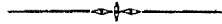


With what confidence we should be told about Luke embellishing the "Petrine memoirs" with another worthless legend which "Marcus Petri interpres" certainly "knows nothing of." The ukases of the "higher criticism" and "science of history" have in this case been spared us by a casual testimony on the part of St. Paul embodied in two words of the passage: *καὶ ὅτι ᾠφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα.*

ARTHUR C. JENNINGS.



ART. IV.—THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY.

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 realized, 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 realized, 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 realized.

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 Testament; and in illustrating that truth we have but to vindicate

St. Stephen's argument, and to carefully 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 realize 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 has been well expressed by 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 authorized 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 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 predictions, 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 due course. 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

¹ "Discourses on Prophecy," 5th edit., 1845.

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 that 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 of 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 having 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 civilizations 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, as 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 chosen and sanctified this house that My name may be there for ever, and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually." Accordingly, for the next 1,000 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 warning of prophecy. 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 paper 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 2,000 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.”

HENRY WACE.