

mouth of man. Its predictive quality derives from this fact, though incidental to it.

The mode by which these visions were communicated to John is, to our human understanding, very mysterious. All we know is that it was through angelic agency (1: 1). In this it has analogies with Old Testament prophecy. Visions presenting truth under like symbolic imagery were given to Daniel, Zechariah, and Ezekiel, and were likewise mediated through angels, so that it would appear that truth can be apprehended visually as well as verbally. Be that as it may, the glory of prophecy is that it comes from God and that it is given to men in order to create faith in Christ. However important it may be to have a proper understanding of "things to come," and no one would wish to minimize a desire for this where it is followed with due regard to the limits set upon it by Holy Scripture, a still more important thing is that we should so come under the dominant vision of Christ in His regal offices as to see in perspective the whole panorama of human history in relation to Him. For the great end of prophecy is not merely to supply information on a prophetic programme but to support the faith of believers and to inspire acclamation and worship. So manifold is the presentation of Christ in this copestone of Divine prophecy that throughout its pages title after title rings out in royal proclamation, "King of kings and Lord of lords," "Prince of the kings of the earth," "The bright and morning star," "The Lion of the tribe of Judah," "The first begotten of the dead," "The beginning of the creation of God." It is as if the full splendour of His glory would here break forth above all time and space in the pure radiance of eternity: yet is that glory caught from what He accomplished when incarnate upon earth. He who sits upon the Divine throne and receives the adoration of heaven and earth does so as the One whose hands were pierced by sinful men, does so as the Lamb that once was slain, even as He "that loved us and loosed us from our sins by His blood."

VII

THE NOTE OF LAW IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

THE BOOK OF THE LAW IS THE SUBSTRATUM OF OLD TESTAMENT prophecy. Beneath the whole structure of prophecy, with its predictions, promises, warnings, and visions of the future, rests the supporting authority of Divine law.* What is

**Note:* The word *law* is used throughout in this chapter in a moral and ethical rather than in a legalistic sense.

prophecy if not affirmation that the heavens do rule, that righteousness and mercy are the pillars of God's throne? Are not the commandments themselves prophecies that God's will shall be done on earth as in heaven, that anarchy and sin shall not triumph finally, and that eventually "all enemies shall be put under His feet"? Prophecy is conformable to its original source and upholds the supremacy of Divine law in the affairs of men. The Prayer-book version of *Psa.* 99: 1 gives the basic presupposition of all prophecy:

"The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient:
He sitteth between the cherubims, be the earth never so
unquiet."

Recognition of this fact led commentators in the last century to shift the emphasis from fore-telling to forth-telling, and in so far as this restored in men's minds a stronger sense of ethical values and of the sanctity of Divine law it was salutary. Extravagances of prophetic interpretation, however, should not hinder us from recognizing also an authentic predictive note in prophecy. Why should not prediction be thought of as retaining ethical value, especially when coupled, as it so often is, with promises of reward and threats of punishment?

The Fall in Eden disrupted the rule of the heavens on earth. The first subsequent action on God's part was to affirm that, by the crushing of the serpent's head, this rule would be restored, albeit through suffering, for in treading down the foe, the heel of the conqueror would be bruised. The language, appropriately, is gnomic—comprehensive rather than explicit and detailed. The passage ranks as the first prophecy of Holy Scripture.

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and
between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and
thou shalt bruise his heel" (*Gen.* 3: 15).

The enmity between the two seeds, the persecution of God's people by the seed of the serpent, the final triumph of Christ and His people over Satan—these are the essential elements of all prophecy. Different phases of the conflict form the immediate subject of particular prophecies, but the final character of all is the Divine law of righteousness inherent in God Himself. To recognize this is much more important than to be able to chart a programme of events.

The kingdom of God is the grand subject of prophecy. We must not take this exclusively as referring to an earthly kingdom, but in the broad sense of God's rule being established throughout all places of His dominion, as *Psalm* 103: 19-22 puts it. Things in heaven and things under the earth, as well as things on the

earth, are to be subjected to His authority. Prophecy "soars with no middle flight," but rising above time and space "asserts eternal Providence, and justifies the ways of God to men." That God in his sovereignty should disclose His purpose to mankind so that they, because of it, might turn from their evil ways and rank themselves on the side of righteousness, shows thoughts of mercy and longsuffering on His part toward the human race. He might well have acted without previously making known the issues of the conflict, for He is accountable to none (Job 33: 13). Prophecy is therefore, even when denouncing in judgment, a pledge of the goodwill of God toward man. The prophets are the evangelists of the Old Testament.

The test for all pretended prophetic utterance is laid down in the book of Isaiah, chapter 8, verse 20:

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them." Even if, having regard to Isaiah's earlier instruction in verse 16, "Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples," we refer (probably rightly) the sanction mentioned to the prophet's own writings, the broad principle remains. The law is the Torah, the basic teaching or doctrine: the testimony is the covenant-witness thereto laid up before the Lord, as were the two tables of stone, which are spoken of as the tables of testimony, and the ark in which they were deposited "the ark of the testimony." To these, as to an appointed standard, all teachings and prophecies were to be referred. What did not conform thereto had no light, but belonged to the darkness. This again shows how essentially the book of the law enters into all Old Testament prophecy, just as in the New Testament the four Gospels enter into all the Epistles.

Enoch, whom Jude speaks of as the seventh from Adam, is the great prophet of the antediluvian age. A holy man, he received testimony that in his life he pleased God, and was translated that he should not see death. His character fitted him to be a recipient of Divine prophecy, and though Scripture preserves no record of his utterances except for one small fragment, that fragment is enough to show the essential nature of his message.

"Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of His holy ones.

"To execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14, 15).

Only a man who was a pillar of righteousness in an age when the earth was rapidly becoming corrupt through sin and violence

could have spoken such words. The burden of his message is the execution of judgment upon all, with particular reference to the conviction of the ungodly. The immediate force of the prediction was doubtless realized in the judgment of the Flood, but like all local prophecy it was proleptic of larger issues and looked forward to the final suppression of evil in the great day of the Lord.

Noah, also, being warned of God of "things not seen as yet," became "a preacher of righteousness," a term almost synonymous with "prophet." The spirit of prophecy in Noah led him to foresee that the Flood was grounded in moral values. God had declared to him, "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them" (Gen. 6: 13). Noah, like Enoch, walked with God, and was upright in his generations, so he saw the Flood not only as a coming event but as a moral retribution upon evil: this became the root of his preaching. Being grounded on the Word of God, however, it was something more than natural morality, and partook of the nature of faith, making him an heir of God's righteousness (Heb. 11: 7).

A striking parallel, but with happier results, is found in the preaching of the prophet Jonah, who cried through the streets of Nineveh, that wicked city, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." This refusal to make terms with evil, and stern warning of inevitable retribution, is characteristic of the message of the prophets, yet with it the door of mercy is not irrevocably closed if hearers are thereby led to repentance and amendment of their ways. "I have published righteousness in the great congregation" (Psa. 40: 9) was as much, and more, the duty of the prophet as to predict things to come, for the latter sprang out of the former. Although only eight souls were saved in the ark, Scripture reminds us that in the days of Noah, when the ark was a-preparing, God waited in longsuffering (I Pet. 3: 20), not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3: 9). Nevertheless, righteousness must be vindicated and prophecy fulfilled: on the expiry of the appointed season of grace God brought in the flood of waters upon the world of the ungodly.

Moses, as lawgiver, the spokesman of God to Israel, must be regarded as a major prophet, one, indeed, so unique in his calling as to be a type of that greater Prophet whom God was to send among men. It was said unto Moses, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth" (Deut. 18: 18). Although in his parting charge to Israel and in his celebrated Song Moses utters majestic prophecies foretelling the course of Israel's history into the far future and also predicting the final triumph of the Lord over all His

adversaries, Moses' prophethood in Deut. 18: 18 refers primarily to his proclamation of the Divine commandments. The response called for is not intelligent apprehension of a future programme but practical obedience to God's law. "He shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." This basic prophecy was cited by Peter to the people gathered in Solomon's porch as referring to Christ (Acts 3: 22-23). Stephen refers to its utterance as one of the distinguishing marks of Moses' greatness, saying, "This is *that* Moses which said (these words) unto the children of Israel" (Acts 7: 37:), thereby also tacitly applying the terms of the prophecy to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The warnings found in the epistle to the Hebrews are drawn from the same source, and one passage makes explicit reference to it. If, as the epistle reminds us, "Moses (as prophet) indeed was faithful in all his (God's) house as a servant," it was "for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken (by Christ)" (Heb. 3: 5). This fact underlies the solemn admonitions contained in such passages as Heb. 2: 1-3; 10: 28-29; 12: 25-26. John, too, in the Revelation, describing the victors over the Beast as they stood on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, writes, "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15: 3), thus linking Mosaic prophecy with Messianic fulfilment.

The Old Testament writings are summarized as "the Law and the Prophets." Moses represents the former, Elijah the latter. Both dispensations were introduced by confirmatory miracles, but the testimony once established, signs were largely withdrawn. The signs and wonders wrought by the Lord Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel age provide a New Testament parallel.

Elijah has left no written prophecies, but his spirit animates all the later prophets. His public ministry, recorded in the first and second books of the Kings, stands as a norm for the prophetic office. His task was to turn back the heart of the people to the Lord, and the means by which he sought to fulfil this task were derived from reflection on the law of the Lord (*cf.* Deut. 11: 17 with I Kings 17: 1), followed by earnest prayer (James 5: 17), and fearless proclamation of God's judgment on sin. He found in the majesty of the law support as a prophet, and so was able to speak with authority and power. When outward circumstances were discouraging and he failed in heart and in his ministry, it was in Horeb that he sought retreat and strength. There, at the mount of God, where Moses had received the tables of the cove-

nant, the Lord reassured His servant that Divine omnipotence had many ways of securing its ends, and that the law would not perish from the earth, even if those who kept it were hidden for a time from the public eye.

The spirit of Elijah left its mark upon Israel. He became the prototype of the promised forerunner of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the messenger of the Lord of hosts, who should prepare the hearts of the people for His coming and make straight the way of the Lord. Malachi's prophecy takes up a reproach against the priests because they had neglected to teach the law, and through partiality in its administration had caused many to stumble in it (Mal. 2: 7, 8, 9). But the wicked are warned that a day was coming when they would be burned up like stubble, when righteousness would shine forth like the sun, and the Lord would vindicate those who feared His name in an evil time. Hear his final admonition, which is entirely in the manner and spirit of Old Testament prophecy, and fitly closes the canon of Old Testament Scripture.

"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and judgments.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come:

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4: 4-6).

These verses sum up the relation between Moses and Elijah, between the book of the law and the prophetic writings. The mission of prophecy is to turn the hearts of those to whom it is addressed back to the fundamental precepts of the law—righteousness, truth, mercy, love, judgment, things that in every age the Lord requires of men. Prophecy, to take the New Testament paraphrase of Malachi, seeks to "turn the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him" (Luke 1: 17). Those who do this are "the wise" (the teachers), who, as Daniel puts it, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: turning many to righteousness, they shall shine as the stars for ever (Dan. 12: 3). Note, however, that the wisdom here spoken of is not intellectual but moral: it is "the wisdom of the just" not "the wisdom of the wise." Here again, by the very language used, we are reminded that prophecy has to do with moral and spiritual issues rather than with mental curiosity. Throughout all Old Testament prophecy runs this strong sense of law. This should instruct us how we are to study prophecy, and still more, how we are to use it in public ministry.

The Old Testament flows into the New. Too much has been made of the supposed interregnum between the dispensations, the long period of silence between Malachi and St. Matthew. True, the canon of Old Testament Scripture had been completed, but that which was already written was in full force until the coming of the New. "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John," we read (Matt. 11: 13). Malachi's prophecy found fulfilment and extension in the ministry of John the Baptist. Incidentally, the law equally with all the prophets is here said to have prophesied, though in this, as its secondary place in the verse shows, it yields priority to the prophets more strictly considered.

This smooth transition from the Old into the New is illustrated also in the *Magnificat* and in the *Benedictus*, which hail Christ as the fulfilment of what had been spoken by "His holy prophets, which have been since the world began" (Luke 1: 70), and also as the Dayspring or Branch ushering in the brightness of a new day and restoring the kingly line to Israel.

Mark speaks of the advent of John as being "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1: 1), so that the ministry of John the Baptist not only consummates that of the prophets but inaugurates the ministry of the Gospel, and thus becomes the vital link between the Old and New Testaments. Acts 1: 22 speaks likewise: the first qualification of apostolic witness is acquaintance with the facts of the Gospel "beginning with the baptism of John." John's message therefore has equally important relation with the law and the prophets, and with the Gospel. The majesty of the Divine law is not diminished by the advent of Christ, though its glory be eclipsed thereby. "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). The saying, so far from belittling the law (though affirming that grace and truth surpass it), is itself derived in language and content from the book of the Law (Ex. 34: 6).

John's one great concern was to insist upon repentance and righteousness in view of the imminence of the kingdom of God. It was the moral issues of that near event, rather than its predictive foreshadowing, which moved him. His stern words to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to the publicans and sinners, to the Pharisees and Sadducees, to the rude soldiery, and to such individuals as Herod the tetrarch, uphold the sanctity of the law and are reinforced by the voice of prophecy. Mercy, however, tempered warnings of judgment to come, for John urged his hearers that "they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus" (Acts 19: 4), to which agree the words of John 1: 7. His ministry was characterized by a conspicuous absence of miracle (John 10: 41), and by a plain adherence to the

familiar teachings of the Divine law. To John the law and the prophets were the heralds of the Gospel.

If the facts outlined have any weight we may expect to find in the New Testament confirmation of the truth here affirmed, that the note of law gives substance and support to all Old Testament prophecy. Nor is such confirmation lacking, for in the manifesto of the kingdom, uttered by the Lord Jesus Himself, these words are found:

"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil.

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5: 17-19).

The law is here selected to exemplify the fundamental principle laid down, though the reference to the Prophets makes it clear that the entire range of the Old Testament is in view, and that the findings which apply to the law apply with equal fitness to the writings of the Prophets. That the fulfilment of Scripture should thus be connected with moral precepts rather than with typical or predictive passages but serves to accentuate the prophetic character of ALL Scripture. Even the precepts of the law are in themselves prophecies of a coming kingdom, when God's will shall be done in earth, as it is in heaven: and thus the integrity of the law of Moses becomes a pledge of the perfection and supremacy of God's rule in a day to come.

"One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." In these words the Lord certifies the unity and structural coherence of the writings of Moses. They affirm that the fulfilment of a particular Scripture does not cancel its spiritual function. The minutest portion must preserve the integrity of the whole, as well as fulfil its individual office. It does not pass out of view until all are in sight: it is not relaxed until the whole is in force. The binding force of one precept is not to be dissociated from the moral unity of the complete law, and is bound up with the maintenance of this balanced perfection of the whole.

The law, therefore, as a concept, is one and indivisible. Transgression is looked upon, not as the violation of a single commandment merely, but as the destruction of a Divine harmony, a breach upon the law's solidarity. So that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is

become guilty of all" (James 2: 10). If the law were not the expression of a Divine unity, disobedience thereto could not fitly be so spoken of. The writings of the law are thus correlated with the majestic circle of God's perfections, each several part of the writings contributing to the final harmony.

This correlation of the law and the Prophets with God's good and perfect will for man shows how intensely practical for life is the unity of Holy Scripture; and in particular, how essential it is to preserve a true reverence for each several Scripture if we are to stand complete in all the will of God. The full sum of Christian perfection, and of Christian usefulness, is expressly stated to be contingent upon the inspiration and due function in Christian experience, of "every Scripture."

"Every Scripture is inspired of God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for discipline which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3: 16, mar.).

There is a real correspondence between the wholeness of Christian character and the wholeness of Scripture. Perfect cloth is not wrought upon an imperfect loom.

Legislation, however, may be perfect technically, yet defective in administration. But it belongs to the perfection of the law that its very least commandment will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom of God. Of this very fact the Lord here pledges in terms the most explicit the success of His mission into the world, and the inviolability of His spoken word, thus binding His personal integrity with that of securing, to the last particular, God's rule, as this is foreshadowed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

If the Author of creation and the Source of Scripture are indeed one, the sanction for the prophetic revelation committed to writing by Moses and the prophets rests on an authority not less secure than that which maintains the structure of the material universe. So it is written, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished." The Scriptures cannot be broken: they will retain their integrity throughout all generations until finally supreme over the events of time. Thus their prophetic utterances, based on Divine law, have unity and purpose. From the chaos of the years emerges a Divinely created cosmos, reducing to order the rude elements of man's long story. This fact is implicit within the promised fulfilment of the prophetic Word concerning God's kingdom among men.

The moral issues of prophecy appear very clearly in that book

of the New Testament which gathers up the sum of all Biblical prophecy, namely, the Revelation. The blessing promised in the Apocalypse is for those who read and *keep*, and for those who hear and *keep*, the sayings of the book—a blessing twice pronounced, once at the beginning, and once near the end of the book (Rev. 1: 3; 22: 7). Moreover, after saying, "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand" (and thus affirming the relevance of prophecy to the march of human history), the angel goes on to declare as the culminating issue of the prophetic message, "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still" (Rev. 22: 11). Could any more effectual way be found of expressing the ethical ends of prophecy?

It has already been noted that the book of the Revelation gathers up the sum of all Biblical prophecy. Its pages are crowded with well-known metaphors and familiar prophetic images from the Old Testament, and its visions abound in verbal allusions to like visions given to the earlier prophets. Thus this book more than any other, perhaps, gives the reader an impression of the cosmic and all-embracing sweep of prophecy as the co-ordinating factor of the times and seasons that make up the sum of human history. It is therefore important to note that in such a book the ethical values of Divine prophecy hold such a high place, and form an important element in giving unity to the whole. This is what is here meant by the note of law in Old Testament prophecy.

VIII

THE NOTE OF PREDICTION IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

THE WORD PROPHECY, IN ITS PRIMARY SENSE, SIGNIFIED ONE who was the mouthpiece of a god, the oracle or its interpretation being termed *prophecy*. A familiar instance of this usage is found in the relation of Aaron to Moses. "He shall be unto thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be unto him instead of God" (with this difference, however, that Aaron was merely spokesman for Moses, not the direct vehicle of Moses' own speech). Aaron thus became Moses' prophet and stood in some such relation to him as did subsequently the prophets in Israel to God. Taking it thus, prophecy is the voice of Deity speaking