

THE
CHURCHMAN

DECEMBER, 1902.

ART. I.—THE PROPHETIC CHARACTER OF THE
JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS.

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 Apostles' 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 realization 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 produced 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 afterthought 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 third edition has been completed this year. He says (vol. ii., p. 505) 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. 508) that “the stream of Messianic prediction is poured forth in rich fulness 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. 510) that “the image of the Messianic King appears in fuller colours and in sharper outlines. These psalms are particularly instructive in one point—namely, that the author emphasizes 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 not less than 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 completely 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 light 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." HENRY WACE.



ART. II.—LIGHT FROM THE ALMANACK.

Matt. xiv. 22-33 ; Mark vi. 45-52 ; John vi. 14-21.

IN the three accounts of our Lord's walking on the sea there are, I think, some undesigned coincidences of considerable importance. If so, it is hardly likely that I am the first to discover them. But I do not happen to have seen the thing written out, and I will try what I can do.

St. Matthew and St. Mark give substantially the same account, though St. Mark has, as usual, some graphic touches peculiar to himself, as that when our Lord was on the mountain above He *saw* the disciples on the sea; that when He came to them "He would have passed by them"; and that they *all* saw Him. St. John's account is independent, yet with some exact correspondences with St. Matthew and St. Mark, notably in the words, "It is I; be not afraid." St. John says, chap. vi. 3, that the Passover was near. Jesus had crossed the sea of Tiberias with His disciples "to rest awhile," probably as a suitable preparation for the approaching festival, which, as devout Jews, He and His disciples would keep at Jerusalem, as before His last Passover He retired to the "city called Ephraim." But it was a time when many were on their way to Jerusalem; and it seems to be for this reason that St. John notices the time, as it accounts for so large a number of people, chiefly *men*, following our Saviour into His retreat.

It was "late," says St. Matthew, or, as St. Mark tells us, "the day was far spent" before the feeding of the five thousand took place. This, with the gathering of the fragments, would take some time; so that the dismissal of the disciples to their boat could not have been long before sunset, which in Palestine at that time of year would be soon after six o'clock. St. John says "it was late" when the disciples went on board. Then followed the dismissal of the multitude and our Lord's ascent of the mountain. And again we have the same expression, "It was late." Thus, there are *three* "lates" in the story