

Hebrew Prophecy and Modern Criticism.

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XI.

'Think not that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil.'—MATT. v. 17.

I ENDEAVOURED to show in my last paper that the truest fulfilment of prophecy lies not so much in the personality and work of Christ as in the religion of Christ. But what is the precise meaning of this last phrase? Is it primitive Christianity, the Christianity of the early centuries; is it mediæval Christianity, the Christianity of the Reformed Churches; is it the Christianity of the nineteenth century as we find it in England; or is it none of these as such, but rather Christianity as taught by Christ and His apostles? For surely we cannot, without some confusion of thought, regard all these as absolutely identical.

As regards the first, we are indeed apt to assume, on *à priori* grounds, a purity in the early Church of which we have little or no evidence. Indeed, the evidence seems rather to prove the opposite. The First Epistle to the Corinthians points to a state of life and religion, the very thought of which is repulsive to the average Christian of to-day. We read of disorders taking place in the church services of Corinth which would now be thought disgraceful at a meeting of a School Board or a Parish Council; of the Holy Communion being converted into something too like a drunken brawl; of an incestuous alliance uncondemned by public opinion. In a word, not only could primitive Christianity fail in practice, but its standards might be very low. It may be urged that in all probability the Church of Corinth was an exception to the general rule; that we do not hear of such things in other Churches; at anyrate, that that particular Church was subject to many special difficulties and temptations. This may have been the case, to some extent; but, on the other hand, it must be borne in mind that it is the only Church of which we really know much. There are also in the other Epistles too many hints of dark sinister influences which were tainting the religious and social life.¹ Nor can we urge, on the other side, the lofty standard of St. Paul's own teaching; for that was plainly the ideal which Christians should

aim at rather than a description of what they actually were.

As we proceed further in the history of the Church, we see the effects of the chastening power of persecution in producing a character heroic and loyal, but for all that somewhat stern and narrow. At the same time we begin to trace, mainly through the influence of the schools of Alexandria and Antioch, a new principle of intellectual life infusing itself into the simple and somewhat crude faith of the early Church, and making Christianity more capable of becoming the religion of the cultured classes. There is something obviously incomplete in the ante-Nicene Church. It belongs to an age of growth and preparation. Taken by itself, we cannot regard it as the fulfilment of an ideal.

With the conversion of Constantine, we reach a new stage in the history of Christianity. On the one hand, we see the Christian Church reaping all the benefits of Roman civilisation. It is an age of organisation. Liturgies, creeds, church offices are systematised and arranged, or their arrangement already begun is now completed. On the other hand, we see the entrance of a secular and ambitious spirit taking the place of the austere unselfishness of the early Christian. And again, as a counterpoise to this, we trace from this time the rapid development of monasticism. Men and women, vexed with the theological controversies of the age or disgusted with its secularity, sought to find in seclusion that religious whole-heartedness which they had failed to find in the world. That the monasteries did a great work in the history of Christianity, that their inmates aimed at living a nobly Christian life, cannot seriously be denied. It was they who kept religion safely stored as in a sacred shrine when it was in danger of being overwhelmed by the flood of semi-barbarism that swept over Western Europe. But a religion, in its deeper spiritual life, almost confined to those who abjured a sinful world, was a very different thing from the world-wide Church foretold by the prophets and

¹ *E.g.* 1 Thess. iv. 5, 6; Phil. iii. 2; Rev. ii. 14.

Christ. The monastic system was in fact a confession of failure to realise in life the Christian ideal.

And what are we to say of the Papal Church of the Middle Ages? Shall we allow the bitterness of party strife to blind our judgment? Shall we ignore its historical connexion with the Christianity that preceded it? Shall we overlook its real work in Christian history? Shall we see in it nothing better than a fulfilment of those prophecies of the New Testament which speak of a great corrupting power hostile to God and His Church, to be eventually overthrown and cursed amid the exultations of her enemy? To do so would be as unjust as it would be ungenerous. For is it not obvious, if we study those prophecies which in the bitterness of controversy have been unscrupulously hurled at Papal Rome, that many of them are directed against an avowed and open enemy to the Christian Church? Nor is it altogether surprising that the son of thunder, himself the victim of a cruel persecution, is thus gathering up and applying to imperial Rome the threats of the earlier Jewish prophets against their several foes,—a Tyre, an Assyria, or a Babylon,—should have shown something of the vindictive spirit of the old religion. We may be thankful, indeed, that in this case, as in the story of Jonah, God was in the event more merciful than His prophet. Rome was not permitted to fall into the hands of its barbarian conquerors until what in it was most worth preserving had become the possession of Christianity, and out of the ruins of the old civil Rome rose a new spiritual empire, the great hierarchy of Western Christendom. In spite of its narrow ecclesiasticism, in spite of its spiritual arrogance, the papacy of Hildebrand was a magnificent attempt to realise the prophecies of the kingdom of God upon earth. No wonder that men, dazzled by its splendour, should have so often been blind to its shortcomings. But the papacy failed just because it made the same mistake which Jewish patriotism had made before. It could not distinguish between a spiritual theocracy and an earthly dominion.

And what of the Reformed Churches? I suppose we may say that the leading principle of the Reformation was that each nation should form a separate ecclesiastical unit, developing itself in various directions according to its special needs, while still united to the Church as a whole on

certain cardinal points of doctrine and practice.¹ But there were numerous difficulties in carrying out this principle. (1) Certain nations, even in Western Europe, to say nothing of the Eastern Church, refused to accept it altogether, and adhered to the old hierarchical idea of Catholicity. (2) Among those nations which accepted the principle, there was a serious disagreement as to what should be retained as essential elements of Catholicity. For instance, the Lutheran Church, with possibly one exception,² repudiated the apostolic succession of bishops. The English Church, in spite of what Roman controversialists have often said to the contrary, made a point of retaining it. Again, on such an important subject as the efficacy of the sacraments, there were the most important differences, not of degree only, but of kind. Lutherans, Calvinists, Zwinglians were on this point as far removed from each other as the Lutherans were from the Church of Rome. And the upshot of it all was, that many of the Reformed Churches practically gave up all idea of Catholic unity. (3) A far more serious difficulty lay in the refusal among the reformed nationalities, if I may use the expression, to accept the principle of a national Church established by authority. The process of disintegration did not stop at the point which the civil authorities desired. Innumerable sects sprang up everywhere within the several nations, and neither king nor Parliament found it in the end either possible or desirable to check them. For they lacked those religious weapons which had bound kings and people under the yoke of the papacy. How, then, can we see in this divided Church of modern Christendom, or in any one division of it, or in any one body of Christians, a fulfilment of Christ's prophecies of the kingdom of God?

And when we pass from questions of belief and organisation to those of life and character, the difficulty of doing so becomes even greater. What are we to think about war, for example? If there is one distinct promise of Jewish prophecy, it is that of universal peace. We cannot merely class the prophecies which speak of it with those which foretell the universal dominion of the Jews, and call them utopian dreams, the offspring

¹ In England, at anyrate, this principle was not altogether new.

² Some English writers have affirmed that the apostolic succession was maintained in Sweden.

of a onesided patriotism. It is true, no doubt, that a certain number were coloured by thoughts of this kind. But there is enough to show that the peace of the world-wide Church was expected as an inseparable outshoot from religious character. 'And many nations shall go, and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jahweh, and to the house of the 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 Jahweh from Jerusalem. And He shall judge between many peoples, and shall reprove strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. . . . For all the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of Jahweh our God for ever and ever.'¹ So, too, in Isaiah's prophecy of the holy mountain (ch. xi. 1-9) the point of the parabolic picture is that the character of the wild animals is so changed that they no longer have any wish to destroy and devour each other. But what do we see now? We see the most civilised nations of Europe year by year increasing their armaments, nation vying with nation, party with party; we find the question now, when and where the next great European war will break out, debated in our daily newspapers with the calmness that we should expect in a leader on the prospects of the next general election. It seems as though the 'herald angels' must sometimes weep to see Christians so dazzled by the outward glories of war as to forget its countless horrors and miseries.

Then, again, in any Christian nation, what comparison do the ordinary standards of life bear to those of Christianity as Christ taught it? In those countless falsities—*e.g.* those many conventional tricks of trade, those only too common professional and social lies, even in those petty hypocrisies of the drawing-room—there is a want of Christian manliness which makes some men sigh for the departed spirit of sturdy English Puritanism. Take again the great social question. Is it not truly piteous that in Christian England a very large and increasing section of our countrymen should be living lives of physical and moral misery, cut off from almost everything that gives life pleasure; and, worse still, that so large a number of

¹ Micah iv. 2-5.

Christian gentlemen and women should practically acquiesce in such a state of things? Christian England has yet to learn that to raise the condition of the poor,—I do not say to support them,—is an infinitely more important duty than joining in family prayer or hearing a weekly sermon. Need I point out, also, how very far in purity of life we fall short of the standard of Christ and His apostles?

We are bound, then, sadly to confess that no single period of Church history, no one division of those who call themselves Christians, has yet realised the ideal of Christianity. But it is this ideal which stands in direct relation to Jewish prophecy. It is of it that Christ said, 'I came not to destroy, but to fulfil.' But is not to say this to reduce to a vanishing point the argument from prophecy? Is it not equivalent to saying that Christ Himself is but a Prophet, and that Christianity is all the more utopian than the earlier prophecies, in so far as its ideals are loftier, and for that very reason impose a greater strain on human nature? How can these earlier prophecies claim a fulfilment in a number of religious and social theories which have never been worked out consistently and thoroughly into a practical living system?

But to say this is to exaggerate the true state of the case. For there is hardly a single element of the religious and spiritual side of Jewish prophecy which has not been *partially* fulfilled in Christian history. The great Christian doctrines of the Fatherhood of God, the presence of Christ through sacramental grace, the influence of the Holy Spirit, were, as we have already pointed out, fulfilments of the prophet's teaching. But they are not merely so many theological propositions; they have exercised a force which has been more and more making itself felt, and leavening society. There has been growing through the ages a kindlier spirit between nation and nation, class and class, sex and sex. 'There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus' (Gal. iii. 28). With St. Paul these words were a prophecy, with us they have in part at least become history. Slavery already stands in direct opposition to our ideas of modern civilisation. To a largely increasing number of people, war, at anyrate with a Christian people, is becoming more and more repulsive. Women are less and less excluded from opportunities of culture and positions of healthy independence. Above all,

every year sees fresh, and, in a measure, successful efforts to promote the welfare of those whom we are beginning to call no longer the lower classes. After all, the seeming apathy of the better-to-do arises, in a very great measure, from the difficulties which beset the social question. It is quite possible to feel a glow of enthusiasm for that noble effort of the primitive Church of Jerusalem to organise the social life in the loving spirit of their great Master, and yet feel bound to confess that even then the experiment proved a failure.

But if they did these things in the green tree, what has been done in the dry? What can we think of the modern substitutes of that first outburst of Christian socialism? An enforced poor-rate, a fraction of which only is spent on the poor, and that too often in a way which tends to pauperise and degrade them: a weekly church collection of petty sums, which mean the sacrifice of not a single luxury or pleasure on the part of those who give them: the distribution of promiscuous alms, that bane of charity organisations. How difficult it is, without doing positive harm, to bring our dealings with the poor into any sort of relation with the spirit of Christ? And how easy it is to allow the possible harm, or the probable harm, of misspent charity to harden us against what we know or feel to be a Christian duty? It is so easy to give our weekly sixpence or our weekly half-crown, and flatter ourselves that we are not tainted with the old socialistic heresy of the anabaptists. But the spirit of the age is, after all, too honest to deceive itself by such a miserable compromise. Amid all its perplexity, it is, at anyrate, feeling after Christianity.

And yet again there is a further difficulty. The great poor questions of the day are becoming so mixed up with the miserable contentions of party politics. There is an increasing tendency to make political capital out of a compulsion which may to many seem unjust, but to none can be inspiring. It may seem a thing too bold to say, but I believe it to be true, that if our poor laws could be swept away entirely, and the relief of the poor left to voluntary effort, there would be, before very long, an immense improvement in their condition. The Church of England, and not the Church of England alone, but other religious bodies, would feel bound to throw themselves into the work of poor relief heart and soul. They would feel that it really was their work, and that they were not patching up

what was already done very inadequately by the State. The love of Christ would inspire energy and enthusiasm. They would take up the work in the same spirit as the early Church and the monasteries, but with the wisdom of a ripe experience. Is it not also true that the new opportunities for work and self-denial would strengthen Christian faith among us? Men would surely realise more and more what is now too often half forgotten, that Christianity is not so much a thing to be learnt as a life to be lived.

We have aimed at showing, by a few examples, that the Church of Christ has in the past already begun at least to fulfil in a measure the splendid prophecies of the Jewish prophets as confirmed and developed by Christ. But we may go a step further than this, and say that Christianity contains within itself forces which seem surely tending to a much more perfect fulfilment in the future. We see this tendency, *e.g.*, in foreign missions. It cannot be denied that this work is steadily increasing in extent, in earnestness, and in power. It used to be a common thing among men of culture to speak contemptuously of missionary labours. To do so now would be to show not only bad taste, but serious ignorance. A spiritual kingdom of the world is already to us something more than a religious theory; it is becoming a historical fact. Christianity already exercises an incomparably greater civilising force than any other religion.

We see the same tendency even in the Christian attitude towards war. If a world-wide peace seems as yet very far from coming into the sphere of practical politics, there is at least a perceptible movement in this direction. Men are beginning more and more to feel that war, though often perhaps at present necessary, is at best a necessary evil. Again, wars are becoming far less sanguinary. Some of the worst evils of war are mitigated by the humanity and even tenderness shown to the wounded. There is a tendency, if a slowly increasing tendency, to settle international disputes by arbitration. It is also more than probable that the maintenance of a balance of power by means of defensive alliances has in itself, for many years, proved a safeguard against a European war.

Again, to speak of our social relations, it may be true that class barriers are still too artificial and classes too exclusive; but with the wider diffusion of culture and education this is becoming

less and less the case. There is every probability that as differences between classes are obliterated, distinctions will gradually disappear also. As it is, men and women of different social grades are more and more inclined to work together in harmony for some common cause.

Above all, we see the same tendency in religious parties. Efforts are increasingly being made to bring together those separated by religious differences. Even though such efforts may not at present have succeeded to the extent, or in the exact way, that their promoters wished, they have at least shown that there is a movement towards religious concord. More than this, they have actually done much to promote mutual understanding and sympathy.

If, then, the prophetic and Christian ideals have been, and are being, more and more perfectly fulfilled in Christian history, is it unreasonable to

believe that the time will come when, in the highest and truest sense, the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ?

It is a common temptation to take a pessimistic view of the age in which we live. We may be inclined to sigh over its open infidelity, its selfish anarchy, its dissoluteness. But these are not the distinctive evils of our age exclusively. In part, they are always with us; in part, they have repeated themselves many times in human history. It is our duty to struggle against them and try to overcome them. But we can only hope to do so effectually if we listen to that voice of God which called almost in vain to the ancient Israelites through the prophets, and still calls to us through the Son of God: 'All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets.'

Recent Literature on the Hebrew Language.

LET the Grammars come first. It is their natural place, and they are most numerous. It is surprising how numerous they are. The late Professor Dillmann, as Principal Davies has just been telling us in these pages, advised all students of Hebrew to make their own Lexicon as they went along. Did he advise them to make their own grammar also? And did he advise every man to publish it after it was made? Gathering them together for this brief literary survey, one is surprised to find no fewer than ten, all published within recent years, and all but one in our own country.

And not only are the Grammars numerous, but some of them have passed into numerous editions. Not to mention *Gesenius*, of whose editions no record has been kept, and not to mention those very recent books, like *Bissell* and *Maggs*, which have not yet had time, there are *Strack* and *Leathes*, which have both appeared in second editions; *Prendergast*, a curious little book, has reached a fifth; and *Davidson* has actually run into a twelfth already. Surely the number of Hebrew scholars in our midst is greater than we thought. Or if not that, then many are they who begin to learn Hebrew grammar and never attain to a knowledge of Hebrew.

The latest and best edition of *Gesenius* in English has passed through three editors' hands, and you will find them all on the title-page. This is the order:—*Gesenius*—*Rœdiger*—*Davies*—*Mitchell*. And the last editor made use of *Kautzsch's* German edition also; so that five men have had it in hand, and done their best with it. Now it goes by the title of *The Student's Hebrew Grammar*. (*Asher & Co.* Large crown 8vo, pp. xxxiii, 423. 7s. 6d.)

Mitchell's Gesenius, or *The Student's Hebrew Grammar*, has most in it of all the Hebrew Grammars we possess. Indeed it has everything in it that we have any right to expect a Grammar to have. For not only are its pages many, but every page is well-filled and orderly. It is not a beginner's book. Its lack of exercises makes it unfit for that. But when the beginning is well over, this is the book in English to go to. At present there is no other to take its place.

Professor A. S. Geden of the Richmond Wesleyan College published a little book last year which supplies one-half at least of what is lacking in *Mitchell's Gesenius*. It contains *Exercises for Translation into Hebrew*; and as it contains