

all who should follow Him. *My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory.* This test may be applied to the company of the prophets, and, if applied with candour, will result in the conviction that such a body of men could never have imposed a series of delusions on their own people and on the whole world. But this is not all. These men were fortified by two other qualifications. They were sometimes armed with the power of working miracles, as in the case of Moses and Elijah. Sometimes also their credential was the utterance of prediction: *When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor comes to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken.* This, however, leads to that second and more limited meaning of the word which has almost displaced the former.

John vii.
16—18.

Deut.
xviii. 22

PROPHETIC PREDICTION.

Predic-
tion.

Prophecy is thus more specifically the impartation of a Divine knowledge of the future to man: that is, it embraces the prediction of future events. All revelation from the beginning has been prediction unfolding into prediction. This, we have seen, is its law; concerning which no more can be said than that the God of revelation has so willed it. We can imagine it otherwise: every generation might have been taught its lesson, as based upon the past, but not including the future. But we are shut up to the assumption that revelation is the progressive disclosure of one great event to which the eyes of all generations, as well before it as after it, were to be directed. Moreover, according to the testimony of Scripture itself the prediction of future events followed by the accomplishment of those predictions has always been one of the Divine methods of authenticating revelation. Here then we have the general laws of prophecy proper, and its criterion as a credential.

THE GENERAL LAWS OF PROPHETIC PREDICTION.

Laws of
Prophecy.

There are a few general principles the study of which are of great importance in order to a right estimate of Scriptural prediction as a distinct and pervasive credential of revelation.

Christ its
Object.
Acts x.
43.

John v.
39.
Rev. xix.
10

Double
sense.

1. The first is that CHRIST IS ITS SUPREME SUBJECT: the Object to Whom *give all the prophets witness*, directly or indirectly, from generation to generation, till He came; and for Whose return, now that He is gone, all the predictions of Scripture wait. The Redeemer Himself declared that the Scriptures were to be searched because they *testify of Me*: as if whatever else might be found in them this was their supreme matter. *The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy*. His Person, advent, and kingdom give to all the prophecies of Scripture their unity. The great catholic all-embracing predictions which pervade revelation concerning the accomplished redemption of mankind, from the Protevangelium, or first prediction with promise, downward, are everywhere found; each new cycle of the prophetic inspiration pays its tribute to that great design of the coming Deliverer. While no prophet is ever heard to foreannounce his successor, all conspire to foreannounce the Christ. We cannot always see the connection between the lesser predictions and that vast accomplishment; but we do see that the running superscription of prophetic revelation is the final kingdom of the Redeemer. All types, which are prophecies in act, and all predictions, which are prophecies in word, have a more or less obvious reference to the Gospel. To discover this we often have to apply what is called the Canon of a Double Sense; that is, a first accomplishment nearer at hand, which itself suggests a second and ulterior satisfying all requirements: a combination worthy of the Divine attributes, and resembling in the free domain of history the use of symbols in nature; the events to which the predictions first refer being themselves prophetic of Christ. In due time we must examine the predictions of the Old Testament more in detail. Meanwhile, all that is necessary here is to dwell on this law as stamping the credential character of prophecy. There are indeed predictions in the Old Testament—such as those minutely describing the destruction of some of the ancient cities of the world—the accomplishment of which is known and read of all men who study history. They must not be forgotten. But whoever examines the New Testament carefully will see that the whole strain of allusion to the Great Fulfilment of the fulness of time points to the coming and kingdom of Jesus as the one accomplish-

ment that guarantees all the rest. There is nothing more certain in the annals of mankind than that a series of predictions runs through the ancient literature of the Jews which has had a most exact fulfilment in the advent and work of Jesus. This is the supreme credential of prophecy in revelation.

2. Another unfailing evidence of the Divine presence in the prophetic Scripture is the peculiar law of PROGRESSION found to pervade them: a law which determines the steady development of the great doctrine of revelation according to certain fixed principles. Every age is under the sway of some governing prophecy the accomplishment of which introduces the government of a new order of prophetic expectation. The fulfilment of one prediction becomes the starting-point of another, with wider issues and a larger number of subordinate tributaries.

Progression.

(1.) It may be said that one transcendent prophecy begins the Scripture, commands the whole of revelation, and binds time and eternity in one: the first Gospel of a coming Redeemer. But even this illustrates, like all others, that largest application of the principle which divides the whole series into the Old-Testament predictions and those of the New. All the ancient prophets spoke of what Isaiah, in their name, calls the *Last Days*, or the great AFTERWARD, that indefinite period of Jacob's prophecy, **בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים**, which began to be more definite in the opening vision of the evangelical Prophet, *It shall come to pass in the last days*. The coming of that glorious After Age, or the ends of the world, or the world to come, the Fulfilment, is the *fulness of time* generally. Particularly, it is stamped with perfection in the New Testament by three tokens: it is the time of the last days when God spoke His perfect revelation *by His Son*, and imperfect oracles were consummated by one Final Voice; secondly, when He who was *foreordained before the foundation of the world*, and *testified beforehand, was manifest in these last times*, as the spotless Lamb of the Finished Atonement; and, finally, the period of the last days when the prophecy was accomplished, *I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh*. These three events fill up the perfection of the Second Period of redemption: the Voice of the Son, the Atoning Blood, the Effusion of the Spirit. And with Christ, the supreme Fulfilment, begins a new order and range of prophecy.

The One Gospel.

Gen. xlii. 1.

Is. ii. 2.

Gal. iv. 4.

Heb. i. 2

1 Peter i 11, 20.

Acts ii. 17.

What eternity is to time that His coming in the new economy is to the expectation of Him in the old. In fact, the very same language was adopted by the ancient Rabbins to distinguish these: the time of the Messiah was the WORLD TO COME, עולם הבא.

Subordi-
nate
Cycles.

(2.) The same principle may be traced in the subordinate cycles throughout Scripture. The patriarchal predictions, while always faithful to the first law and keeping the Messianic age in view, terminated in Canaan, to begin again with an altogether new order of prophecies. The predictions of the Jewish prophets, so far as they referred to the Captivity, found their accomplishment in that event, the first goal of the largest of all clusters of foreannouncement; but with that accomplishment another series emerged into prominence. Similarly, there are, in the New Testament, subordinate cycles of predictions out of the accomplishment of which other predictions arise. Over the Incarnation there was a large array of prophetic songs, pointing to the Advent but including also its ulterior results. Our Lord's own predictions referred to His death and resurrection and ascension; to the outpouring of His Spirit, the establishment of His kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem, the final resurrection, and the end of the world: the largest and most comprehensive series of predictions delivered by any one Voice since prophecy began. The same law is latent in the Apocalypse, the last book of prophecy; but here our eyes are holden, and it is not given to those who now read to trace its operation otherwise than in broad outline. The more this general principle is studied, in its application to the entire mass of the predictions of Scripture, the more glorious will appear to all dispassionate students the economy of prophecy which the Omniscient Mind has ordered. Whatever it may be to those who are bent upon resisting all evidences that recommend the Word of God, to those who are OF THE TRUTH this law of foreannouncement will itself be a strong credential of revelation.

Reserve.

3. Once more, and pursuing the same topic a little further, all prophecy is under the law of RESERVE; a mysterious law which has been appointed in the Divine counsel, and has literally never been changed. In its absolute supremacy it governs the development of revelation: this being the difference between time and eternity, that in the latter alone will all restriction be done away.

Neither *What* nor *What manner of time* has ever been fully made clear until the day has declared it. It is evident that this might have been otherwise. The same Spirit Who foreannounced the Coming of the Christ could have so described His Person, so unfolded His work, and so defined the period of His advent, as to remove every vestige of uncertainty. But this was not His will. He so ordered every prediction, and every cycle of predictions, that, while enough was declared to encourage hope and excite desire, enough was concealed to shut up the heirs of prophecy to faith. Looking back upon the long series as irradiated by the light of Pentecost we see that every general and every more particular prediction had its determinate reference to the Great Fulfilment; but we can see also that not one of them was clear enough to preclude unbelief in the case of those who were disposed to murmur against Divine Providence. Every generation could rejoice in the fulfilment of the prophecies that had gone before concerning itself; but as to its own future it was under the sway of an indefinite hope. There is no exception to this law throughout the economy of prophecy. When it was approaching its Old-Testament close, it might appear as if the law was somewhat relaxed; for Daniel's predictions are exceedingly minute, and their specifications of the Seventy Weeks, and of the peculiarity of the last week of the Seventy, goes beyond the general indeterminateness of prophetic utterance; but his prophecies are no real exception, having been until the Messiah came almost as indeterminate as the date of the Millennium. The New Testament introduces the same law, and is everywhere faithful to it. Reserve begins again; and it reigns over the expectations of the Christian church at the present hour. Our Lord's foreannouncements of His passion were veiled in a certain obscurity; and it was not until after His resurrection that even the THIRD DAY was understood. Even when approaching the seventh of the weeks before Pentecost, and giving His disciples their last encouragement, the Saviour says only *Not many days hence*, though we might suppose that the tenth day would be certain to all. As soon as the Holy Ghost begins a new cycle of predictions concerning the coming again of Jesus, with all the subordinate fulfilments of prophecy connected with that event, we mark that we are under the same

1 Peter 1
11.

Acts 1 5

1 Peter i.
11.

restrictions as the fathers were under. We have the immeasurable advantage of the accomplishment of the greatest prophecies concerning Him in the First Advent; but the times and the seasons of the Return are still under a veil. We have, like the ancients, to inquire diligently *what or what manner of time the Spirit of the Christ did signify*. Nor have we a right to expect until the Lord comes a more clear and full revelation of the Millennial events than the fathers had of the Advent of the Redeemer. Now this law of a strict reserve is itself a glorious testimony to the wisdom and goodness of the God of revelation: especially when it is connected with those we have already referred to. For, to sum up, all prophecy points to One Supreme Person, like the needle to the pole, and with only the same tremulous variation; all proceeds in the majestic march of a determinate counsel, but in spiral cycles; and over all, including that under which we live, there is the same veil of heavenly mystery. Like every past generation, we also are in the hour of a great Expectation: an hour or a day which is rich with the inheritance of a vast fulfilment, but richer still, if possible, in the hope of a yet more abundant inheritance hereafter when the time of its perfect revelation and enjoyment shall have fully come.

A Sign to
every Ge-
neration.

4. Finally, an important law of all prophetic announcements is that it has been constituted by the Holy Spirit a sign to every successive generation: in other words, like the miracle proper, and equally with the miracle, it has been a Divine credential of revelation. In the unlimited wisdom of the Supreme the prophetic office was ordained to subserve many purposes. It was the medium through which the supreme communications were, from time to time, made to the chosen people, of encouragement or warning to themselves, and of defiance and threatening against their enemies. Hence for a long series of ages it was the vehicle of the entire economy of Divine instruction: containing the doctrines and the ethics of the religion common to all dispensations, with a glorious prospective announcement of the Christian truth hereafter to be revealed. Hence the prophetic books, and the prophetic elements in all the other books, are to us an inexhaustible fund of instruction apart from their predictions of future events. But, all this being true, it is equally plain that

the whole system of foreannouncement was intended to be from generation to generation a standing and permanent credential. There is abundant evidence of this in all parts of the Old Testament. *And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the words which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken.* Long afterwards we read: *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else: I am God, and there is none like Me. Declaring futurity from the former time, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.* To this our Lord gives His own sanction for the New Testament: *And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe.*

Deut.
xviii.
21, 22.

Isa. xlii.
9, 10.

John xiv.
29.

THE TESTS OF THE PROPHETIC CREDENTIAL.

THE TESTS of prophecy are very simple. They are, strictly speaking, not the moral character of the prophet, nor the worthiness of the matter, nor the preservation of the record, nor obvious connection with the Divine scheme: these are all implied characteristics which have been already dwelt on in another connection. But the prophecies which are the credentials of a revelation ought to be such as to satisfy their student that they can be accounted for only by Omniscience; they should be beyond the suspicion of a mere human fulfilment; and they must of course, in order to be prophecies, precede their accomplishment.

Tests of
Prophecy

1. It is undeniable that the prediction of future events is the prerogative of Omniscience alone; and also that in the Scriptures God is represented as making it one great purpose in His commission of the prophets to establish clearly this claim. We may suppose therefore that the predictions of Scripture will generally, if not in all individual and isolated cases, have such a character as to be beyond the reach of human calculation. It may safely be granted that in some cases it is impossible to prove the event foreannounced to have been beyond the range of skilful foresight. But it must be remembered that the weight of the argument from prophecy does not rest upon isolated examples: it depends upon certain great and prominent and vast predictions

Possible
only to
Omniscience.