

were heard, sometimes in the deserts, sometimes in the streets of Jerusalem or Samaria, warning them that the one great reality with which they were concerned, and on which their whole destiny depended, was the will of God, their King and Lord: that, if they would return to Him in repentance and obedience, they might be saved; but that, if not, their sins and corruptions would be left to work out their natural consequences, and that they would fall under the sword and the tyranny of their oppressors. The kingdom of God, the rule of God, was the great reality behind all this visible scene, controlling and determining its results. Its influence was manifested from time to time in some great judgment, and it came nearer and nearer. At length in the time of our Lord its final approach was proclaimed; it entered into the world in its complete reality, and its judgments were enforced upon God's own people.

Moreover, we are called upon to recognise that the essential position in which we stand at this day is the same, and to repent, in the sense of turning our minds, hearts, and souls to these eternal realities. So far as the course of the world itself is concerned, we

are warned by prophets and Apostles that, through all the apparent external vicissitudes of men and of affairs, God is steadily advancing the great purposes of His kingdom, and guiding everything to that grand consummation, when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. The convulsions of nations, the progress of discovery, the influences of literature—all are tending to the same great result, to make the person, the character, and the will of Christ more widely known, and to lead to the general establishment of His authority. The Kingdom of Heaven stands behind this visible scene at the present day, as it did in the time of the Jews; and it will some day stand revealed, as it did after their time, as the one great force of history.

For each of us individually, the call to repentance involves a call to recognise our relation to this Divine King, this Divine Prophet and Priest, as the one eternal reality of our lives. We play our parts here, from year to year, in the various occupations which He has given us, serving Him in the development of one part or another of His purposes. But these are only the particular behests in

which our faithfulness, our love, and our trust towards Him are being tried and developed. They will pass, with those bodies which are our instruments in discharging them. The question then will be how far we have done His will, and have lived in His true faith and fear. Let us, while striving to do our duty in them all, as His servants, yet have our eyes ever fixed upon Him, as the eyes of servants upon the hand of a master, turning inwardly from this external world, and living, in the abiding realisation of His presence, for Him alone. Then may we look forward, with hope and confidence and joy, to the final realisation of His kingdom, in that last day of the Lord, when His judgments and His mercies shall alike be finally revealed.

Such is the aspect of prophecy considered as a whole and in its main current and purpose. Its application in detail, especially by the writers of the New Testament, forms a separate subject of great importance, which I hope to consider in subsequent lectures. But as we view it in reference to its goal, from the beginning to the end, prophecy presents itself clearly as the one clue to the labyrinth of history. Beginning with but slight threads in early patriarchal

times, it has sufficed to lead those who traced it, through the long and mysterious windings of Divine providence, to the open space of Christian light, and Christian life, in which we stand at the present day. While men were working at a thousand objects of their own, founding empires, developing commerce, elaborating philosophies, with their eyes closed to all but the immediate material and intellectual and temporal interests in which their energies were absorbed, the Divine purpose, which had been indicated from the first in the family of Abraham, was working silently towards its own ends, and gradually using for its purposes all the other elements and creations of human energy and thought. It was concerned mainly with that moral and religious principle, on the vitality of which ultimately depends the whole fabric of human society. That moral and religious principle is the seed of which our Lord spoke, which at first is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown it becomes a great tree and the fowls of the air lodge in the branches thereof. As prophecy appeals to this principle, so it is only in proportion as men's hearts are alive to it and to its supremacy, that they are prepared to recognise and to follow

the voices of the prophets when addressed to them. It was because most of the Jews of our Lord's day were alive to everything except that moral and religious principle, alive to their own temporal interests, but not to the need of repentance, that they failed to acknowledge the voice of our Lord, and that the Kingdom of God was consequently carried forward to its final establishment, against them, and not by means of them.

VII

THE USE OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY IN THE NEW TESTA- MENT

“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet.”—MATT. i. 22.

To Christians, who submit to our Lord's teaching as of supreme authority, and who accept the writings of Evangelists and Apostles as inspired, the use of Ancient Prophecy in the New Testament must afford decisive guidance; while, at the same time, the fresh series of prophecies afforded by the New Testament fall, in some respects, better within the range of our observation and judgment than many of those in the Old Testament. In respect both to the use of Ancient Prophecy and to the gift of New Prophecy, the New Testament is perfectly continuous with the Old; and no interpretation of prophecy can be compatible with the claims of the Christian faith which is not in

harmony with that of our Lord, and of the Evangelists and Apostles. If it should be requisite, as some seem to have thought, to explain away the use of the Old Testament by the Evangelists, or to apologise for it, they may still afford us, of course, invaluable instruction, but their authority as inspired teachers would be gone, and some of the cardinal positions of Christian belief would have to be reconsidered. It is of the highest importance to us, therefore, alike for our own spiritual instruction, and for the defence of our Christian position, to understand their point of view, to be satisfied of its reasonableness, and of its harmony with the whole analogy of our faith. It must reveal to us, as nothing else can, the real Christian principles of the interpretation of prophecy. At the same time, in prophecies uttered by our Lord, and by His Apostles, we may expect to see prophecy at its highest point of development. They themselves tell us that, in their utterances, the last word of prophecy has been spoken, and that we have simply to look for its gradual unfolding and ultimate development. In a word, in the New Testament we have, from the Christian point of view, at once the highest interpretation

of prophecy, and the highest examples of prophecy.

In the present lecture it is on the first of these subjects—the interpretation of prophecy in the New Testament—that it is proposed to offer some observations; and this subject can hardly be examined in a more crucial instance than in the Gospel of St Matthew—in such expressions, for instance, as that which is familiar to us at Christmas. “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,” etc. St Matthew, it is clear, wrote primarily for his fellow Jews, and his account of the Gospel is specially adapted to meet their position and their beliefs. The opening words of his Gospel, which are too often, perhaps, passed over as a mere summary of a genealogy, are among the most pregnant words in the New Testament, and must have embodied to a Jew the whole of his past history and of his present and future hopes. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Those words told the Jew, at once, that in JESUS, whose birth and life and death the Evangelist was about to narrate, would be found THE

CHRIST, the Messiah for whom he and his whole nation had been longing for centuries, the King who had been promised of David's Royal Line, the descendant of the Patriarch in whom it had been promised that all nations of the earth should be blessed. The whole of Jewish history and the profoundest beliefs of the nation are flashed before the mind of a Jew in that brief phrase. It was as much as to say to him: "Listen as I proceed to tell you how the promises made to Abraham, and the oath which was sworn unto David, are at last fulfilled; how the Divine unction has at last fallen upon the heir of that great line, and how the Prophet, Priest, and King of your nation stands revealed." That, we may venture to say, was the only way in which a Gospel to the Jews could begin. To a Gentile it might be enough to tell him of a Divine Saviour in human form. A Gospel for him might commence, like that of St Mark, with the declaration: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." But to a Jew there could be no revelation which was not in harmony with his old revelations, and which was not a fulfilment of them. If he was to accept a Messiah who was the Son of

God, that Messiah must be also, as a first condition, the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. Thus, in this short phrase, does the Evangelist at once sum up the whole of his Gospel, and at the same time indicate to us the prophetic point of view from which he presents it.

Accordingly he goes on, in passage after passage, to illustrate the manner in which the prophecies of the past, their promises and experiences, had been fulfilled in the person and the work of the Christ whom he proclaimed. At His birth, all that came to pass was done "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel." He was born at Bethlehem, "for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda, for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel." His parents had to flee into Egypt "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son." His escape was the occasion of the slaughter of the children of

Bethlehem, in which "was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet," of Rachel weeping for her children. He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene." When the time came for Him to enter on His public ministry, He was preceded by John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, "and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven"—the kingdom to which all the prophets had looked forward—"is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." He opened His ministry at Capernaum, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, . . . Galilee of the Gentiles, the people which sat in darkness saw great light." He charged the people, after His deeds of mercy, that they should not make Him known, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold My servant, whom I have chosen. . . . He shall not strive nor cry . . . a bruised reed shall He not break, and smok-

ing flax shall He not quench." His parables are in harmony with another prophecy of Esaias, which said, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive." When He entered into Jerusalem before His passion, "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass." In His betrayal, and the price put upon it, "was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet." His final words on the cross fulfilled an utterance of the Psalms; and His last words before He left the earth are a solemn declaration that that kingdom of God, which He had begun by proclaiming, was finally established. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth."

These characteristic passages from the Evangelist have been recited in order that we may have before our minds, not merely some particular instances of alleged prophecy and its fulfilment, but the whole spirit and purpose of his message. The impression which they leave is not that the Evangelist is seeking for prophecies to which he can

appeal in support of his cause, but that his mind is moving in a world of prophecy which is familiar to those for whom he writes, and that he notices naturally, in passing, one point after another in which the life and the Gospel of Jesus Christ answer to it and fulfil it. He does not stay to prove his instances; his reference is sometimes vague and general; it may be enough for him to say, generally, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophets," without specifying which, or their particular words. It is like the case of a man looking at the picture of some great scene he has witnessed, and saying to his companion: "There is such a point in the landscape, and there is another"—a hill, or a stream, or a house, or a familiar face—except that here the position is reversed, and the Evangelist is looking at the reality, and recalling points in the prophetic picture which he and his readers had long been contemplating. Before them is the picture, at last realised, even to many of its minute details; and the Evangelist lingers, even amidst the absorbing interest of the real life and character he is describing, over those features which help to assure him that he has at length found what he and his

fellows had so long looked for—all the more, perhaps, because in some cases such features are of the nature of those slight touches which cannot be artificial, and which bespeak what is genuine and natural.

In other words, the conviction in which the Evangelist's mind moves is that the whole history and prophecy of the past, all through those three series of fourteen generations which he enumerates—from Abraham to David, and from David to the carrying away into Babylon, and from the carrying away into Babylon to the Christ—had been one continuous growth, steadily unfolding the germ from which it started; and that as the traits of the father and of the father's father are to be seen in the son, so the principles and the methods, and even the external characteristics of past Jewish life and thought are reproduced in this final birth of the sacred history. If you would understand and do justice to him, you must not begin by concentrating your attention on a few secondary particulars, questioning this, that, and the other small details: you must look at his principle and his position as a whole; and then you may judge whether the details are

in harmony with it and are justified by it. Is it not a common matter of experience that a number of details in a story, or inferences in an argument, may seem strained and unnatural if you begin with them, and look at them one by one independently? But when the story or the argument is viewed as a whole, you see their naturalness; they fall into their places, and incidental points of verisimilitude which, standing alone, you would have regarded as fanciful and worth very little, become some of the most vivid, life-like, and convincing features of the whole transaction.

Such is the spirit in which St Matthew writes, and the cardinal principles of Jewish history and prophecy are his vindication. On those principles, the whole of that history had been guided by one Divine will, and moulded by one Divine hand, towards one great goal—the establishment of the kingdom of God among men, under the rule of One who is both God and man. The way had been prepared for it; the race in and through whom it was to be established had been disciplined and educated. Great spiritual and moral truths had to be planted in their souls, before they could produce represen-

tatives capable of a mission such as was entrusted to Apostles and Evangelists. For that purpose, they not merely had to undergo certain painful experiences—the captivity in Egypt, conflict with bitter enemies, severe temptations and consequent defections, exile and oppression—but they needed to be lifted and sustained from time to time by Divine guidance and comfort ; above all, by glimpses of the goal towards which they were tending, sufficient to assure them that all they were suffering and experiencing was in harmony with their ultimate destiny, and that the Person who would at length be manifested as the Captain of their salvation was one with them in their nature and their struggle, though infinitely superior to them. Such was the combined effect of Jewish history and prophecy, growing as experience grew, and brightening under an ever-increasing illumination. What is recorded for us in the Scriptures of the Old Testament is not a mere natural history, interrupted from time to time by isolated prophetic voices, but one grand birth of time—the prolonged travail pangs of the daughter of Israel giving birth to her Messiah, sustained by continuous Divine assurances of the blessed issue,

constantly increasing in clearness and certainty.

In this long travail, moreover, the essential circumstances remain the same, or similar, from age to age: the comparative insignificance of Israel; the great military monarchies by which she was surrounded; the necessity of a flight into Egypt or a sojourn in the wilderness; the unexpected appearance of some deliverer, born, it might be, in a humble station, but bringing God and God's help once more near to the people in their sin and distress; or a prophet deserted and betrayed, wounded in the house of his friends, and put to death. As this experience grew and the light of prophecy brightened, the vision and the conviction grew also that all this was but the rehearsal of a great and final reality; that the divine kingdom, for which all this was a preparation, would at length be established by a Member of the great representative line, who would combine all the experiences through which the nation itself had passed—in an humble and unexpected birth, in a lowly state, in flight, persecution, temptation, struggle, betrayal, and death, but gaining at length the final victory, for Himself and for the people of

God, and establishing for ever a divine kingdom.

This is the root from which the whole thought of an Evangelist springs who proclaims a gospel for Jews. The Christ's wonderful birth and His Divine nature had been foreshadowed by the mysterious words of the prophet—that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son, and that His name should be called *God with us*. Those mysterious words had unquestionably been uttered centuries before; that marvellous name had been given; and whatever it may have referred to in the prophet's time, here at least was a reality which answered to it. If He had to flee into Egypt, so had the nation done in its early distress; if His escape had been accompanied by the slaughter of the Innocents, so had many a Jewish mother in past times bewailed her innocent children, slaughtered, in the course of God's mysterious purposes, by the ruthless Assyrian or Babylonian invader; if He was to live at Nazareth and share the reproach of a despised people, had it not been foreseen that the Servant of God would be a mere branch or shoot, of no form or comeliness, despised and rejected of men, so that the general effect of the

predictions concerning Him was that He should be no better than a Nazarene? In the same way, did not our Lord's whole career—the manner in which He was heralded by a voice in the wilderness, His union of gentleness with power, the mysterious nature of His teaching, and eventually the character of His betrayal and of His sufferings—recall the visions of ancient prophets and the experiences of ancient saints? What they had seen and what they had felt, however dim and mysterious in their case, had been fulfilled in Him; and so, as the living parallel passes before the Evangelist's eye, and the deep spiritual similitude is fixed on his mind by the Spirit who inspired him, the exclamation rises, as it were involuntarily, to his lips—sometimes in view of a profound, and sometimes of an almost external, resemblance—"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet."

In fact, if we are to appreciate the use of prophecy in the New Testament, the truth appears to be that we must directly reverse the aspect of the matter which is too often pressed upon us from a mere human point of view. We are told that the prophets looked, in the first instance, to something in

immediate relation to the events of their day, and to the circumstances with which they were dealing, and that the primary meaning of prophecy is to be sought in those contemporary events, although from them it may, in some instances, be extended—some say by way of type, some by a sort of double sense—to the final Messianic realities. But, in the view of the New Testament writers, that which was primarily vouchsafed to the prophet was a vision, or a glimpse, of the ultimate reality, of the final purposes of God, of His ultimate judgment, of His final salvation, of the character of the Person through whom that salvation was to be wrought, of His sufferings, and of the glory which should follow. In proportion as that great Deliverer, that final judgment, and that ultimate salvation, gleamed for a while upon the prophet's eye did their light and their example illuminate the present, and was he enabled to see the purpose and the will of that Saviour and that Judge in respect to the events and the struggles of his own time. To the prophet, in short, it was the great reality of the future which illuminated the present; it was not merely a few sparks of light from the present which enabled him to

penetrate the dim and distant future. After all, we may well observe this striking and unquestionable fact, that the chief difficulties in connection with a prophecy like that of Immanuel relate to its meaning in the past rather than to its applicability in the present. The birth of Christ and the work of Christ are, beyond question, aptly described by the words which the Evangelist quotes from Isaiah; but commentators of all schools, conservative or critical, old and new, are in much perplexity and confusion as to the reference which the words may bear to any event in the time of Isaiah himself. Whatever such contemporary reference they may have had, it seems to baffle our present knowledge and resources; but that the Son of the Blessed Virgin has proved to be *God with us*, this is a matter which all Christian hearts, and some hearts which are not nominally Christian, will thankfully acknowledge. In the same way, if we can but lay aside what a great writer on this subject has called "our cold, pedantic way" of measuring the visions and the thoughts of inspired men by our own range of insight and our own apprehensions, we shall recognise it as unquestionable that the realities of the gospel,

the life and the words of our Lord, and the facts of the Christian Church, do, as a matter of fact, answer to the visions and the words of the prophets, although, at this distance of time, it may be impracticable for us to discern, in detail, the circumstances on which they threw a partial light in the days of those who uttered them.

If, then, prophecy be such a great reality as we have been contemplating; if, as the Prophets, the Apostles, and the evangelists believed, not a hair fell to the ground throughout the long history of the Jewish nation without the knowledge of its God and Saviour; if every event, and every inspired utterance, was controlled and directed by that God and Saviour towards the establishment of a divine kingdom, under a Divine and human Messiah; if human nature remained the same throughout, and the divine methods of discipline and guidance were the same also; if our Lord, as the great Head and Representative of the nation, was to share their experience—or, rather, if they, in their degree, were to share His—then the Evangelist was justified in his quick eye for resemblances between the story of the Messiah and the history of his nation,

in his deep conviction that all that happened in our Lord's life—not only the great features of His character, but the very circumstances of His career—had been intimated and foreshadowed in the past, and, in a word, in believing and teaching that “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet.”

VIII

PROPHECY IN OUR LORD'S MINISTRY

“Behold, I have told you before.”—MATT. xxiv. 25.

IN a previous lecture the manner was discussed in which the Evangelists interpreted and applied the prophecies in the Old Testament in relation to our Lord ; and the purpose of the present lecture is to consider the prophetic, or rather the predictive, character of our Lord's own teaching. He is the supreme example of the double aspect of the prophet's office, both in interpreting and enforcing divine and eternal truths, and also in predicting the future. In the former of these two prophetic capacities, He illuminated, with the divine light, the depths of the ancient law, bringing home to men's consciences, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in parables like that of the Pharisee and the Publican, its profound moral and spiritual penetration, and their miserable failure to

fulfil it. But we are concerned here with the other aspect of His prophetic office—that of prediction—and it will be found very impressive to observe how large, and even paramount, a place is held in His teaching and His work by this predictive prophecy. His Advent was heralded by prophecy, and His own first word was a prophecy—viz., that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The preaching of John the Baptist may, indeed, be instructively considered from the same point of view. He, too, was pre-eminently a prophet, in the sense of a preacher and interpreter of righteousness; but he was also, in a most conspicuous and striking degree, a prophet, in the sense of foretelling future events of the most momentous nature. His declarations respecting our Lord foretold his character, His office, and His death, with inspired prescience; but, apart from this, his mere declaration that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and that, with it, the judgment of the Jewish nation was approaching, is sufficient testimony to his inspired vision. He based the whole of his preaching on that solemn prediction, warning the people that the axe was now laid to the root of the tree, and that One

was coming immediately after him, in whose presence he would become insignificant, whose fan was in His hand, and who would thoroughly purge His floor. His preaching was not a merely general warning of the certainty of the just judgment of God upon national and personal sin; it was a specific prediction that a certain Person was immediately at hand who would Himself enforce those judgments, and who would set up a kingdom which would be that of God Himself—a kingdom, not of earth, but of heaven. There is no clearer or stronger instance of definitely predictive prophecy than the fact that, before our Lord had been so much as heard of, John the Baptist should thus have predicted His immediate coming, and the great spiritual, moral, and national revolution which was to ensue.

Now, our Lord takes up this prediction of the Baptist and makes it His own. When He had heard that John was cast into prison He departed into Galilee, and “from that time He began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” His own exhortation to repentance, like that of John, does not rest simply upon general moral, and spiritual considerations, but is

founded upon the declaration, the prophetic declaration, that a new kingdom is about to be set up ; and He calls upon men to change their minds in view of that imminent fact. As the subsequent history has shown, that prophecy corresponded to a great and momentous reality. From the time of our Lord's departure from earth, or from within a few days after His Ascension, a new authority has existed in the world, a new personal authority, that, namely, of our Lord Himself, acknowledged as the Son of God, acting by various agencies, in the Church or the Churches which are called by His Name.

This, it is important to remember, constitutes the grand distinction between the state of the world before Christ and the state of the world after Christ—a distinction conspicuous to outward observation as well as to spiritual insight. Since that time there have always been great societies in the world looking up to Jesus Christ, not merely as their Guide, but as their Lord and Master, regarding themselves as bound, in all things, by His authority, as revealing to them the will of God and the laws of heaven ; they have asserted that

authority against the authorities of this world, and have made the laws of this world's authorities bend to it; they speak of Him in their Creed not only as their Master, but as their Lord, and they believe that everything they do, and everything that is done in the world, is subject to His judgment, and will ultimately receive His sentence. It is, therefore, in a proper sense a kingdom in which men and women recognise that they are subject to Jesus Christ, as to a King whose laws are supreme, in life and in death. According to His own illustration, He has gone into a far country for a while, and men may for a time forget or disregard Him, without being immediately recalled to His allegiance by force; but He, and He alone, is their eternal King and Lord, and they will some day have to answer to Him. Our Lord, as has been said, claims this office of King, because He is the Son of God, to whom the Father has entrusted all rule and all authority and power; and, in this respect, He assumes a position which is not so much as claimed by the founder of any other religion. Such, then, in its elementary conception, is the great institution which was about to be set up, and which

John the Baptist and our Lord predicted. They announced the coming of a new authority, the advent of a new King, the creation of a new Society, the revelation of a Judge and a judgment not hitherto known, and they called on men to accommodate themselves to this supreme and imminent reality.

This was the central truth of our Lord's teaching. In this great central prediction everything else was included, and to this, as we shall see, everything returned. But He proceeded to delineate the nature and the general history of this kingdom in a number of parables, which, as uttered beforehand, constitute a most remarkable series of predictions, which have received in history an ever-increasing verification. Take, for example, those which are collected in the thirteenth chapter of St Matthew. It is there described how the chief means for the spread of the kingdom is the Word, which works in men's hearts like a seed, which grows in one soil and not in another, but where it takes good root brings forth abundant fruit. We are told that, "the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field ; but while

men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also," and the householder gives orders that the wheat and the tares shall grow together until the harvest; so that the Society, which is to be known as the Kingdom of God, is, until the end of the world, to include bad men as well as good. Again, the kingdom of heaven was to be "like a grain of mustard-seed . . . which indeed is the least of all seeds, but, when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof"; that is, its beginning was to be slight, and its growth gradual, but its ultimate extent immense. Again, it was to be like leaven, gradually permeating the whole mass of human life. These and similar similitudes exactly describe what has been the character and the mode of growth of the Church in all ages; and if we were not so familiar with them, we should be the more impressed with the divine foresight, which, instead of anticipating for the Divine Kingdom either rapid progress or perfect results, predicted its slow growth by the

humblest of means, and the imperfection with which its ideal would be realised, until the day came for its final and complete realisation. The life of that earthly society, which acknowledges Christ as its King, has been, throughout history, exactly what our Lord predicted it would be, and the Church is thus, even in her defects and disappointments, a witness to the truth of her Divine Lord.

But our Lord's preaching contained other predictions of a still more specific and far-reaching character. In the first place, as is acknowledged even by modern critics who do not fully acknowledge His Divine nature and authority, He clearly predicted to His disciples both His death and His resurrection. These predictions were not, indeed, put prominently forward in His general teaching; and it obviates many difficulties to bear in mind that they could not have been so put forward without reducing His work among the Jews to an unreality. He came to His own people, making a real appeal to them to receive Him, and He exerted all His power, wisdom, and grace to win their hearts to Himself. It is evident, from His intimations to His disciples, that

He knew it would be all in vain ; but if He had said so to the Jews, to whom He appealed, He would have rendered the appeal unmeaning. In the end, when all hope is gone, He does say as much, even to them ; but not until every motive and every warning is exhausted, and He is obliged to declare, in bitter grief and tears, " Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

This is the explanation of the circumstance which, though often much exaggerated, is to a considerable degree true, that the atoning death of our Lord does not receive so much prominence in His teaching as in that of the Apostles. He could not give it that prominence without openly and constantly assuming that the appeals He was making to His people would be in vain, and that they would reject Him and put Him to death. When they had done so, when the dreadful event was accomplished, then it stood out in its awful reality and supreme significance, and the vision of that Blood of Christ, which the Apostles themselves had beheld, occupied the centre point of their view, and was interpreted to them by weighty, though reticent, predictions of their Master. If the prediction of His death had thus to

be guarded, and, so to say, confidential, the case could not but be the same with His predictions of His resurrection. If, indeed, He predicted His death at all, it would seem essential that He should also have predicted His resurrection. That death, without the resurrection, would have been a message of despair, alike in the prospect and in the retrospect, and to both our Lord's saying eminently applies: "Now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe." The Apostles could not but believe in One who had thus calmly predicted two events so utterly incredible to them as His murder and His resurrection, and whose predictions, in each case, had been so exactly fulfilled.

But though there was thus a certain reserve in our Lord's predictions respecting Himself, He expanded more and more clearly, and more and more fully, as His ministry proceeded, His prediction that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, particularly in its relation to the Jews. Gradually, as their resistance to Him deepened, He explained to them more distinctly the meaning of His precursor's declaration that "Now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; there-

fore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Here, again, it is in His parables that we find some of His most remarkable predictions respecting the fate which was in store for the Jews. Such, for instance, is the parable of the householder, who let his vineyard out to husbandmen, and went into a far country, and sent his servants to receive the fruits of it; and last of all he sent his son, but "they said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance; and they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him. When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto Him: He will miserably destroy those wicked men; and He said unto them: . . . Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." We are told that when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard these parables, "they perceived that He spake of them." So, again, in the parable of the king who made a marriage for his son; but the guests refused to come, and the remnant took his servants and entreated

them spitefully and slew them; but when the king heard thereof he was wroth, and sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Even among the parables which, in their more general meaning, are peculiarly precious to Christians, as containing the very essence of the Gospel, such as that of the Prodigal Son, several have a clearly predictive character in reference to the Jews and the Gentiles. Even if our Lord had not uttered more direct predictions respecting the fate of the Jews and of Jerusalem, these parables alone would have been a marvellous record of supernatural foresight and prophecy.

But I need only remind you briefly of the clear and terrible prediction He uttered, towards the close of His ministry, respecting the doom which was to fall upon the Temple and the Holy City. His disciples came to Him, we read, to show Him the buildings of the Temple, and Jesus said unto them: "See ye not all these things. Verily, I say unto you there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down;" and soon afterwards His disciples came to Him privately, saying:

“Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?” In answer to this question, He delivered a prophecy which, although in some respects, to be presently noticed, very mysterious, predicted, in the most unmistakable manner, the fearful scenes of the destruction of Jerusalem which ensued about forty years later. “When ye shall see,” He said, “Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance . . . for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people, and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” Attempts to post-date either the Gospels, or these portions of them, so as to reduce these references, as a whole, to vaticinations after the event, have failed, and they stand upon the page of Jewish history like the words of

warning written by the finger of God upon the walls of the palace of the King of Babylon.

But they were not uttered as mere displays of our Lord's prophetic power, but with a momentous moral and religious purpose. They were intended to direct the thoughts and hopes of His disciples, and of the Church, to the course and the method in which the kingdom of God, which our Lord had from the first announced, would be developed and manifested. It is a characteristic feature in these predictions that they are wrapped up in a prophecy which looks far beyond them, to the final coming of our Lord in His full power and glory. It is this which constitutes that mystery in the discourse to which I have referred, and which no interpretation has fully succeeded in dissipating. Endeavours have often been made, for instance, to apply the whole discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jews, and the abolition of the Old Covenant; but although those events were undoubtedly of far more momentous importance in the divine economy of history than we sometimes realise, it is quite impracticable to explain some of the language

as referring to them only. We cannot possibly, for instance, regard as fulfilled in those events such language as this: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." It is manifest—and the consideration is one of importance in reference to the whole subject of prophecy—that we have here precisely the same phenomenon as in Old Testament prophecy—viz., a combination of the immediate and of the distant future, so entwined with one another that it is difficult to disentangle them. It is the same phenomenon, for instance, which perplexes us in some of the prophecies of Isaiah, where the happy prospect of a return from the exile seems swallowed up in the far larger

and grander visions of the final redemption of mankind.

But in the case of this grand prophecy of our Lord, we may, perhaps, see more clearly both the nature, the reason, and the purpose of His method. It would seem clear that the main and ultimate scope of the prophecy is to direct His disciples and His Church to be living perpetually in a state of watchfulness, and consequent preparation for His return, and for the final realisation and coming of His kingdom. He said to them, again and again, that the time of the final return could not be revealed to them. "Of that day and hour," He said, "knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My father only." He even disclaims any knowledge of it Himself. "Of that day and that hour knoweth no one," as St Mark records it, "no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." He repeated the same warning after the resurrection. "It is not for you," He said, "to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." That is a great mystery; but there could be no stronger assertion of the principle that the time of our Lord's final coming is absolutely

shrouded from all but the Father's own knowledge. This being so, it became impossible for our Lord to say that the final manifestation of His kingdom would not occur at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. It was impossible, it was forbidden even to Him, to declare before the event, that that which was immediately imminent was only the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the final revelation of His kingdom was reserved for a subsequent time. For all that was revealed, the two events might have fallen together in the same great catastrophe, and it was therefore impracticable to make a sharp chronological line of distinction between them, when looking forward to both. The destruction of Jerusalem was one great step in the manifestation of the divine kingdom. It was the final doom of the past ; and for all that men, or angels, or even the Son knew, it might have been the final doom of the present. The consequence is that the two momentous events are seen in vision as inextricably blended. The grand result of the discourse is that both events would happen, though whether they would happen together, or at an interval of time, long or short, no one, not even the Son, could tell.

The same principle will apply to the prophetic visions of the Old Testament. From the prophets, too, the times and the seasons were hidden, but they were granted a vision of the glory of the ultimate future, and at the same time of nearer events which were steps towards its realisation. They saw them both, but they could not tell whether, in point of time, they were closely associated, or separated by a long interval, and they described them as they saw them, projected in one plain and prophetic revelation.

But to us, the course of events has now separated the catastrophe of the Jewish nation from the remainder of the predictions in this solemn discourse of our Lord, and it remains to us the great prophecy in which the whole of His message is summed up. He began, as you have been reminded, by proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He concludes in this discourse, uttered at the very threshold of His cross, by warning us that that Kingdom, which has already come in so remarkable a degree, that realm in which He is acknowledged as the sole King and Lord, and of which we are professed members, will certainly come still nearer to us ; and though He cannot tell us

the day or the hour, yet the day and the hour will come, when He will reveal Himself in His full majesty and power, to enforce, fully and finally, the laws of His kingdom; when the Tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people; . . . but the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable . . . shall have their part . . . in the second death. He tells us that that great consummation will come with consequences of awful convulsion physical, moral, and political, of which the convulsions which accompanied the overthrow of the Jewish nation were a type; and He calls on us, by virtue at once of the certainty of the result and the uncertainty of the time, to be perpetually on the watch for Him, and to be in a state of preparation for His coming. "Be ye also ready," He says, "for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." "Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Such, then, in conclusion, is the nature and office of prophecy, as exemplified in its highest form in our Lord Himself. It is the very basis on which He builds His work; it is the ultimate and supreme motive on which He relies. "Repent," He says at the out-

set, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Watch," He says at the conclusion of His ministry, "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." In fact, what our Lord has done, in respect of the motives to be brought to bear upon our characters and upon our conduct, may be illustrated by the famous phrase that He "called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old." He announced a Kingdom, present in some degree now, but hereafter to be revealed in infinite glory, in which everyone will be judged according to the moral and spiritual laws He proclaimed; and He warns us that our relation to that kingdom is of such momentous importance as to overshadow every interest and every desire of this world. This Prophecy is the fulcrum, with which He would lift the heavy weight with which our souls are bound to this earth; and the experience of human nature tends to show that no other leverage is adequate to lift the burdens which hold us down.

In the other great religions of the world also it is the future which is the motive power. Perhaps the chief weakness of the Jewish religion lay in the remarkable fact, that its laws were not enforced by the sanction of a

future life. Why that sanction was withheld from them has been the subject of great debate ; but perhaps the reason is a more simple one than has been generally supposed. The future life could not be disclosed by a true revelation, until the Judge and the Saviour had been revealed, on whose mercy, as well as on whose judgment, that life is mainly dependent. Any attempt to depict that future without placing in the forefront the Saviour, for whose sake forgiveness is bestowed upon us, and by whom, at the same time, our judgment is pronounced, would have been necessarily misleading ; it must either have obscured the divine justice or the divine mercy. But from the moment when the Saviour's Death had made atonement for us, and the Saviour's Resurrection and Ascension had assured us of His office as our Lord and Judge in that eternal realm—from that moment the vision of the eternal future, the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord, lay open to human eyes ; and its prophetic revelation by Him furnished, to all who followed Him, a motive of transcendent power. So, accordingly, St Peter, who had heard this great discourse, summed up the gospel in his old age. "Blessed," he ex-

claimed, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. . . . Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

IX

PROPHECY IN THE EPISTLES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery ; (as I wrote afore in few words: Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ).”—EPH. iii. 3, 4.

IN this concluding lecture it remains for me to offer some observations on the predictive element in the Epistles of the New Testament. In the last lecture the momentous place held by prediction, and by warnings and exhortations founded on prediction, in our Lord's teaching was illustrated ; and it was shown, in particular, that the proclamation with which He and His forerunners commenced their ministry—that the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, was at hand—was really a summary of the whole of our Lord's message, a brief account of the work He accomplished and is still accomplishing. He established a Society of which

He is the acknowledged King ; the existence of that Society constitutes the great difference between the world before the coming of Christ and the world since His coming ; and He taught His disciples and ourselves to live in a constant state of watching for the complete and final revelation of that kingdom. He explained, also, in various parables of a predictive character, what would be the general nature and history of His Kingdom. But much in this subject was left by Him, as it were, in outline, and dimly shadowed forth, for the simple reason, as was pointed out, that it could not be clearly revealed or understood until the two great events had occurred, on which it was mainly dependent—His atoning death and His resurrection. Those two events entirely transformed the relation of men to Himself, to God and to one another, and until they had actually occurred, their significance could not be explained or appreciated. His atoning Death at once superseded and abolished the Jewish sacrifices, with the whole economy which those sacrifices represented ; and His Resurrection and Ascension, followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, introduced new spiritual forces into the world, and supplied

the means of life and growth to the new society.

Accordingly, when we pass to the Epistles, we find a new light thrown, by the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord, alike on the present and on the future, on the eternal spiritual relations of men to God, and on their mutual relations in the Christian society or Church. I cannot but remark again that it is strange it should be often made a complaint against the theological teaching, not merely of the Church but of the Apostles, that it gives prominence and importance to considerations which are less prominent in our Lord's own teaching. How could it be otherwise? Is it conceivable that such momentous events as the Passion and the Resurrection of our Lord could have occurred without leaving a deep and a new mark upon the Apostles' thoughts and lives, and without altering the proportion in which truths, old and new alike, appeared to them? It is by great actions that in the last resort life and history are moulded; and even our Lord's words, divine and regenerating as they are, were overshadowed by the supreme effect of His final actions—His Passion, His Death, and His Resurrection.

For our present purpose we are mainly concerned with but one of those effects—the creation and development of the Christian Church. It is evident from the Book of the Acts that the disciples and Apostles had at first very little idea of what that Church was destined to become, and in particular that they were far from appreciating the manner in which our Lord's sacrifice, and the consequent abolition of the Jewish dispensation, had done away with the division between Jew and Gentile, and rendered possible a universal society. The effect of our Lord's Atonement, and of His assumption of Royal and Judicial authority over all mankind, had to be gradually disclosed; but as soon as this becomes clear to them, after the Council at Jerusalem and the preaching of St Paul, the nature of that Church and its future history are revealed to them in great prophetic outlines, similar, in their combination of what is clear and what is obscure, what is immediate and what is distant, to prophecies in the Old Testament respecting the dispensation of the Gospel. In St Paul's writings, in particular, the vision of the Christian Church, of its character and of its future, emerges into more and more distinct vision and becomes

more and more prominent. The prophetic vision of the future Church grows upon him, and gives a new colour to his later Epistles.

Take, as a striking example of this prophetic view of the Church, the Epistle to the Ephesians from which the text is taken. If you recall the conditions under which those words were written, it will justly be considered one of the most astonishing, and most indisputable, instances of inspired and prophetic utterance to be found throughout the Scriptures. That the Gentiles are fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of the divine promise in Christ through the Gospel—this is to us a commonplace, and we may often listen to such passages without their making any startling impression upon us. But vastly different would have been their effect upon any reader at the time St Paul wrote them, whether Gentile or Jew. Bear in mind that there existed at that date the most absolute separation—and not merely separation but antagonism—between the Jews and all other races. In the Roman Empire, though the Jews were already spread throughout it, with much of that cosmopolitan genius they have

always displayed, they were nevertheless a people within a people, a world within a world. It would not be too much to say that the Jews and the Roman world constituted two independent civilisations and systems of life. The Jew lived upon his traditions and upon the promises made to the fathers ; he had his own kingdom and laws ; and he existed, not for the present, but for the future, for that time, foretold by his prophets, when the Messiah should be revealed, and the everlasting kingdom of the Son of David be set up. All that he saw was temporary, and simply subservient to this grand result, and he made no secret of his contempt for it, and sense of superiority to it. It was but natural that this feeling should be reciprocated by the Gentiles amidst whom he lived ; and the Jew was to them a member of a race whose habits and thoughts were incompatible with those of ordinary human society. He was tolerated, he was used ; but he was regarded as an alien, almost as an enemy of the human race. There was thus on both sides an insuperable sense of antagonism. The Jew and the Gentile dwelt apart ; each feeling that the other had no share in his hopes, his sympathies, his interests, and each

expecting, if not desiring, the overthrow, if not the extermination, of the other.

Now the Apostle who penned the words of the text was a representative member of this Jewish race, "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law a Pharisee." To us he is a Christian, and we do not easily realise him in another capacity. But the disciples were called Christians in Antioch by those who looked at them from without; the word is not used in St Paul's Epistles. He did not for one moment cease to be a Jew because he became a follower of Christ. On the contrary, he became more intensely, more profoundly, more heartily and sincerely a Jew, if possible, than ever before. He was more thoroughly a Jew because, unlike the mass of his people, he was a Jew full of hope and assurance, instead of a Jew depressed by disappointment and despair. Tenaciously as the Jews clung to their traditions and their prophecies, the sense of their destiny being persistently baffled created a bitterness and desperation among them, inconsistent with an enthusiastic faith and pride in their vocation. But to St Paul it was the reverse. He discerned, with the rapt and enthusiastic

vision of a prophet, that the promises made to his nation had, as a matter of fact, at last been fulfilled, that the Messiah for whom his people had been yearning throughout their long history had come, and that the moment of their highest glory had arrived; to him the words of the prophet Isaiah were no longer a mere prophecy; they were a realised fact: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." His spiritual eye discerned in our Lord the real King and Saviour of His people, who would establish a dominion more real and more powerful than any that had yet been conceived. His soul is filled, therefore, not merely with the faith of a Christian, but with the faith of a Christian Jew; and he speaks in all his Epistles in the spirit, and from the point of view, of a Jew whose national hopes have at length been fulfilled. In this very Epistle to the Ephesians, for instance, he seems, in the chapter immedi-

ately preceding this, to address the Gentiles with something of the old sense of superiority. "Wherefore," he says, "remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh, made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:"—the very description which any devout Jew would have given of the Gentiles—"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."

Such was the position of the Apostle, and from this point of view it is that he utters the predictions (for such they are) in the text. He is a prisoner at Rome; regarded by the Romans as simply the leader of a new sect of Jews, promising in some respects to be more troublesome than the Jews themselves. He feels visibly impressed upon him, in every possible way, that antagonism between the

two peoples of which I have spoken. He was the one man of that day who knew both worlds thoroughly, and could, therefore, best appreciate the separation between them. A Jew who was only a Jew might shut himself up among his own people, and might fail to appreciate the intensity of the opposition which his name and faith produced. A Gentile Christian who had not happened to live amidst a community of Jews might similarly fail to appreciate the intense indignation and aversion with which they regarded one who, as they deemed, was intruding with unhallowed foot into the sanctuary of their faith. But St Paul could be under no such misconception. By Gentiles he had been persecuted as a Jew: by Jews he had been stoned as a renegade to the Gentiles. He stood, as it were, between two worlds, each protesting against him, and declaring that he had neither part nor lot with them. To proclaim to the Jews that the Gentiles would become one with them—to proclaim to the Gentiles that they would become of the same body as the Jews, and joint partakers of the Jewish promises—each was at that day a paradox—and an equally offensive paradox; to proclaim it, moreover, not merely as a possi-

bility, but as the most unquestionable of certainties, as a Divine Revelation, and as announcing the greatest glory of Jew and Gentile alike—this must have seemed to the men of that day little less than madness. “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad,” was no unnatural exclamation.

Such, however, was the deliberate and constant message of the Apostle. He declared, in face of all this contradiction, of this seeming impossibility, that to him had been supernaturally revealed the mystery which had been up to that time hidden in the consciousness of God. “By revelation,” he said, “He made known unto me the mystery; . . . Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit.” He felt himself standing at the turning point in the history of the world, and he claimed to see unveiled before him the main and essential design which, from thenceforward, was to be carried out by the Divine hand. He claimed to discern, not merely the revelation of the grace and truth of the Saviour’s character, he claimed not merely to be the

messenger of a new spiritual truth, but he did not scruple to avow that the main scope of the divine purposes in succeeding history had been made known to him. "Unto me," he says, "who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in heavenly places might be known through the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The very principalities and powers of heaven are regarded by him as looking on with wonder at this mysterious unveiling of divine purposes, and at this utterly unforeseen and scarcely conceivable birth of time. A result the most improbable, the most offensive in idea to all but a handful of people then living, is solemnly declared by him to be the ultimate design of God.

Let us endeavour to realise what we may venture, from a human point of view, to

call the sublime audacity of such a prediction. It is not a hope, it is not an idea of a possible development; it is a positive assurance of the future course of history. But this prediction has been realised. It has been so abundantly realised that, as I remarked at the outset, we sometimes fail to appreciate the extent to which it was a prediction. That which the Apostle declared has become true to the letter, alike in relation to the Gentiles and to the Jews. We of the Gentiles have entered into the spiritual inheritance of the ancient Jewish people. The prophets, the psalmists, the historians, the Messiah of the Jews are all ours. We are consciously, in spirit, of the same body as David and Isaiah; our spiritual life is sustained by their words, our hopes are fed by their promises. It is of the essence of our position as Christians to claim that we have become of one body with God's ancient people, and that all His promises to them are fulfilled to us. Our highest pride and privilege is that we are no longer aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but that in Christ Jesus we are the subjects of the King of the Jews, and belong to His people, whom He came to save from

their sins. St Paul, as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, has brought us to share his fellowship and his glory. On the other hand, his predictions respecting the Hebrews have similarly been fulfilled. "I would not," he says, "brethren, that ye should be ignorant . . . that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved." These wild dreams of the Apostle, as they must have seemed at that time to Jew and Gentile alike, were the sober visions of a divinely inspired foresight; and within ten years of the time when Jerusalem was to be trodden down of the Gentiles, and the division between the two peoples made more visible and more bitter than ever, the Apostle foresaw the intercommunion of the two, and the most essential element in the history of the next 1800 years.

But there is another great element of prediction respecting the Christian Church which especially claims notice at this point, as it had a peculiar interest for the founder of these lectures, Bishop Warburton. The purpose of his foundation was "to prove the truth of revealed religion in general, and of the Christian in particular, from the com-

pletion of prophecies in the Old and New Testaments which relate to the Christian Church, especially to the apostasy of papal Rome." The prophecies respecting the Christian Church generally, on which we have just been dwelling, appeared to him to receive an addition of extraordinary force in the intimations, by which they were accompanied, of the corruption and apostasy which would arise in the Christian society. His biographer, Bishop Hurd, who was the first to fill the office of lecturer in this Trust, says, in his *Life of Bishop Warburton*, that some particular prophecies had struck his attention as furnishing the most decisive argument for the truth of Christianity. And he quotes from one of Bishop Warburton's works the following observation—"I have ever thought," he says, "the prophecies relating to Antichrist, interspersed within the Old and New Testaments, the most convincing proof of the truth of Christian religion that any moral matter is capable of receiving:" And again, "This question, what individual power is meant in the prophecies, is one in the right determination of which alone I am persuaded you might rest the whole truth of the Christian religion "

(p. 90). Among his works is an interesting discourse on the rise of Antichrist, in which he points out that the conviction, which prevailed in the Protestant Church at the Reformation, that the Papacy was the Antichristian power predicted by St Paul and St John, had been discredited by the exaggerated light in which it had been placed by the Puritans, as well as by the violence with which it had been employed in controversy, to discredit every ceremony or custom which was in the least degree connected with the Roman Church—an extravagance of which we have too much evidence even at the present day. A whole series of these Lectures has before now been devoted to the investigation of this subject, particularly in connection with the Revelation of St John, and no less than a whole course of Lectures would suffice to deal with it satisfactorily.

One observation may be made, in passing, in reference to the problems presented by that book, which seems to have an important bearing upon the general principles of prophetic interpretation. It is often laid down by modern interpreters of prophecy, as an unquestionable canon, that all prophecy is to be interpreted, in the first instance, in relation to

the events of the prophet's own age, so that prophecies like those in the latter part of the Book of Isaiah, which deal with events after Isaiah's age, cannot be attributed to him. But if so, what are we to say of the Apocalypse? A large part, at all events, of that book deals with subjects so entirely out of the range of observation in the age in which it was written, or in any subsequent age, that after 1800 years its meaning remains, in great measure, a profound mystery. That the last book of the New Testament should be a prophecy of supreme awe and grandeur, is a final illustration of the predominant importance of prophecy in the scheme of divine revelation; and that it should be so mysterious illustrates, not less forcibly, the principle that prophecy is really only interpreted by its fulfilment, that as it came not of old time by the will of man, its meaning may not be open to the understanding of men, or even to that of the prophet himself, until history has supplied the key to its interpretation. The prophecies relating to our Lord's first coming were not clearly understood before the event, and those which predict the circumstances of His Second Advent will

similarly receive their only adequate illumination as that Advent approaches.

But, without attempting a detailed inquiry into this subject, which would be inconsistent with the scope of the present course of lectures, it must be recognised that Bishop Warburton was at least justified in this general observation, that St Paul, in his Epistles to the Thessalonians, and St John, in his Revelation, clearly reveal the broad fact that a great apostasy would appear in the Christian Church, which would mislead Christians in the most disastrous degree, and which would only be overthrown at the final appearance of our Lord Himself. The Apostles looked forward to our Lord's coming, and did not know how soon that consummation might arrive; but St Paul expressly warned the Thessalonians not to be "soon shaken in mind, or be troubled . . . as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man" he said, "deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." Similarly St John warns his children again and again that, within the Christian Church, false prophets and Antichrists would come, and that the

spirit of Antichrist was already in the world. St Paul, again, speaks of a distinct revelation — that “the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits . . . ; speaking lies in hypocrisy ; having their conscience seared with a hot iron ; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.”

Now little as we may be disposed to denounce another communion, we cannot, as Protestant Churchmen, disguise our belief that a great apostasy, and an apostasy bearing a great resemblance to some of the marks indicated by St Paul, has arisen in the Christian Church, and has attained what we must needs regard as monstrous and pernicious proportions. It is certainly a most striking fact that, side by side with the grand picture of a universal Church, comprising both Jews and Gentiles, and constituting the very body of which the Saviour Himself is the head, the Apostles drew also a picture of a profound corruption within that body, and that the latter prediction has been fulfilled as sadly as the other has been fulfilled gloriously. St John in his Revelation leads us to expect that that

apostasy will not be overcome without tremendous religious, moral, and political convulsions, and there is certainly enough in the state of the world at the present day to render such a prediction only too probable. Such is the general character of the Apostolic predictions with respect to the future of that visible Church of God which it was their mission to establish. The predictions they uttered respecting it were utterly beyond all human expectation; but they have been already fulfilled to a most remarkable degree, and nothing has occurred in the history of the Church which is not in harmony with their prophetic statements. We have the more reason to fear that the worst and most terrible of those predictions will be verified, and that we ought to live in preparation for those supreme conflicts which both our Lord and His Apostles prophesied would conclude the present dispensation.

Let me only add, in laying aside this great subject, that, however imperfectly and unworthily it may have been treated, its consideration cannot fail to be profitable if it only ends in directing our thoughts to those supreme and final realities, those last things, as Christian writers have been wont to call

them, which we all as individuals, and not merely as members of a Church, have to meet. We are all, alas, familiar—all at least who are old enough, as is the case with most of us, to have stood by the side of many a grave—too familiar in one sense, though we cannot be too familiar in another, with those grand prophecies of the future destiny of our souls and of our bodies, which St Paul was inspired to write for the lasting consolation of Christian hearts in mourning and in death. To every one of us the most important of all the apostolic prophecies is his declaration, “Behold, I show you a mystery : We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump : for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” If the predictions of our Lord and of His Apostles have already received so large a degree of fulfilment, we have the stronger ground for faith in these solemn prophecies of what we may, each one of us, hope to experience in the future. God grant that we may so live in that faith as to be able to join in the concluding exclamation of that great prophecy—“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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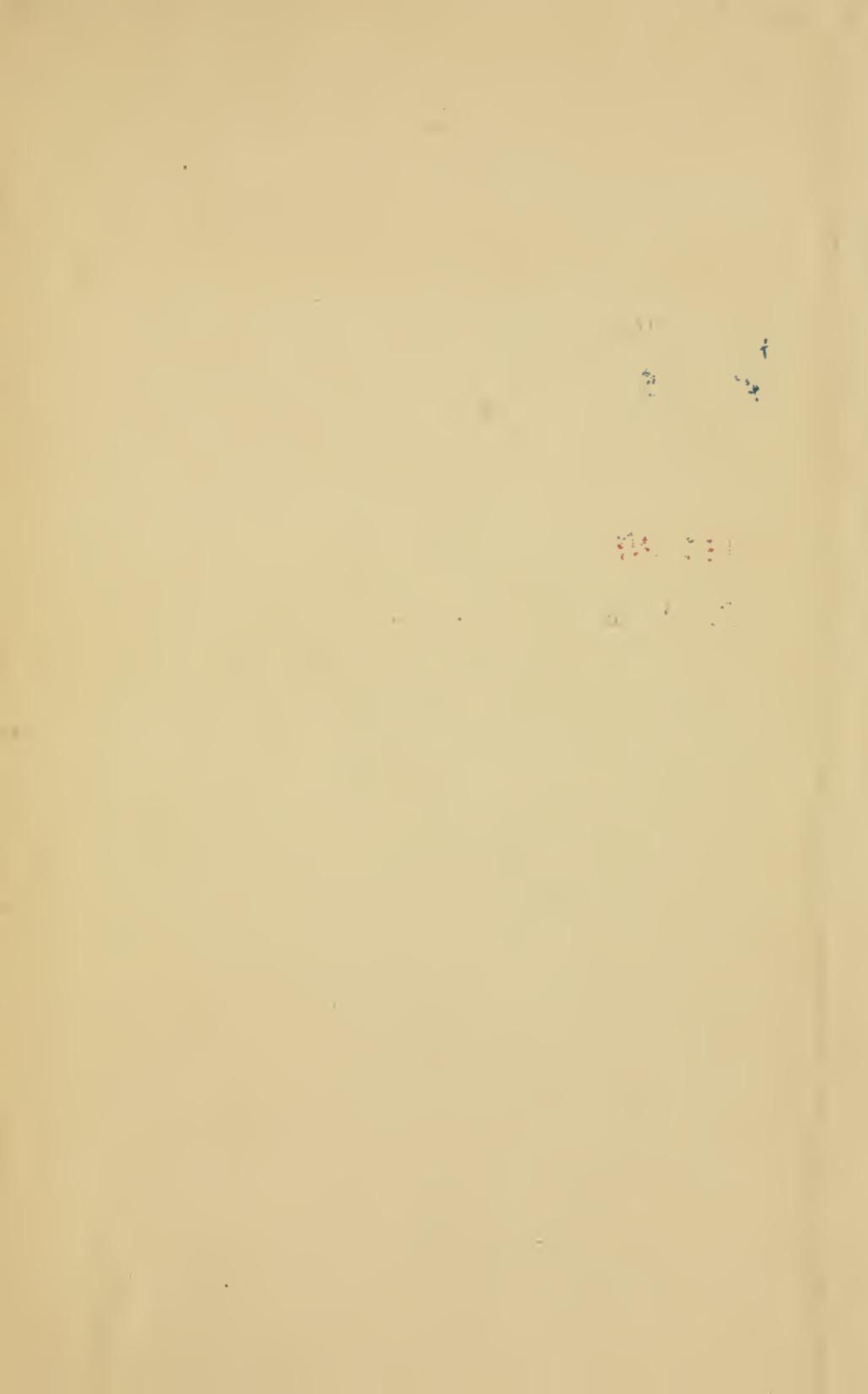
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