

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. xli.
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.

such as only the Supreme Mind could have given to men, and the accomplishment of which is before our eyes. Beginning with these, and fortified by their undeniable strength, we have only afterwards to stand on the defensive with regard to the rest: nothing is necessary beyond establishing that the opposite conclusion cannot be proved. First, then, let this test be applied to that One Great Object of prophecy to Whom all the prophets bore witness. During a thousand years a perfect picture is gradually drawn, by more than a hundred distinct predictions, of One Person, and of Him as unique in the history of mankind: that distinct picture being the filling up of an outline which had been sketched thousands of years before, in fact from the very beginning of the world. Could the Deliverer of mankind have been foreseen in all the marvellous traits of His character, and in all the minute circumstances of His appearance and history and life and death and resurrection and reign, by the enthusiasm of national longing? Could the converging foresight of a series of prophets have drawn this most elaborate and most sacred Portrait? The same may be said as to the steadfast predictions of the fates of some of the leading nations of the world. After the Person of the Messiah, the Israel after the flesh which rejected Him takes the next rank in the historical perspective of prophecy. There is a similar wonderful unanimity in the predictions of their entire history whether as originally Hebrews, or afterwards Israelites, or in more modern times Jews. Their destiny as depicted in the Bible, that is in both Testaments, brings prophecy and fulfilment into such plain and undeniable harmony that no room ought to be left for infidelity. This is a topic that must be pursued through the whole Bible, which shows that the rejection and dispersal of the people was foretold when it was most prosperous, its elevation and dignity when it was most dejected. Moses, the founder of Hebrew greatness, foretold the dispersion of Israel as the result of their disobedience, and at the same time their preservation through all ages as distinct and unconfounded among the nations. Scarcely one of the later prophets but has repeated this wonderful prophecy, applicable to no other race. The nations among which they were scattered have disappeared, or are in course of disappearance: the ten tribes are wanderers over the

face of the earth still. They have survived the greatest revolutions of history : a standing proof that the Eye of the Supreme foresaw what His omnipotent Hand has accomplished. *Though I make an end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make an end of thee.* And, as to those other nations themselves, the prophetic Scriptures abound with predictions, more or less minute, the fulfilment of which has proved that the voice of God uttered them. It was foretold, again and again, that the covenant people should go into captivity : that the captives should be again set free, and those who spoiled them be themselves laid waste. A minute study of these prophecies will show, and the more minute the study the more effectually will it show, that Omniscience was in these predictions. Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah predicted that the kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem also would be scourged by Assyria ; and it was so. The fulfilment was exact as to the ravage of Samaria, and the restraining hand that saved Jerusalem from destruction. In the year 712 B.C. Nahum denounced ruin against the Assyrian oppressor and Nineveh : in the year 612 B.C., after a century which had given no signs of this, the destruction of Nineveh took place. Concerning Babylon also, the successor of Assyria, there were equally sure words of prophecy. No fact in human annals is more certain than that the Babylonian captivity was foretold by Isaiah, and also the deliverance of the people ; nor than that Micah, two hundred years before their accomplishment, predicted the same events. The burden of Tyre in Isaiah described its ruin by the Chaldeans in a manner so clear and explicit, and so fully confirmed by history, as to make it one of the triumphs of prophetic evidence. But for confirmation of the evidence the prophecies themselves must be carefully studied. This branch of the Apologetics of revelation is only glanced at in this general summary ; it will amply repay the most exhaustive examination.

Jer. xxx.
11.

2. As the first test pays its tribute to the Omniscience of the God of revelation, so the second pays its tribute to the Omnipotence. Only He Who gave them could fulfil the predictions of Scripture. But it has been urged by the opponents of the Faith that many of those so-called vaticinations which undeniably are found in the rhapsodies of the prophets were really fulfilled ; but

Fulfilment
required
Omnipotence.

Matt. i.
22.
2 Peter i.
16.

fulfilled through the determination of those who were interested in their accomplishment that they should be accomplished. It is pleaded with great subtilty that patriotic enthusiasts, gifted with keen foresight, gave hints of what they saw in the germ of probability; and that these hints fulfilled themselves. It is not a hopeless, nor is it even a difficult, task to vindicate the whole body of Old-Testament foreannouncements from this charge. But it most concerns us to examine it in its reference to the New Testament, where it is applied, with some show of plausibility, but with no real force, to the Supreme Fulfilment of all prophecy. The spirit of infidelity does not shrink from making the career of Christ a studied adaptation to Himself of the scattered prophetic hints of the ancient records. It seizes upon the Scriptural word, *that it might be fulfilled*; and boldly assumes that the entire history of our Lord and His kingdom in the New Testament was a *cunningly devised fable*, woven after the pattern given in the Old Testament. It is scarcely necessary to say that here lies the stress of the whole argument against the Christian revelation as resting upon the fulfilment of prophecy. We may remain for ever in doubt as to the precise relation of some of the obscurer predictions of the prophets to their fulfilment: the doubt is simply the result of our ignorance of many of the elements necessary to its solution. But it is a matter of vital importance, the very life of Christianity is in it, that our Lord's manifestation on earth should be a fulfilment of what was provided and foretold according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; and not a studied assumption of a character and destiny sketched in the enthusiasm of national hope. Here we must needs argue in a circle: it is the first necessity, as will be hereafter seen, that, as we believe in God, we believe also in His Son. And He rests the whole issue of His mission, with all its boundless interests to mankind, upon the accomplishment of the entire prophetic word in Himself. He has appropriated all the leading foreannouncements of the Messiah to His own Person. But, in His own application, and in that of His Spirit in the Apostles, there is a distinction to be observed. While all the major prophecies are referred to as absolutely accomplished in His mission—beginning with His incarnation and ending with His final return—many of the minor

prophecies are said to be fulfilled in an accommodated sense. The formula *that it might be fulfilled* applies to some events which accomplish prophetic types : such as *Out of Egypt have I called My Son* : and, *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was a voice heard*. The same principle may be applied to many quotations from the ancient prophets : in Christ and His kingdom all types and predictions found as it were their natural and legitimate resting place. But it must be remembered that, if the Supreme Fulfilment is in Christ, His authority must protect all the prophets who wrote of Him : protect them, not only in their general authenticity, but also in the detail of these most obscure predictions. The two prophets against whose mission and specific prophecies infidelity has most vehemently excepted are Isaiah and Daniel ; and these are precisely the prophets whom Jesus and His Apostles most emphatically quote. They are safe therefore in our estimation for the Master's sake. But, speaking generally, they are safe in their own integrity. Their leading foreannouncements were such as could never have fulfilled themselves, nor have been fulfilled by those who artfully seize upon these hints. Have the nations and empires whose overthrow was predicted and accomplished, fulfilled the predictions by their own cunning ? Are the Jews executing on themselves the judgment written ? They are the most determined enemies of the Christian Fulfilment ; but they do not deny that the hand of God has been long against them. He has smitten them, they think, for the chastisement of the world's peace ; and wounded them for the transgressions of mankind ; but surely they have not smitten and wounded themselves in order to fulfil predictions bound up with their own disgrace.

Matt. i.
22.
Hos. xi. 1
Matt. ii
17, 18

3. The test of prophecy takes yet another form. It is very confidently asserted that some of the avowed predictions of Scripture were written **POST EVENTUM** : after the supposed accomplishment. To prove this in the case of any of the least of these predictions is a task which has not succeeded ; in the case of the greatest of them, that is of those on which the burden of the credential lies, it has been a hopeless failure. But the spirit of infidelity is very bold : as daring in its unholy attacks as the spirit of faith is daring in its acceptance of mysteries. From the

**Post
Eventum.**

earliest assault on prophecy down to modern times the whole force of its attack has taken this direction. Disintegrating the Scriptures as a whole, utterly renouncing the traditions of ages, and attaching no weight to the testimony of Christ and His Apostles, of the Jewish and Christian churches from the beginning, it scruples not to make the Pentateuch a Mosaic tessellation of documents to which Moses has only given his name, which indeed belongs to a period subsequent to the Captivity; and the voices of the psalmists and prophets, from Samuel and David to Joel and Zechariah, are regarded as singing strains which turn history, past and present, into poetry with a prophetic form. The Book of Daniel is declared to have been written after the leading events which it records, these being mainly predictions concerning Antiochus Epiphanes; while its remarkable miracles are supposed to prove its unauthentic character as well as later origin. It has been seen that the Lord has thrown His shield around this prophet; He mentions him by name; receives from him His Messianic designation, Son of Man, and that of His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven; and generally protects him by anticipation against all assaults. The Lord's own apology is sustained by the best modern research; and, after the utmost critical sifting, its most vehement opponents have no argument to allege but the extreme minuteness of its prophecies and the supernatural hand in its events. The Holy Gospels contain predictions of the Supreme Prophet; and they also are therefore assigned, in spite of the strongest evidence of antiquity, to a period after the destruction of Jerusalem. In this case also our loyalty to the Lord almost forbids argument. If Christ Jesus be worthy of any confidence the main predictions of the Old and New Testaments must have been delivered before their fulfilment. As to a multitude of lesser prophecies, about which there may be contention, the application of our test, and the consequent vindication of the prophets in detail, will require the close study of prophetic Scripture as a distinct branch of theology. But that minute investigation is not necessary to show the triumph of this particular credential of revelation as such in its broad outlines. Doubtless the New Testament followed the Old, and the Old was not written after the event. The dispersion of the Jews, the spread of Christianity, the ruin

of the great empires whose burdens rest upon the prophets, the signs of Antichrist, the latter-day infidelity,—all are fulfilments of distinct prophecy, which assuredly was written before their accomplishment.

PROPHECY AND MIRACLE.

The evidence of Prophecy as a credential of revelation is of the highest order: whether taken by itself or in connection with miracle generally.

Nature
of Cre-
dential.

1. In common with miracle proper it is a standing and perpetual token of the Divine presence in the whole sphere of revelation. He Himself appeals to both as His high prerogative in many of the sublimest passages of the prophets. *I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly and they came to pass.* It was the Voice Supernatural, beyond the ordinary methods of guiding man's inquiries, that declared all coming events from the beginning: nothing worth calling history has taken place without foreannouncement. And it was the Hand Supernatural, beyond the ordinary and quiet operation of Providence in nature, that SUDDENLY brought it to pass. The boundless variety and steadfast unity of these predictions give them an unspeakable grandeur; and the wonderful events in human history which are the direct fulfilment of prophecy are beyond all others great in all the elements of sublimity. In fact, if all the events which have been matter of fulfilment and of prophecy are eliminated from the current of human history there is not much that is left. The leading transactions of every age have been under a ruling prophecy; and we also, in our day, wait to see the end of the things that concern ourselves.

The
Presence
of God.
Isa. xlviii
3.

2. Viewed apart, and by themselves, these prophecies are peculiarly cumulative in their demonstrative force. Unlike the miracles, the fulfilled predictions constantly enlarge the materials of their evidence. There is a sense indeed in which this observation, frequently made, is not true. The miracles recorded in Scripture are thought to be more feebly commended to the acceptance of every succeeding generation; as if the testimony

Cumula-
tive.