

ARTICLE II.

MINUTE PREDICTION AND MODERN DOUBT.

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SOME one has said that while miracles were originally designed to assist in the establishing of Christianity, they are to-day a great obstacle to faith. The same may be said of the prophecies, and is in a sense being said of them even by some biblical scholars. Of course so destructive a critic as Canon Cheyne of Oxford belittles and rejects what he terms "a circumstantial fulfilment" of prophecy. That much more conservative fellow-Oxonian of his, Professor Driver, while rightly emphasizing the fact that "the prophet speaks primarily to his contemporaries," and while admitting that the visions of the seers are "independent of time" and can properly be projected "upon the shifting future," yet cautions against "a too literal interpretation of prophetic imagery," and against the idea of a "detailed and definite description of the circumstances of a distant age," and affirms with reference to Isaiah's prophecy concerning Tyre, "there is no evidence that it was fulfilled, either at once or subsequently, in accordance with the details of his description," but only "in its main conception," the details being "unessential." A leading Yale professor, a Congregational pastor formerly, who has written a book on "What is the Bible?" speaks disparagingly of those finding "remarkable minute correspondences between old-time prognostications and new-time events," and Dr. Ladd says expressly that the Hebrew prophet was *not* "an announcer of definite future

events," though what he would do with such passages as the beginning of the tenth chapter of First Samuel is not exactly clear. Professor Briggs, of Union Seminary, who has produced a work on "Messianic Prophecy," in the Inaugural Address upon his induction into the chair of Biblical Theology in that Presbyterian school of the prophets, names, as one of the "barriers" to be swept away, "Minute Prediction."

Now this is something which must be determined by evidence, for it is a matter of observation as to whether or not prophetic forecasts have become historic facts. In the writer's "The Bible Verified," he thinks he has shown, to the extent of five chapters, how the Word of God *has* been minutely verified in the cities of Babylon and Tyre and Jerusalem, and in the whole unique history of the peculiar Jews. Not to traverse this ground again, he will in this paper confine himself to what was foretold about Christ, and he will write not as a theologian, but from the standpoint of an average pastor. The late Canon Liddon gave three hundred and thirty-three particulars prophesied about Jesus and fulfilled in his Person. Edersheim, in his "Prophecy and History in Relation to the Messiah," while deprecating (as we all must, with Lieutenant Totten and other such in mind) a "mechanical literalism," yet maintains that "many special predictions can be only Messianically interpreted," and that "unquestionably" there are "definite predictions," and this perhaps will appear in the development of our theme which will be illustrated by Messianic prophecy alone. We might say, with the lamented Delitzsch on this subject, "Whether one takes with reference to Christianity the unitarian or trinitarian, the rationalistic or supernaturalistic standpoint, it is established that Christianity, as contradistinguished from Judaism, is the religion of consummated morality, and that Jesus is the great holy divine man whose appearance *halves the world's history.*"

In general it would seem that the minute constitutes the only difference between sagacious human foresight and divinely-given actual foreknowledge. Any one can make a vague prediction, and run a fair chance of having it verified. It is the wonderful minutiae which test the matter of a real inspiration. The famous Delphic oracle once said to the rich Croesus who consulted it, "If Croesus crosses the Halys, and prosecutes a war with Persia, a mighty empire will be overthrown;" and it was even so, but it was his own empire. The oracle had so worded its wisdom, that, whatever the issue, it would not have to recede and retract. There is no such ambiguity to the divine oracles. And now, in a more particular unfolding of our thought, let us first consider the fact of the Messianic expectation in the first century as presumably caused by something definite predicted, and let us next take a comprehensive survey of actual predictions which will be seen to have been such as naturally to have excited hope.

1. First, as to the fact of the Messianic expectation. Europeans long noted, with a curious interest, articles floated to them over the ocean from unknown shores. A Portugese pilot had seen upon the waves a piece of rudely carved wood. Pine trees, and cane stalks, and other vegetable growths that were unfamiliar to Europe and its neighboring isles made people wonder whence these came. On the coasts of Ireland and Scotland and Norway was thrown by the billows, from time to time, what evidently came from tropical forests. There were even reports of canoes, and of human bodies with strange features, constituting part of the sea's drift from the west. Whence came all these? No one knew; but more and more were led to believe in an undiscovered continent as the source of the mysterious freightage of Old Neptune. Hope and belief in Columbus were thus strengthened, and he sailed away to solve the problem, and in 1492 America was discovered. It was now the the well-

understood Gulf Stream which, bearing this and that from a far-away country, awoke expectation and faith in Europeans. This mighty ocean current of warm water in the midst of cold, at the behest of the continually blowing trade winds of the tropics, rushes forth from our Gulf of Mexico a river which is two thousand times larger than the Mississippi, and which is sometimes forty and again three hundred miles and more wide. It rolls northeastward along the entire United States coast, though at some distance therefrom, then strikes across the vast Atlantic, through its very heart, toward Europe, and after many a turn, north and south and east, it completes its course of over three thousand miles, to bless with a temperate climate and a luxuriant vegetation regions that otherwise would be frozen and barren and desolate. Its heat is said to be sufficient to "melt daily a mass of cast iron as large as Mount Washington," and this it distributes over Western Europe, even Arctic cold being thus modified with salutary effect. Now the Gulf Stream not only carried warmth and fruitfulness across the Atlantic, but it was also the means of starting the course of empire westward by carrying to the Old World evidence of a new continent. We can to-day by actual experiment prove, that articles committed to the Gulf Stream at its source as it dashes past Southern Florida will ultimately be carried to points where expectation of old was born by reason of similar drift that then appeared. *Like this ocean current* is the stream of Messianic prophecy, flowing down through the past, and widening in its course, and blessing every nation it touches by awakening a great hopefulness.

(1) Placing ourselves at a time just prior to the great discovery of the kingdom of the truth, we find that many devout souls were in a state of expectancy. Luke tells us that the aged Simeon was "looking for the consolation of Israel," and was confident "he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ," and that the saintly Anna

was similarly minded, and that there were still others who "were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Mark describes the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, that "councillor of honorable estate," as one who was "looking for the kingdom of God." Matthew informs us of wise men coming from the East with the same pulsing hope. Indeed, the New Testament is confessedly full of what Wordsworth would call intimations of immortality, "of a better day to dawn, even as Zacharias prophesied, "the dayspring from on high." So fervent was the Messianic expectation in the first century, Josephus says, "That which chiefly excited the Jews to war was an ambiguous prophecy, which was also found in the sacred books, that at that time some one within their country should arise who would obtain the empire of the whole world," and this Jewish writer has nothing sadder to record than the rise and fall of various false Christs.

(2) Classical writers, also, of the beginning of the Christian era testify to the same expectation. Suetonius, who wrote "The lives of the Cæsars," says, "A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East that it was fated for the empire of the world at that time to devolve on some who should go forth from Judea." Tacitus speaks of a similar belief being current, "that the East would renew its strength, and they that should go forth from Judea should be rulers of the world." Though Virgil (40 B. C.) may have written his fourth Eclogue in honor of a son of a literary friend, he yet could hardly have used such significant language as is found in this poem, had he not caught the spirit of what have been called "the unconscious prophecies of heathendom." How almost Messianic are these lines, for example, from the Eclogue:—

"Come, claim thine honors, for the time draws nigh,
Babe of immortal race, the wondrous seed of Jove!
Lo, at thy coming how the starry spheres

Are moved to trembling, and the earth below,
And widespread seas, and the blue vault of heaven!
How all things joy to greet the rising Age!"

There must have been something measurably specific foretold to have made such a deep impression on the pagan as well as Jewish mind. No doubt, therefore, can exist as to the fact of a peculiarly expectant mental state about the time of the actual advent of the Lord.

(3) Whence came these rising hopes? They came from what had floated down the stream of Messianic prophecy from a very remote time, just as the drift of the Gulf Stream, upon being carried to Europe, made certain choice and prophetic spirits like Columbus believe in another and new world. And, as we might commit ourselves to the warm current issuing from its source in the Gulf of Mexico till we were landed where canoes and pines in 1492 went ashore to stir the Old World, into the new life of modern discovery; so can we start with the fountain-head of Messianic prophecy in the tropics of Eden, and by simply following the current find ourselves eventually at the fulness of time when the Messiah did appear and was recognized by reason of the prophecies then culminating and in him having their manifest fulfilment.

Nor will there be about them anything vague and uncertain, as in the oracular sayings of classic story. The reader will recollect how it was in the temple of Isis at Pompeii (whose "Last Days" Bulwer delineates), how the statue moved its head, opened its lips, and with a hollow voice gave forth its oracle for some consulting merchants whose ships were to sail for Alexandria the next day. This was the predictive utterance:—

"There are waves like chargers that meet and glow,
There are graves ready wrought in the rocks below;
On the brow of the future the dangers lour,
But blest are your barks in the fearful hour."

"Nothing could be more plain," said a worshipper, who added,

"There is to be a storm at sea, as there very often is at the beginning of autumn, but our vessels are to be saved." The priests themselves, however, did not seem so certain in their own private hearts. One of them remarked to another upon the improvement in the voice of the statue since a suggested mechanical change had been made, while the other said that if a storm did come and did even wreck the vessels, yet the oracle would prove true, for in one sense ships at the bottom of the sea were "blest" in being forever at rest. The Messianic prophecies are not thus equivocal, capable of being taken either way, and fraudulent, being conceived with the very idea of deceiving. They will rather be seen, on examination to be so true and minute, that we will exclaim with Philip, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth."

2. We come, in the second place, to a survey of some actual prophecies. In making a selection of predictions about Christ, we naturally would like to know those to which he himself called attention on that eventful occasion, when, walking with the two doubting disciples toward Emmaus, he began with Moses, and "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." But we are left in ignorance as to the particular prophetic forecasts upon which he commented, except that he indicated his main lines of thought in that he said, "All things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms concerning me." Under suggestion from this division, we will weigh anchor on the Gulf Stream of Messianic prophecy by starting at the very beginning with "the law of Moses." We cannot stop to discuss each prediction in detail, because for the present we desire to get the truer effect of a wide sweep of prophetic utterances,—not as they may be but as they generally are interpreted. We cannot tarry either to note the primary and secondary references which are acknowledged

in some of the predictions. Nor does it come within the scope of our present trend of thought to debate disputed dates of books which, at the latest, long antedate the verifications. We will give ourselves at once to the current, and move rapidly on, as the majestic stream of Messianic prophecy may naturally and easily lead.

(1) At the very dawn of biblical history, we are issuing from the tropical beauty of Eden with the prophetic announcement that the seed of the woman should "bruise" the head of the serpent, which had bruised the heel of humanity when there was the temptation, and the fall, in the garden. That primeval promise must have meant something, and could have signified nothing less than a great recovery on the part of mankind from the injury sustained in the calamity of original sin. We sweep along the current, and we next find that the blessing is to come, not only in the line of the race, but through the Semitic branch thereof, as the rythmical words of Noah show:—

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem ;
And let Canaan be his servant.
God enlarge Japeth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem."

There is briefly outlined here by the seer the political primacy of Japheth, the religious ascendancy of Shem, and the degradation of Canaan, and the descendants of these have answered to the forecast, in the servitude of large portions of the human family like the Canaanites and Africans, in the prominence and power of the Japhetic nations specially centered in Europe, and in the religion of the world, Christianity, having come from the Semitic peoples of Asia. Shem *has* had the pre-eminence foretold in that the Messianic stream flowed by his tents.

The current on which we are being borne takes another turn, and we are in the line of *Jewish* descent on our way toward the promised Christ, in that to Abraham was

the assurance made, "In *thy* seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." There is thus a chosen *nationality* for the transmission of the blessing, and we all know how the Hebrews *were* entrusted with the oracles of God, and did furnish the ancestry of the Lord. Still more definite is the designation next of the Messianic *tribe*, as one is singled out of the twelve tribes of the nation by the glowing prophecy:—

"The sceptre shall not depart from JUDAH,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come;
And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be."

That Christ did spring from Judah is a simple matter of history, and that he came before the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Roman Titus, when the sceptre of power did depart from the Jewish nation, is also well known. So strong now has become the current of Messianic prophecy, that even the half-heathen seer Balaam is impelled by the sight of Israel, from his position on a hill-top commanding a magnificent view of them in the valley, to break out into the rapturous words, which fairly throb with the thought of the splendid destinies wrapped up in the peculiar people:—

"I see him, but not now:
I behold him, but not nigh:
There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

We hear the echo of that inspired utterance afterward in Deuteronomy and Joshua and Micah and Nehemiah, and the familiar Star of Bethlehem is its brilliant fulfilment. The tide is full set, the course of the current is unmistakable, when Moses himself gives his great deliverance, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye harken." Very naturally the woman of Samaria shared the hope of the Samaritans, who received the five books of Moses, while she said with all confidence, "I know that

Messiah cometh (which is called Christ).” She must have often read of the coming prophet like unto Moses, and from such clear words she could not have been otherwise than expectant, not only of a Messianic age, but also of a personal Messiah, and the Lord himself must have had this, among other Mosaic prophecies, in mind, when he said, Moses “wrote of me.” Thus have we swept through “the law of Moses” on our swelling Gulf Stream.

(2) Another grand sweep will take us through “the psalms.” In the particular family line of the “sweet psalmist” himself was the Messiah to appear, for there repeatedly occurs a promise like this:—

“I will not lie unto David ;
His seed shall endure for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me.”

And he died in hope, his “last words” being about

“One that ruleth over men righteously,”

While he added,—

“Verily *my* house is not so with God ;
Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.”

He felt that a son of his was to have perpetual dominion, a “son” whom he yet in one psalm called “Lord,” an anomaly with which, it will be remembered, Christ puzzled the Jews of his day. How definite were the manifold prophecies which named David as an ancestor of the Messiah appears, when, in the first century, the common title of the expected Christ was “Son of David.”

Floating swiftly along our Gulf Stream, we gather up other Messianic material from the Psalms. “Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption,” had very little application, if any, to the psalmist, for his flesh did see corruption, and his tomb could be seen at the time of Peter’s Pentecostal address, but the prophetic words did receive a most striking fulfilment in the resurrection of “great David’s

greater Son." There are also in the Psalms very significant details. When we read these various minute touches,—

"And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,"
 "They part my garments among them,
 And upon my vesture do they cast lots,"
 "They pierced my hands and my feet,"

We are brought very near to the cross of Cavalry, with its familiar but sad incidents, though the descriptive lines were written hundreds of years before the events thus foreshadowed.

(3) How long is the Gulf Stream? over three thousand miles. We have gone over two of the millennial divisions of our Messianic stream "in the law of Moses" and in "the psalms," and now we sweep out into the times of "the prophets" themselves. Isaiah stands forth pre-eminent. He prophesies, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel," that is, "God with us," likewise called "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God," and we think of the Virgin Mary and of her first-born with his divine characteristics. The same prophet speaks of a land "glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light," and we have the whole Galilean ministry by the sea of Gannesaret pictured as with a single stroke of a master artist's brush. In that marvellous fifty-third chapter, which has made infidels believers, and confounded sceptics who would not be convinced, we have a vivid portrayal of the *suffering* Messiah, so enigmatical till the Christ of history exactly filled the prophetic outline, even to minutiae, for when we read that the wondrous Person "opened not his mouth," we are reminded of the patient silence which was so inexplicable to Pilate; and when we read again, "His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death," we are struck with the correspondence to subsequent facts, when the Lord *was* "with the

wicked" in being crucified between two thieves, and was "with the rich in his death" in that he was buried in the private garden of the wealthy Joseph, while the rich Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of fragrant "myrrh and aloes."

From Isaiah we pass to Micah, and hear him prophesying that out of humble Bethlehem "shall One come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting;" and this was sufficiently specific to make the Jewish Sanhedrim, more than seven hundred years later, officially declare that Bethlehem was to be the birth-place of the promised One. If this is not minute prediction, there is no such thing as minuteness. Subsequent prophets never for a moment lose sight of the coming Messiah. Jeremiah says, "I will raise unto David a righteous Branch," Ezekiel says, "My servant David shall be king over them; and they all shall have one Shepherd," and after a mystical seventy weeks, says Daniel, "Shall the Anointed One be cut off," "to make an end of sins, and to make reconcillation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." Haggai says, "I will fill this house with glory," "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former," but as the second temple was not specially glorious of itself, was indeed so much inferior to the first that the older Jews actually "wept" with disappointment, the greater glory promised for it must have been none other than the coming to it of the Messiah, who therefore was connected by this prophecy with this second house, whose rebuilding by Herod was never counted a third structure, and whose destruction by the Roman armies, 70 A. D., fixed and defined the time within which the Christ should appear, and before the post-exilian temple was forever destroyed, there did come to it One who was glorious, "fairer than the children of men."

Zechariah's predictions, too, were minute, presenting

still other features by which the Christ might be recognized. Said this prophet, "They shall look unto me whom they have pierced," and the crucified One with his pierced side comes to view through the intervening ages. The King, whom this same sacred writer represents coming "lowly, and riding upon an ass," while yet "his dominion shall be from sea to sea," suggests the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the still more triumphant march of the present around the earth. The passage, "They weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver," which were cast "unto the potter, in the house of the Lord," makes dramatic that scene of Judas throwing down in the temple the same number of silver pieces wherewith the innocent blood of his Master had been betrayed.

What a wealth of Messianic delineations is being gathered while we are being hurried along the stream of prophecy, and we reach the flood tide in that last of the prophets, Malachi, who exclaims with exultant hope, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple," and we see at once John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth whose way he prepared by announcing his coming and by pointing him out as the long-expected Lamb of God, and our Gulf Stream of Messianic prophecy, which we have been following through the law of Moses, and the psalms, and the prophets, all the way from beautiful Eden, breaks at last upon the first century with the melody of the ocean's gleaming surf, with the musical sound of "many waters" that sparkle with a gladsome light. "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write," and we have found him by the minutiae of prophetic utterance through thousands of years. And from this single line of Messianic evidence among many other lines that might be presented, "minute prediction" would seem to be *not* a "barrier" needing to be swept away, and

“modern doubt” would seem to partake somewhat of the nature of the ancient *slowness to believe* which the Lord himself sadly reproved.

In conclusion, to vary for a moment the figure permeating all that has here been written, as a red strand runs through all the cordage of the British navy, we have traced through whole millenniums the scarlet thread of Messianic prophecy. Or shifting our position yet again, as we glance backward through the vista of centuries, we are reminded of a not infrequent scene in the mountains. Alpine ranges stretch away for miles, peak succeeding to peak, and in the early morning, while dark shadows lie along the valleys and far up the steep slopes, summit after summit, every Mont Blanc, is gilded by the rising sun. So a long sweep of vision into the past shows a succession of mountain tops golden with the rays of the Sun of righteousness, and while there are many low vales unlighted, the towering heights are so illumined with glowing prophecies, that there is one stream of Messianic light from Eden to the Cross, and the radiance reaches to the present, and shall go corruscating down to the remotest future.