

## DIALOGUES ON THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETS.

## VII.

Montanism a Link in the Chain of Prophecy.—The Late Canon Bright on Montanism.

*Mason.* I wonder, Riddell, whether you know a small volume by the late Canon Bright, in which he deals with Montanism and other topics, called *Waymarks in Church History*? I have brought it to show you.

*Riddell.* I know it, Mason; it has even been offered to me for a *quietus*, as a sort of “bare bodkin,” as if to “do for me.” I regard the author as one of the eminent and admirable writers of the Church of England in our time, now, alas! taken from us. But this does not blind me to the possibility that he has followed the traditional way of treating Montanism, and followed it too closely, without taking a dispassionate view of the facts. Here is the book. It opens with the observations: “A bias of some kind is unavoidable. We cannot ignore our own beliefs, or even our own prepossessions; to pose as external to a subject on which we have interior convictions . . . would be like trying to take ourselves out of ourselves, to pretend not to be what we are. If our object is truth, we must not begin by being untrue; and affectation or unreality is untruth.” What do you think of that?

*M.* You surprise me—I mean with the quotation. It is a defence of heathenism! I can imagine myself a missionary to an intelligent Moulvie who confronts me with the prefatory remark, “A bias of some kind is unavoidable. We cannot ignore our own beliefs, or even our own prepossessions; to pose,” etc., etc. And I do not think my argument would be able to proceed beyond his preface, unless indeed I were a better missionary than the reverend Canon, which is unlikely, layman as I am.

R. You really do believe, then, in a common ground of truth, Mason—I would not be uncomplimentary to a layman in theology. Yes, I felt sure you did. But then I also felt sure of the same in the late Canon, until he told me that he believed in bias, that he would not ignore his own prepossessions, could not therefore “pose as external to a subject on which he had interior convictions”—*exterior* convictions are something else!—could not therefore do anything “like trying to take himself out of himself.” He forgot that he himself was something of a poet. Ah, yes! he did just then “pose as external to” poetry. I am afraid he is self-condemned in “pretending not to be what he was”—a poet.

M. Yes. Don't you think on the whole it must be another Canon Bright? “Affectation or unreality is untruth.”

R. However, Mason, you and I can perhaps for a while “take ourselves out of ourselves” without “posing” in a too theatrical manner in this study, enough to examine the Canon's remarks on Montanism. And he really has some good remarks presently. “We need to be reminded,” he says, “of Newman's homely plainness of speech, ‘it is not honest to distort history.’ . . . We must not ‘let reverence for any man cause us to err’ . . .” But let me read you some of his longer remarks on Montanism. He says: “Now it is quite true that prophesying had been current, not only in the Apostolic age, but to some extent in the Sub-Apostolic period, or even later, and that the more fervid Christians were still wont to believe in revelations by vision.” I call that a great concession, don't you?

M. Yes. *Cela donne furieusement à penser.* It makes me think what is meant by “the more fervid Christians.”

R. Does it mean, think you, “opposed to the lukewarm” of whom John the Elder says that Christ says: “I will spit thee out of my mouth” (Rev. iii. 16)? If so, it is accurate,

for that writer was a Prophet, a brother of "his brethren the Prophets" (Rev. xxii. 9), and thus was one of those same more fervid Christians, and my point is that the Montanists were his direct successors.

*M.* Quite so; your argument is one that will take a good deal of answering. But I fear the Canon implied something less complimentary to the Montanists when he said "more fervid Christians." More *fervent* would have been kinder than *fervid*, which is not at all kind; at least it strikes me so.

*R.* You will note that not a word is said by the Canon concerning ecstasy or trance, and yet that is what the term "revelations by vision" conceals. It may be there is something antipathetic to the British mind in "ecstasy." Perhaps it sounds feminine, or extravagant, or "gushing." Theologians are afraid of it for fear the laity might dislike it, or for other reasons. Nevertheless the thing must be faced and the term must be used. Ecstasy is a Scriptural term, and it was once applied to Jesus by some who knew Him (Mark iii. 21). Here then is the concession that some Christians from 30 A.D. to 130 were wont to believe in revelations by ecstasy.

*M.* What then are the objections to the Montanists? They seem to have been really on the conservative side, as you observed before—to have been old-fashioned.

*R.* Well, listen while I give you Canon Bright's account: "It was not prophesying as such, nor visions as such, which finally led the bishops of Asia to pronounce against Montanus and his two female companions, Maximilla and Priscilla. It was the application of the idea in what was called a 'false kind of ecstasy,' in prophesyings claiming to 'develop' the disciplinary and practical teaching of the apostles into an indefinite series of rules austere and rigoristic, which alarmed and shocked the churchly mind."

*M.* I take that sentence to mean that there were two

objections felt to Montanists : first, they practised "false ecstasy"; secondly, they made new rules of austere living, for which they claimed apostolic authority.

R. You have correctly divided the subject, and you agree with the Canon's division. But we have already discussed the first charge of "false ecstasy" (EXPOSITOR, December, 1902), and have seen that it might easily rest upon exaggeration. We should like to hear the other side, if not from Montanus, which is impossible, at least from Tertullian, who maintained it, without a doubt, in his six or seven books on "Ecstasy." If you try to examine what "the churchly mind" thought of false ecstasy, and had to say of it, you will find, unfortunately, little. We find it recorded (Eusebius, *Church History*, v. 16) "that the spirit, speaking through Maximilla, said: 'I am chased as a wolf from the sheep; I am not a wolf; I am word (*ῥῆμα*) and spirit and power.'" Now, what does this amount to?

M. We have, I remember, the term "wolf" applied to a false prophet by St. Paul in a well known passage (Acts xx. 29). And the comparison to a wolf is in St. John (x. 12).

R. Quite so. Some one of the churchly mind had accused Maximilla of being a false prophetess, and excommunicated her or threatened to do so, and she repelled the charge as false. Her denial was put down as the utterance of the false and lying spirit within her. Indeed, as among persons who agreed in believing that they all had a spirit within them, it is not surprising that a prophetess should say the words given above partly in her own character, partly in that of the possessing spirit. There is nothing in the words, as actually uttered and heard, to show that she deserved excommunication. "But," says Canon Bright, "the false ecstasy implied a suspension of intelligent consciousness, and this was a mark, not of Biblical prophecy in its normal condition, but of the *mantiké* of the old

world." Here it must be confessed by both sides, his and ours, that we enter on very difficult ground. But it may be observed that "a suspension of intelligent consciousness" is something very much like St. Peter's condition when he was in an ecstasy at the Transfiguration.

*M.* Do you really think that he was in an ecstasy then?

*R.* I do, certainly, and am convinced that he was. It is the simplest explanation of the data which nobody has ever explained in any more satisfactory manner, and it is the oldest Christian explanation, given by Tertullian. However, you remember the words in Luke ix. 33, "not knowing what he said?" It would be safer on the whole to suppose that there were degrees of suspension of consciousness, and it may well be that the Montanist Prophets often became unduly excited, and their intelligent consciousness unduly suspended. I would not defend all their actions and sayings, in spite of the bias and prepossession of the Canon. I think it is most probable that they were betrayed into extravagances of prophecy. Still we can try to do them justice. And when it comes to comparing them with the *mantiké* of the old world, and saying "there was a heathenish twang about their utterances in the way in which they were uttered," this we may dispute, for there is not a scrap of evidence to show that the bishops of Asia thought of any such comparison, or accused the Montanists of being mantically inclined. We know that the most famous *mantiké*, the oracular prophecy of Delphi, was usually exceedingly intelligent, and even if the priestess was popularly supposed to suspend consciousness, that did not prevent the Christian fathers of the fourth century from believing in the genuineness of some communications of the oracles, which swarmed in the century following the Emperor Hadrian, 138 A.D. Indeed they were anxious to induce the oracles to acknowledge the Divinity of Christ.

*M.* Some of the oracles are among the best reading in

Greek literature, as the late Frederic Myers has shown in his brilliant essay on them.

*R.* The Canon goes on to make an amazing statement that the Montanists "claimed to supplement the apostolic teaching on matters of order and conduct, so that requirements, largely dictated by excitable women, might be pressed on the Christian conscience as equally sacred with the precepts of St. Paul." What does that amount to?

*M.* I should say it amounted to a condemnation of the Church order which the Canon himself upheld, and in which he "claimed to supplement the apostolic teaching on matters of order," since the obedience of a bishop to an archbishop, and of a priest to an archdeacon, and scores of other requirements are not to be found in Scripture. They could not be. Some slight measure of supplement of teaching must be allowed, or no church body could exist in these days.

*R.* No, indeed, though the supplement may be reasonable and inoffensive enough. Very likely he means nothing more than "application" of the general to the particular. But where, I wonder, does the Canon find that the Montanists pressed their requirements on the Christian conscience as equally sacred with the precepts of St. Paul? He also says these requirements were largely dictated by excitable women. Are not men also excitable? Were not the bishops at Nicaea and Ephesus excitable? "Dictated" is a question-begging term, and very ambiguous. There is nothing to show that the women were actuated by a dictatorial temper, or that they were anything but honest in believing that they were true Prophetesses inspired by the Holy Spirit. As to their actual utterances we know next to nothing; but if we are to use the writings of Tertullian to supplement our scanty evidence about the "excitable women" who lived two generations before him, and as far away from him as Central Asia Minor is from Carthage, and

who spoke in Greek while he wrote in Latin, then we shall look in Tertullian to see whether he, on his part, pressed these requirements on the Christian conscience as equally sacred with the precepts of St. Paul. And we shall find that he does the exact opposite, that he can hardly write a page without referring to the authority of St. Paul. The Pauline Epistles and the rest of the New Testament and the Old are his never-failing standard. He never dreamed of laying down anything that was not properly based upon Holy Scripture. He protests against a charge of vacillation being brought against "Paul the Apostle of Christ, the teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and the truth, the vessel of election, the founder of the Churches, *their censor in matters of discipline.*" Again, he calls "Paul the immovable pillar of matters of discipline" (Tertullian on *Modesty*, 14, 16). And he labours with great pains to arrive at his actual meaning as an authority. It is then a mere travesty of the great Montanist to say that *he* "claimed to supplement the apostolic teaching, so that requirements, largely dictated by excitable women, might be pressed on the Christian conscience as equally sacred with the precepts of St. Paul."

*M.* Yes, you are right. The Canon is biassed against Montanism; but as he said at the outset, in self-defence I suppose, "a bias of some kind is unavoidable." He must have known what was to follow his own preface.

*R.* Excuse me one moment, Mason. I am now just looking to see how many times Tertullian, the Montanist, refers to Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla in the course of his works. I am looking in the Index to Oehler's edition. I think you will be surprised when I tell you how many times he mentions them in the 1,700 pages of his writings. Just twice! And yet that editor's Indices are so complete as to fill 163 pages.

*M.* It is quite plain that Montanus and the Prophetesses did not subtend a very large angle in Tertullian's mind.

R. Now we come at last to the third objection, "which finally led the Bishop of Asia to pronounce against Montanus."—Remember, the works of Tertullian have been treated by the assailants as an armoury for the attack on Montanism; and yet this involves the great assumption that Tertullian was a true follower of Montanus. This is the third attack. "The rules put forth (by the Montanists) were all in the direction of severity; more and longer fasts to be observed, second marriages absolutely forbidden, self-surrender during persecution made a duty, absolution to be impossible after certain heinous sins." (Bright, *Waymarks*, p. 42, referring to Tertullian's Montanist books.) Now we may suppose the bishops in Asia knew as much about the question as Canon Bright. They did not know what Tertullian was going to write two generations or more later. Would you believe that just the opposite of severity was charged against the Phrygian Montanists by the "Church writer" Apollonius (in Asia Minor about 185 A.D.), who says that Montanus "taught dissolutions of marriage-ties"? This is a charge of laxity, not of severity—we are dealing only with the charge, not with the truth of it, which is beyond our data to ascertain. Again, then, you will note the contradiction. Then, as to fasting. It is obvious that fasting is recognized in the New Testament, fasting rather too diverse to be included in any one formula. What Tertullian says is this: "How very little interference with eating there is with us! Two weeks of fasting in the year, and those not entire weeks."

M. How would that suit the modern Church discipline in some quarters? The moderns want more than two weeks' fasting in the year. Tertullian was moderate.

R. However, we may admit that Apollonius does charge Montanus with having "laid down the law of fastings," as if he were a *lawgiver*, a *Nomothetês* like Moses; but here again we have the orthodox impaling themselves upon



the horns of a dilemma just as awkward as that of the Montanists. For if we admit Tertullian as a witness, we find him quoting the gospel text (Luke xvi. 16), that the law and the Prophets were until John, and it is urged that he pushed the meaning of this text too far, in that he took it as a basis for the "New Prophecy," as the Montanist dispensation of the Spirit was called. But what reason is there in saying in one breath that Montanism emulated Moses as the *Legislator* of fasting in accordance with the Old Testament, and that Montanism superseded the New Testament, and, much more, left the Old Testament behind? This does not look like consistency in the assailants of Montanism.

*M.* I suppose you are satisfied that the fault of inconsistency did not rest with Montanism first, and so provoked the equally inconsistent attack?

*R.* On the contrary, I am not concerned—let me repeat—to defend Montanism in all points. It is quite possible that it may have been inconsistent and somewhat irregular. Nevertheless, that would not prevent it from being the direct successor of the Apostles on their prophetic side, and the evidence goes to show that it was the direct successor of that older school which the three Synoptists represent, while the tradition of the Fourth Gospel is that which the orthodox champion, Claudius Apollinaris, drove like a wedge into the heart of Asia Minor, where it finally came to prevail over Montanism. However, we have not yet finished with the reasons which Canon Bright assigned as having led the bishops of Asia to pronounce against Montanism. As to the prohibition of a second marriage Tertullian had much to say, as also about Flight in Persecution, and about Restoration (not Absolution) after heinous sin. He had many scriptures to quote on his side of each of those three questions. But it would detain us long to discuss them now. Yet I must say that he is unique

among the Fathers for the freshness and energy and life that he puts into all his handling of scripture. Though Origen rivals him in some respects, having the advantage of writing in Greek, it does one good to read him. It appears, however, when we turn to the bishops of Asia Minor, that so far from complaining that Montanists were unduly severe in regard to flight in persecution, so far from saying that they were greedy of martyrdom, Bishop Claudius Apollinaris taunts them by asking, "Let them answer us before God: Is there one of these who began their talking from the time of Montanus and the women, who was persecuted by the Jews or was put to death by the heathen?"

*M.* I see the discrepancy between the Montanism as represented at 150 A.D., and as represented at 200 A.D. Are we then to infer that times had changed between the Asiatic Montanists and Tertullian, so that what was true of the former was not true of the latter witness, and that Montanists were more ready in Tertullian's time to die in martyrdom than they had been two generations earlier?

*R.* It must be uncertain. Persecution had increased in the interval. But whatever Tertullian's orthodox opponents cast in his teeth, the Asiatic bishops were far from using the taunt of undue severity against the Montanists of their time and place, and undue severity was not a ground of condemnation with them.

*M.* I have heard the Montanists called "The Puritans of the early Church."

*R.* Yes, and you will judge of the accuracy of that sweeping statement by the remarks of Apollonius on the dice-playing and the face-painting, which I will give you presently. Now we come to a fourth charge. "The erection of a small Phrygian town into a New Jerusalem, a centre of Montanist religious life, would be felt to savour of Judaical localism." The Canon is right here. This is one of the charges of Apollonius, who mentions two towns,

Pepuza and Tymium. But does this suffice to make Montanism a heresy? It was not a shocking offence. These small towns were not to be rivals to the destroyed Jerusalem, however their importance was exaggerated by Montanus. Not even the Canon will venture to say that Tertullian, for instance, thought of them as his Mecca.

*M.* No. It is also easy to imagine how the Montanists would sometimes, like other people, use the florid language of hymns and be misunderstood by their opponents in doing so. If these towns were the head-quarters of the Montanist army and seemed to be "cities of refuge" or "holy cities"—and well they might be pardoned for so regarding them—it would be a very small matter in itself, I agree.

*R.* Yes. But now we come to the last of the grounds. "Fifthly, an arrogant, self-righteous temper was developed, expressing itself in scorn for the historic Church and its ministry, to which were applied, as freely as by Gnostics, such terms as 'unspiritual' or 'carnal.' Against it was set up a new church, calling itself 'spiritual,' professing to be alone faithful to the inspirations of the Paraklete, and speaking, not through any appointed order, not through a 'mere number of bishops,' but through individuals pronounced to be 'spiritual' men. . . . The Montanist conception of the Church and its life was in effect revolutionary, clean contrary to that which appears, not only in Irenæus and in the sub-apostolic Fathers, but most pointedly in the Epistles of St. Paul." Here the Canon has waxed very bold in his statements. "A mere number of bishops," is, of course, a well known saying of Tertullian's. But, unfortunately, he is very wide of the mark. He has not said what he ought to have said, and he has said what he ought not to have said.

*M.* What ought he to have said?

*R.* That one consideration which weighed with the Asiatic bishops was the supposed financial malversation of Mon-

tanus and his followers. First the Anti-montanist writer (Claudius Apollinaris is he) comments on the shocking death of their "first steward or something like a steward"—apparently a financial officer. Then Apollonius taunts Montanus with "having appointed exactors of money, and devising a corrupt system under the name of 'offertories,' and providing salaries for his preachers of the word, in order that the teaching of the word may be fortified by means of gluttony." Indeed the greater part of Apollonius's polemic is directed against a prophet receiving gifts and money. He denounces one Themison who "wrapped himself in covetousness as with a cloak" and "bought off his imprisonment with money." He challenges "the prophetess to tell us about one Alexander" and his "robberies." "We will show," he says, "that these so-called prophets and martyrs are making small gains out of the poor, the orphan, and the widow, as well as the rich." "Alexander has been judged before the proconsul at Ephesus for his robberies." "Does a prophet dye his hair, paint his eyebrows, and play dice?" This is the charge of Apollonius, an Asiatic writer, if not a bishop, in denouncing Montanism. (Eusebius, v. 18.)

*M.* To judge by the charges of the assailants, I should say there was not much that resembled Tertullian's Montanism in the Montanism which Apollonius attacked. Or had Montanism improved as it grew older, and given up painting its face and playing with dice?

*R.* No, indeed. You may infer, on the other hand; that the Church was quite ready to launch two charges mutually inconsistent in character within a limited time—for we cannot exactly determine Apollonius's date: he was, however, contemporary with Tertullian—against Montanism. If both kinds of charges were true—that of dice-playing and that of undue severity—then Montanism was an impossible combination, an idol of clay and iron, that was not worth the powder and shot of any attack whatever. Why did

Canon Bright not once mention the charges which Eusebius quotes from Apollonius and his preceding Anti-montanist, when Canon Bright himself knew Eusebius so well, and is his editor?

*M.* I wonder why. He must have known them very well.

*R.* An omission of the first water. I leave you to answer the question. You will answer it, please, without imputing motives—if you can.

*M.* If I can! Well, now tell me what the Canon ought not to have said.

*R.* Yes, things are apt to escape even the most biassed and prepossessed theologian. But you will note here, *à propos* of the Montanists being “the Puritans of the early Church”—and I often wish myself more of a Puritan than I am—will you note that if Puritanism is a misnomer as applied to the Montanists, as it must be unless the Anti-montanist Apollonius wrote a tissue of falsehoods, then the characteristic feature of Montanism is not its severity of morals, which Canon Bright passed so lightly over, nor is it anything of an ethical nature at all? It must be sought elsewhere. And where can we seek and find it except in the strong prophetic character which marks its operation whether in Asia in the time of Claudius Apollinaris and Miltiades and, rather later, Apollonius, or as regards the theory of ecstasy in the time of Tertullian in Asia?

*M.* I see your contention is that Montanism is stamped with the mark of prophecy, not with the mark of “Puritanism.” Current opinion has clung, with a tenacity worthy of a better cause, to Puritanism as “the enemy”—doubtless it long has been so in the University of Laud—but you make out a strong case for prophecy being the mark of Montanism; held, of course, to be false prophecy, but, whether false or true, held to be a reason for condemning Montanism and so effecting its extinction. I quite

agree with your view. Now, will you kindly tell me, before we part, what you consider the Canon ought not to have said?

R. He manifestly ought not to have said that the Asiatic bishops condemned Montanism for assuming the term "spiritual" and calling the church party "carnal," when there is not a sign or a trace of Montanists doing any such thing till we come to the later writings of Tertullian, two full generations later. Observe that the Anti-montanist Apollonius is taunting the Montanists with carnal living, while Canon Bright is charging them with undue severity and with scorning the historic church as "carnal."

M. Which was right?

R. I am afraid we must say the Canon was wrong. He certainly was wrong if Apollonius was right; and if Apollonius was wrong, it was the duty of the historian of the English Church and editor of Eusebius to point out where he is wrong, and to clear away the historical difficulty, if any. This he has not done. He has utterly confused two separate periods, attributing to the earlier what belonged to the later. He has shown a defect of historical accuracy, a lack of historical imagination, and an utter want of historical criticism in dealing with these Anti-montanist charges and allegations.

M. I think you began by reading me the Canon's own words: "A bias of some kind is unavoidable. We cannot ignore our own prepossessions." That is how he began, and this is how he ends! As only a layman, I cannot wonder. He thinks the Montanist conception of the Church was revolutionary as shown in Tertullian, and he asserts the earlier Montanists were the same, and *therefore* the Asiatic bishops condemned them, when there is no trace, I understand you to say, that they had any conception of the Church at all except the traditional one of maintaining the practices of the Prophets. So that the most conservative

body of Christians then existing is by him dubbed revolutionary.

*R.* Exactly. That is my point. That is how Church History is written!

*M.* By an eminent Anglican divine! Then, Riddell, it wants overhauling.

*R.* It wants a new bottom, Mason—the Christian Prophets; a new bias, or rather balance—that of Truth; but though the crew is ever slowly changing, I find comfort in knowing that our Pilot remains the same, as faithful as He is sure. And we can trust Him still.

E. C. SELWYN.

## STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND TOPOGRAPHY OF JERUSALEM.

### IV.

#### THE PRELUDE.

THE histories of many of the famous cities of the world run back into legendary tales of their origins: the selection of a site by some wandering hero surprised into the intuition of advantages which it takes centuries of fame to prove; a sacrifice and the descent of favourable omens; or a miracle; or the apparition of a deity. It is the fate of the most sacred city of all to be destitute of such memories. Her name, as we have seen, betrays no certain sign of a belief in her divine foundation.<sup>1</sup> There is no story of the choice of her site by the first men who dwelt, or worshipped upon it. And (if we leave aside in the meantime the ambiguous narrative in Genesis xiv.) the earliest notices of Jerusalem present her entering history with a plain, unromantic air, singularly in keeping with that absence of

<sup>1</sup> EXPOSITOR for February, 1903. Yet see farther on in this article.