

The Fulfilment of Prophecy.¹

OUR subject is : What is Prophecy ? and How is Prophecy fulfilled ? The subject is one confessedly difficult and somewhat alien from the English mind. Is it too much to say that it pre-eminently suits the German metaphysical genius,² and that Ewald's celebrated "Introduction to the Prophets," Riehm's great work on "Messianic Prophecy," and the admirable introductions to Lange's commentaries upon Genesis and the Three Gospels, have virtually exhausted the subject ?

What makes the Prophets so unusually difficult to a Western reader is not only their Oriental dress but their highly figurative method. For example, the Epistle to the Hebrews, in order to prove that our Lord was Man as well as God, quotes only the following words from the prophecy of Isaiah : " I will put my trust in Him " (Heb. ii. 13 ; Isa. viii. 18). St. Paul, to prove our Lord's commission to the Church on earth, gives an entirely new turn to a well-known passage in one of the Psalms, namely, " He received gifts in Man," by rendering it : " He gave gifts unto men " (Eph. iv. 8 ; Ps. lxxviii. 18). Our Lord in His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem seems to confuse two quite different events, namely the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world. St. Matthew, in order to show why our Lord had to leave Egypt, quotes Hosea's historical record of the fact that Israel under Moses left Egypt (Matt. ii. 15 ; Hos. xi. 1). Most remarkable of all, St. Peter quotes a maledictory portion of Psalm cix. to prove that a fresh apostle " must " be elected in the place of Judas (Acts i. 20 ; Ps. cix. 8) !

¹ Being the substance of a paper delivered at the Victoria Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, on February 21, 1916.

² As we are at war with Germany, and therefore (according to Professor Sayce) we are not allowed to give the Germans credit for any single talent but that of destructiveness, let me prove my point by three indisputable examples : (1) Coleridge has always been acknowledged as the chief English philosopher of a metaphysical cast in England for the last hundred years. It has now been proved, with some injury to his fame, that the largest part of his chief work was drawn *totidem verbis* from the German Schelling. (2) Lord Jeffrey, the best of Scotch critics, admitted that Goethe (whom he specially disliked) was the first man to open to us the character of Shakespeare's Hamlet. (3) In our own day, the Bishop of Gloucester is actually supported by the Bishop of Edinburgh in holding that our Lord's prophecy of the end of the world was merely a hyperbolic—or rather burlesque—description of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ! Surely we are a greater race of administrators than philosophers !

These are samples of prophetic testimony which do not appeal, at any rate at first sight, to the modern mind. They are not proofs which would convince an English jury.

If we have the candour to admit these difficulties we shall advance, I think, to their complete solution. Let us take the journey in easy stages.

I. WHAT IS PROPHECY ?

Prophecy is, as its name imports (Heb. *roêh*, LXX *ὀράων*, Lat. *videns*), essentially INSIGHT into God's dealings with men in this world. It, therefore, naturally issues in FORESIGHT as to their future issues. For God is always the same. He calls Himself "the I AM." He says of Himself, "I change not." He is "the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." The same is true of Man. Geology has proved that Cro-Magnon man was just one of us. The recent discovery of Egyptian novels in the sand shows man of the XVIII Dynasty to have been of like passions with ourselves. Man's history is always repeating itself. He, therefore, who is most perfectly in tune with God and man is a prophet.

This is the prophetic gift—the art of dealing with man from the standpoint of God. And as man is a being built not only for time but eternity, a prophet is one who can declare God's eternal counsels as they appear in the midst of time, and who can see the things of time *sub specie eternitatis*. St. Paul describes the gift as the result of the spirit of man in all its freedom illuminated by the Spirit of God (I Cor. ii. 9-12). St. Peter defines Old Testament prophecy as the action of "the Holy Ghost" upon "holy men" (2 Pet. i. 20). And both Amos and St. John agree in looking on the Spirit of God as constituting them prophets (Amos iii. 7; Rev. i. 1). The Nicene Creed reminds us that "He spake by the prophets." And our Lord forewarned us that "He will show you things to come."

II. WHY IS PROPHECY CONFINED TO THE JEWS ?

Every nation has its special endowment (*χάρισμα*). The French are the greatest naturalists of all time : witness Buffon, Lamarck, Cuvier, Geoffroi St. Hilaire, the Abbé de Gaudry. The Germans, as we have seen, are the greatest metaphysicians in Europe. The Romans were the greatest jurists of all time. The Greeks brought the arts to their highest perfection. The Egyptians were the

world's greatest builders in stone. Every nation has its gift : and, therefore, every nation will be represented in the final City of God (Rev. xxi. 24, 26).

But all nations have not the same gift. And the reason is obvious—

“ One subject only will one genius fit—
So vast is art, so narrow human wit ! ”

The one great gift of the Jews was “ religion.” As our Lord reminded the woman of Samaria, “ Salvation is of the Jews ” (John iv. 22). Other nations felt the need. They alone supplied it. “ To them were committed the oracles of God.” They alone proved to be, as Dillmann says, “ the men of revelation.” They alone “ provided,” as Lange beautifully puts it, “ the maternal bosom for the Son of Man.” “ Of them Christ came, Who is God over all, the Blessed One for ever.”

Why was this God's choice for them? Was it due to favouritism? No, “ there is no respect of persons with God.” But this: they were the most human of men. It was because they were the most representative of the sons of men that they were the most naturally fitted to produce THE SON OF MAN. Take Abraham's petty falsehoods, Jacob's petty thefts, Peter's petty shams at Antioch, Judas's petty bargain over selling Christ—why, they were like the people of our own age! Take, again, the awful inconsistencies of character between the meek and the hot-headed Moses, between the David who wrote the Psalms and that other David, between the bold professing John the Baptist and the doubting Baptist, between the two Peters, the two Marks, the fiery and the loving John, the doubting and believing Thomas, the saintly and sinning Magdalene. Even the Apostles after Pentecost were most quarrelsome fellows—almost as bad as our great Reformers, who ran the Apostles close in their possession of spiritual gifts. Here is a cameo of portraits for all time. Here is human nature cut to the life. And the Jews supplied not only the fount but all the types of human history writ legible in man. God, if He wanted to take human flesh, could not do better than seek His habitation among the Jews. “ God, Who in old time . . . spake unto the fathers by the *prophets*, hath in these last days spoken unto us in His SON.”

Hence it was to the Jews and born of Jewish nature only that the GOD-MAN appeared. “ He came not to lay His hold on angels.”

They were not bad enough specimens of the race for that. "But on the seed of *Abraham* He layeth hold." "It is evident that our Lord sprang out of *Judah*."

Hence all Jewish history became bound up with the future fortunes and misfortunes of the *Messiah*. "These things happened unto them as TYPES" of Christ and of His Church to come (1 Cor. x. 6). When *MOSES* spoke of "a Prophet" raised up "from among your brethren like unto me" he thought of himself as a symbolic fragment of the *Messiah*, a chip of the block to come, a stone of the new temple. When *Moses* refused the crown of *Egypt* it was "the reproach of *Christ*" that he "esteemed" as being "greater riches than the treasures in *Egypt*" (Heb. xi. 26). When he passed through the *Red Sea* and fed his people with manna in the wilderness he was prefiguring *Christian* "baptism" and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. x. 1-4). When he was forbidden to pass into the *Promised Land* it was because he forgot himself when he ventured to lecture, not the historic people of *Israel*, but "the Church in the wilderness," which was "the Body of *Christ*" and the "*Israel of God*" (Acts vii. 38; Gal. vi. 16). It was in this sense *ABRAHAM*, by his willing sacrifice of *Isaac* in the hope of his resurrection, "saw *Christ's day*" (John viii. 56; Heb. xi. 19), and that *DAVID*, thinking of his own resurrection, "spake of *Christ*" (Acts ii. 31), and foresaw also His ascension into heaven when the ark of God's presence, mounting the steps of the temple at *Jerusalem*, "received in the Man" of God's choice gifts of gold and silver from the tributary heathen nations—gifts which were to be given back as thankofferings to the people of *David's choice* (Ps. lxxviii. 18, 30, 31). It was in this way that all the prophets fore-felt, as *Ewald* says, His coming Whom in their life's strange experiences they dimly represented. "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for SIGNS and wonders in *Israel*" (Isa. viii. 18).

And what signs they were! How *JEREMIAH's Lamentations* typify the Man of Sorrows! "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" (Lam. i. 12). *ZECHARIAH's* pastorate valued at only thirty pieces of silver (*Zech.* xi. 13); *DAVID* "pierced" in "hands and feet" (Ps. xxii. 16); *ISAIAH* promising his disciples a resurrection from the dust of the earth together with his own "dead body" (*Isa.* xxvi. 19); *HOSEA* prophesying the coming of Him Who should be the "Death of death" and Who should resurrect His people

“after three days” (Hos. vi. 2; xiii. 14)—all these men were in some dim, mysterious way partakers “beforehand” of Christ’s sufferings and also of His glories to come: “unto whom it was revealed that not for themselves but *for us* they did minister” these anticipations of the Gospel-message (1 Pet. i. 11, 12).

The people of Israel, then, was not like other nations. It was a TYPICAL nation. It was a PROPHETIC nation. The Jews were REPRESENTATIVE of Humanity in the concrete, or rather of God’s dealings with man. Hence they were a photograph of THE MAN to come. “To Him bare all their prophets witness.” “The testimony to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” And Christ by His coming not only fulfilled their predictions to the letter as an afterthought completing God’s original design. But more than that: *God foreseeing CHRIST to come antedated His historic appearance by fore-tokens of His coming*: so that Israel even left the Promised Land and went down into Egypt, and Moses fled from Pharaoh “till the men were dead which sought” his “life,” as a symbolical anticipation of another Child fairer than Moses Who, too, should find refuge in Egypt and return to His country another way when “the men were dead which sought the young Child’s life” (Matt. ii. 20; Exod. iv. 19).

HE is the Desire of all nations. In Him not only God and Man but all the cross-roads of History and Prophecy meet. His First Coming was the goal (τέλος, Rom. x. 4) of ancient history. His Second Coming is the goal for which even now the whole creation is in earnest expectation. The Jews were the symbolical nation whose VISIBLE CONQUESTS over Nature prepared the barbarian nations for His first personal coming. The Christian Church, which is (as Ignatius says) the bearer of His SPIRIT, is by her SPIRITUAL CONQUESTS the harbinger to the modern world of His Second personal Coming (Rom. viii. 19; Eph. iii. 10, *ἵνα γνωρισθῆ ἡ νῦν . . . διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ.*

III. HOW IS PROPHECY FULFILLED?

God’s Word is, like His mind, eternal—“not for an age but for all time.” His word is, therefore, unlike men’s words. It is never exhausted in one fulfilment (2 Pet. i. 20, *ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεσθαι*). It refulfils itself through all the cycles of man’s history—

“As the world goes spinning
Down the ringing grooves of time.”

In the education of the race (to use Lessing's great phrase)—

“ The old order changeth yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways.”

And what is true of the race of man as a whole was specially true of the Jewish nation in particular. In all the pangs of its life-long experiences as a nation it was giving birth to Christ (Micah v. 2; Rev. xii. 5; Gal. iv. 19, 26). The spiritual crises in its long-drawn history were but the travail-pangs of Him in whom its Laws and Types and Prophecies and Ceremonials found not only their fulfilment but their exhaustion. He was the groundwork of all their peculiar history. All their partial and fragmentary glimpses of the future found in Him their perfected and completed likeness. He was the solution of all their enigmatical history, the mirror in which stood reflected all their personal and national hopes and fortunes.

But until He came the word of prophecy was dark, even to the prophets themselves (1 Pet. i. 11). They were specially perplexed by the fact that prophecy never exhausted itself in a single historical fulfilment (2 Pet. i. 20, *ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται*). They forgot that the eternal Word, being the expression of God's mind, was not bounded by the age which produced it. It saw the end before the beginning. That is to say, it often saw the whole mountain-range of the future without always counting the intervening peaks. For example, Isaiah sees the “SERVANT OF THE LORD” fulfilled first in Cyrus, then in Israel, lastly—when neither of these accomplished the whole tenor of the prophecy—in Israel's future Messiah. Jacob prophesied of a SHILOH (“Rest”) to come, which was very poorly fulfilled in the first resting-place of the ark of the God of Israel. It was not less inadequately fulfilled in Sol-omon, “the man of rest” (1 Chron. xxii. 9). But only truly was it fulfilled in the Prince of Peace in Whom we find “rest unto our souls.” It was the same with the VIRGIN-BIRTH. Isaiah sees one fulfilment in the mother of Hezekiah, who was at the time of the prophecy a “virgin” (Isa. vii. 14). In his last chapter he regards the re-birth of Israel to a new hope after the exile as another metaphorical fulfilment of his own prophecy (lxvi. 7, 8). Micah seems to add to this prophecy of the Jewish nation, the “virgin-daughter of Israel,” the fact of the birth of a Deliverer at *Bethlehem* in David's line

(Micah v. 2). But the people of Israel were not content till the prophecy was literally fulfilled in Him in Whom all prophecy found its goal.

It is the same with "THE DAY OF THE LORD." Every rise and fall of the city of Jerusalem typified the nearer coming of the true King of kings. The treachery which should find "a man's chief foes" to be "of his own household," and which should "call to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them," was only partially true of the Jewish Captivity to the Assyrians (Mic. vii. 6; Hos. x. 8). Our Lord by His quotations showed that this was more drastically fulfilled in the more awful siege of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke xxiii. 30). But our Lord's and the prophets' words will only truly be fulfilled, as St. John points out, in that literal end of the world, of which these were only typical foreshadowings (Rev. vi. 16). Again, one hears of people objecting to the MALEDICTORY PSALMS. But David was no ordinary king cursing an ordinary traitor. David was a type of the Son of David. Ahithophel's treachery to the Messianic king was the first of a series of treacheries to God and His Church which refulfilled themselves in Jewish history. JUDAS'S was one example. The treachery of the Jewish Church to the young Christian Church, when it betrayed it to the Roman government,¹ was the next example. "The Jews," says Chrysostom in his Commentary on the Psalms, "have literally fulfilled these awful predictions." Then came the apostasy of the Church itself to the truth, first by infusion of Jewish sacerdotal principles (Acts xv.; Gal. ii.); then by admitting the speculative errors of the Gnostics² (1 John ii. 18; Col. ii.); lastly, by that admixture of *both* Jewish and Gnostic principles, which produced by the end of the fourth century that combination of St. John's "Antichrist" and of St. Paul's "man of sin," which in every age of the Church's history—from the age of Hippolytus to our own age—has been referred, by Catholics and Protestants alike, to the Church of the Papacy!

Is there not a pregnant truth hidden in all this apparent indefiniteness before the definite fulfilment of God's aim? God's

¹ Baur (alas, another German!) has investigated this problem with his usual thoroughness and originality ("Ch. Hist." ii. 132 n., cp. Gibbon ii. 228, 243 n. 61, ed. Smith).

² Lightfoot has correctly detected traces of Gnosticism in the legendary glosses with which Ignatius in his genuine epistles has overlaid the Scripture narrative. Already in the early Church the Mystery of Iniquity was at work!

march through history is impeded by man's slowness to keep pace. Hence, it is only through the long process required in the education of the race that man rises at critical conjunctures in his history to see God's hand in the event towards which Grace and Nature are always leading him.

IV. DEFINITE FULFILMENTS.

But are there to be no final fulfilments before the end? Is there no OPEN VISION of the whole without this complicated cross-reference to all time? Are there no definite stepping-stones in time to lease us in this march of God across history? Yes, the seventy years of Israel's captivity at Babylon were literally fulfilled (Jer. xxix. 10; Dan. ix. 2), and paved the way for those seven times seventy years, before the end of which Messiah was to appear to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Dan. ix. 24; Ezra vii. 8—i.e. roughly 450 B.C. to A.D. 30). Again, BABYLON has for the last thousand years fulfilled to the letter Isaiah's circumstantial prophecy of her desolation. It is only in our own time that the very trace of her existence has been discovered. TYRE, "the mart of the nations," still remains, as Ezekiel prophesied she would be, a bare rock on which the fishermen spread their nets! PETRA, the stronghold of Edom, was rifled, as Amos foretold, by the Romans. "How have the hidden treasures of Esau been searched out!"

These nations were picked out by the bold hand of prophecy that they might be a warning to future nations whose principles they represented. Babylon is the type of godless security repeated in Rome, at Paris, at Berlin. Tyre is the representative of that cosmopolitan commercialism whose merchant marine enables her to traffic in all waters—the type of Venice, of Holland, of England. Edom is the eternal symbol of spiritual treachery to the people of God. Do we wish to see how the worship of wealth, with its business frauds, provokes God to bring on war? Let us read Hosea xi. 7, 8; Amos vi. 1–14 and viii. 4–10; Zeph. i. 4–19. Do we wish to see spiritual privileges abused by a lukewarm clergy? We have only to look at the modern picture drawn for us by the hand of Malachi, *i.e.* i. 6–ii. 9. Would we see the Prussian infantry and cavalry described? Let us read it in the portrait of the ancient

Chaldeans, and see the purpose for which they are hurled against a guilty nation like our own—

“ ‘How long, O Lord?’—thus I cry, but Thou hearest not. I complain unto Thee of violence, but Thou savest not! Why dost Thou let me see wickedness and causest me to behold crime? Day by day I witness robbery and violence, whence ariseth strife and contention. And the law is powerless and justice is paralysed. The wicked prevaieth over the righteous and the judges judge unjustly.

“ Behold ye among the heathen [for My answer, saith the Lord]. For lo! I raise up the Chaldeans. They are a cruel and ferocious nation. Their hordes run far and wide to dispossess the nations of their homes. They are terrible and dreadful; *they own no law but their own, and from their pride there is no appeal*. Their war-horses are swifter than leopards and fiercer than famished wolves. Their horsemen scour the coasts; yea, their horsemen heed not distance in their pursuit; they are as swift as the vulture that swoopeth to her prey. They come only to destroy; their faces are eagerly bent on destruction like the east wind, and they heap up prisoners as the sand on the seashore. They scoff at kings, they laugh at nobles; they mock at strongholds, and take the highest ramparts. And though they change their mind many times, and transgress and make themselves guilty, yet *their own might is the god that they worship*. . . .

“ Thou hast ordained the Chaldean, O Lord, to execute Thy judgment, and hast raised him up to chastise Thy people. Yet Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look indifferently on wrong. Why, then, dost Thou look on while this nation dealeth treacherously, and why dost Thou keep silent when the wicked devour a nation more righteous than themselves? . . . The Chaldean casteth his line and catcheth all nations in his net and sweepeth them up in his drag. . . . Therefore he worshippeth his own might. . . . Shall he always empty his net in triumph? Shall he never cease to harry the nations? . . .

“ And the Lord answered me. . . . Behold, the Chaldean’s soul is lifted up with pride; there is no uprightness in him. . . . Rather, he is inflamed by drunkenness and pride, and his home cannot content or contain him. Therefore he is greedy as the grave and insatiable as death. He seeketh to subdue all nations and to despoil all the peoples of the earth. But [the time cometh when] all these shall laugh him to scorn and shall hurl their taunts at him, saying: ‘Woe to him that groweth rich by robbery! His time is short. . . . Thou hast spoiled many; therefore shall many spoil thee. . . . Thou hast planned the overthrow of many peoples: but by so doing thou hast planned ruin to thine own house and hast sinned against thine own soul. . . . The glory of the Lord shall be seen in your destruction.’ ” (Hab. i., ii.).¹

It was in crises like these that men rose to a firmer faith in God, which proved their salvation (Hab. ii. 4; Rom. i. 17); that DAVID beheld (or forefelt) in his spiritual agony the terrors of the Cruci-

¹ I gladly announce my indebtedness in this paper to two remarkable works, *Half-hours with Isaiah* and *Half-hours with the Minor Prophets*—two admirable paraphrases of the Prophets by a scholarly Hebraist, the Rev. J. P. Miles, of the Old Baptist Chapel, Devizes (3s. 6d. and 2s., Marshall Bros.). The former of these works has only just been issued, and deserves a greater circulation. They would both have won the encomium of Bishop Horsley and Dean Milman.

fixion at the hands of his own people (Ps. xxii.) ; that DANIEL beheld the four kingdoms, in the last of which—the Roman—the beginnings of Christ's Church should be set up ; that ISAIAH beheld the Messianic Deliverer, Who should be born of a Virgin in a period of great spiritual darkness and should grow up "despised and rejected of men" not only as "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" but to be "reckoned among transgressors" and to "make His grave with the wicked" on the Cross "and with the rich in His death" (Isa. liii.).

It was precisely in such a horror of great darkness that our own PITT in 1805, unable for "*ten years*" to see any future for Europe, calculated the date of Waterloo, and foretold (in some rough notes left in his handwriting) that England's future danger would lie in the confederation of the German states, and that her future allies would be her then present enemies—France and Russia ! It was in 1844, over seventy years ago, that DISRAELI—then a young man with all the melancholy and forebodings of disappointed ambition—foretold in the fifteenth chapter of the fourth book of his great novel, "*Coningsby*," this very war, which he prophesied would be largely a war brought about by professors and would lead to a greater revolution than the German Reformation, yet no Englishman would believe it ! He later forewarned us of the German navy some forty years before it was built. If these things are permissible to political prophets in the secular world of statecraft, how much greater is the likelihood that God should reveal to His chosen more definitely still the things which belong to their eternal peace !

We are witnessing now the break-up of old Europe—the Europe of Caesar, of Charlemagne, of the Papacy and old Feudalism. The German nation is once more employed in the process, as it was in the days before Caesar's Empire fell. May we not see in these things the exhaustion of the Gentile power "in order that the way of the Kings of the East"—that is, the empires of China and Japan, of India and Africa—"may be prepared," and that the Jews may return to their own land once more as the Head of the Nations before the end come ?

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