

THE ALLEGED PROPHECIES

CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST IN THE OLD
TESTAMENT.

FIVE LECTURES,

BY

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LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

ONE of the oldest, most popular, and most effective arguments in favour of the view that Jesus Christ was God, or at all events, a miraculous or supernatural, and therefore exceptional being, is the alleged existence of passages in the Old Testament, which are held to be predictions of his birth, mission, character, life, and death. This argument has appealed to a variety of peculiarities in human nature, which have caused it to be a telling one. People who could not appreciate a close train of reasoning, or be influenced by purely moral and spiritual considerations, have their sense of wonder gratified and their imagination excited by the consideration that the coming of Jesus and the circumstances of his birth, life, and death, were all foretold, ages before he appeared.

And here, at the very outset, I fully admit that the New Testament does more or less distinctly set forth Jesus Christ as the fulfiller of Old Testament predictions. The passages will come before us afterwards ; here it will be enough to admit that the fact is so. But, while admitting that, we are forced on to the question—What then? Even in cases where there is a definite assertion of fulfilled prophecy, are we to give in to the evangelists without personal examination and the use of our own judgments? To do so would not only be foolish but base.

But the question is a far more complex one than it appears to be. As we go on, we find we are obliged to ask such questions, for instance, as these:—Were these alleged fulfilments of Old Testament prophecies *afterthoughts*? Did the Old Testament prediction suggest and half compel the New Testament fulfilment? Did Jesus himself believe that he was the fulfiller of Old Testament prophecies? If so, how far did he consciously *try* to fulfil them, and, as it were, lay himself out for their fulfilment? Or, if Jesus did hold that he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, did he not also lift those prophecies into an entirely new region, giving a moral and spiritual meaning and value to an altogether

political and material reference? If so, how far did he suggest the higher truth, that not only *he*, but that *any* moral and spiritual reformer may be a true fulfiller of Old Testament prophecies—their fulfilment being not a personal but a perpetual one;—so that he claimed to be the Messiah, as he also claimed to be a son of God, not as an exceptional being, but as one who presented conditions and reaped blessings within the reach of us all? I feel sure there is a great deal in this, and that a cool, impartial, and close examination of the alleged fulfilments of Old Testament prophecies in the New, would lead to the discovery that the all-pervading idea is, that the hopes of Israel found in Jesus, not the intended and expected, but the true, because the moral and spiritual, realization.

The question thus becomes forced upon us, whether the evangelists themselves, in stating that such and such prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, really meant that the Old Testament prophecy referred to him, or only that it spiritually received its moral and religious fulfilment in him. Jesus himself certainly never gave in to the political and material hopes of the nation, and neglected, in a striking and defiant manner, obvious political and material references of the prophecies. He announced that he came to fulfil, but he only fulfilled by spiritualising, and by acting out on a heavenly stage the drama intended for an earthly one. It will thus be seen that the question is far from settled, even when we have admitted that the evangelists held the Old Testament prophecies had been fulfilled in Christ.

When we, however, examine these passages in the New Testament which affirm fulfilments of passages in the Old, several very curious facts come to light; these, for instance,—that many of the passages from the Old Testament, quoted by the writers of the New, are mere descriptions, misread or used by them as prophecies; or that, as quotations, they are vague, or palpably inaccurate, or mere illustrations. It will well repay us here to look a little at this.

Take, for instance, as illustrative of the use of mere *descriptions* as prophecies, the following:—In Matt. xiii. 14, 15, we find it stated that Jesus spoke in parables to the people, *because* they were dull and blind, and *because* it was “not given” to them to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven;” and “in them,” we are expressly told, was “fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” In John xii. 37-41, the passage is quoted with the added statement, that the people “*could not believe*” in Christ, “*because*” Isaiah said or wrote that;—a horrible statement, which of itself demands of us a sharp scrutiny of these alleged fulfilments.

Now what do we find in the passage itself in the Old Testament? We find not a prophecy at all, but a statement of fact—a descrip-

tion of the dull, blind condition of the people in Isaiah's time. And it is this description of a fact before the prophet's eye that is taken as a prophecy of a far-distant event! Many other examples could be quoted,* but it is not necessary to encumber the lecture with texts. It is sufficient to point out here, and to lay emphasis on the fact, that Old Testament passages containing descriptions of present facts are taken by the New Testament writers as prophecies of future events.

Instances of the second kind, mere *vague* quotations, are as frequent. It is, in fact, one of the singular and most suggestive peculiarities of these quotations, that they are often so vague and far-fetched as to almost hint, after all, that the quoters did not really mean to suggest that the Old Testament writers actually intended to point out the events of New Testament times, and to hint further, that the New Testament writers only used the Old Testament passages as descriptive illustrations. In one place, Matt. xxvi. 56, we have the vague general statement, that "all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." And yet the very vagueness and generality here may indicate that the writer really regarded the events he alluded to as actual *fulfilments* of Old Testament prophecies. In Matt. ii. 23 we have the statement that Jesus dwelt in Nazareth, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'" But such a passage is nowhere to be found. In John xv. 25, we have the very vague statement concerning the Jews' hatred of Christ,— "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." But it is well nigh impossible to fix upon any definite passage as that which is here said to be quoted. In John xix. 28, in a description of the crucifixion, we have this—"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." Again, however, we look in vain for any definite "scripture" where this is to be found. To say the least of it, it is utterly *vague*. In John xx. 9, we read that the disciples did not yet know the Scriptures, that Jesus "must rise again from the dead." Here is the perfection of vagueness. Where are the scriptures that prophesy the resurrection of Jesus? The evangelist does not tell; and most assuredly the Jews knew nothing in their own Scriptures of a dying and rising Messiah.

Inaccurate quotations form another though a closely allied class of quotations from the Old in the New Testament. One fact is important, that the majority of the passages in the New Testament quoted from the Old, as fulfilled by Christ, are not taken from the Hebrew Bible at all, but from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew. The original writers of the Greek New Testament, then, quoted at second-hand from the Greek Old Testament, errors and all; and, in addition, often quoted from memory, and quoted wrongly.

* See Luke iv. 16-21; John ii. 17; John xiii. 18; John xix. 36; Acts i. 16-20; Heb. x. 4-7.

Then, finally, we have passages that are purely *illustrative*, which are hardly quoted as fulfilments, such as John iii. 14, 15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." In a passage like that, we have suggested the possibility of a use of passages for the mere purpose of illustration and analogy, even where the formula occurs, "That it might be fulfilled."

Besides these, we have a great number of passages to which, in subsequent lectures your attention will be directed, as furnishing abundant examples of palpably inaccurate and forced application. Many of these are in the Gospels; others are to be found in the writings of Paul. Of these last, Mr. Jowett frankly says:—"There is no evidence that the apostle remembered the verbal connection in which any of the passages quoted by him originally occurred. He isolates them wholly from their context; he reasons from them as he might from statements of his own, "going off upon a word," as it has been called—in one instance, almost upon a letter (Gal. iii. 16), drawing inferences which, in strict logic, can hardly be allowed, extending the meaning of words beyond their first and natural sense. But all this only implies, that he uses quotations from the Old Testament after the manner of his age;" so that this very emphatic and suggestive statement about *Paul's* loose way of dealing with the Old Testament must be made applicable to *other* New Testament writers. That this must be so, I shall in future lectures abundantly prove.

The New Testament writers, then, extracted from Old Testament passages *forced* meanings and applications. In some cases, it is true, it may be difficult to say what the original passage means; in many others it is perfectly plain that the passages quoted do not for a moment mean what the New Testament writers make them mean. Again and again Old Testament passages, palpably referring to Old Testament times—to Hebrew politics, and national joys and sorrows, struggles, hopes, and fears—are violently torn from their connection and applied to New Testament events. I shall prove that abundantly before I close. At the same time, I must again remind you that, in some cases, the writers of the New Testament may not have meant anything more than to use Old Testament passages as apt quotations, just as we do. How often do modern writers describe a thing by saying—"As Shakspeare says," or "In the words of the poet," or "As one has said," and then follows the apt quotation.* When I was preparing this lecture, my eye fell upon a passage of this kind, in a pamphlet that came

* From the play of Hamlet alone, we have taken out of their connection and applied to a thousand things, persons, or events, such phrases as these, for instance:—"Weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable"—"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy"—"Brevity is the soul of wit"—"Let the gall'd jade wince; our withers are unwrung"—"More honoured in the breach than the observance"—"There's method in his madness."

by post. The writer says—"Well may we say in the words of Shakspeare, 'Can this be true, can this be possible?'" It would be ridiculous to say that the writer meant to suggest that Shakspeare intended to point to the thing this new writer denounced in Shakspeare's words; and yet it must be confessed that the quoting in the New Testament of so-called prophecies from the Old is often of this kind.

But, after making a liberal allowance for that, the fact seems to remain that the New Testament writers do deliberately quote from the Old Testament, for the purpose of affirming that the passages they quote were actually prophecies of Christ. Can we account for this? I think we can. The New Testament writers probably believed that Jesus was actually the expected Messiah, and if so they would naturally take it for granted that what were regarded as Old Testament descriptions were applicable to him. If they remembered a passage that bore a verbal resemblance to what they were writing about, they quoted it; if not, they felt so sure he did everything as the fulfiller of Scripture that they inserted only a general reference to the Scriptures, such as "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled." In the time of Christ, there was a revival of Messianic hopes and expectations. Pretenders and fanatics had arisen to gratify the eager longing of the nation, and it was of the greatest possible importance that the life of this candidate for Messianic honours should have his life, work, and death, linked on to the Old Testament records. Innocently and naturally, therefore, the writers seized upon everything that could possibly help them. It mattered not to them that they tore a scrap from its context to furnish a fulfilment of prophecy: it mattered not to them that the passage they conveyed away plainly referred to ancient political events. Christ *must* have fulfilled all Scripture, and so all Scripture had to submit to be mutilated or appropriated, to furnish triumphant credentials to Christ. They were not dishonest, they were only fanatical: they did not intend to pervert and wrest the Scriptures, they only meant to glorify them by linking them to the life and work of their glorious Lord. They acted as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews acted when he assumed that Christ, as the true High Priest, and, strangely enough, as the perfect sacrifice also, *fulfilled* and completed in himself all old sacrificial forms and truths; or when he took the Jews on their own ground, as believers in those old sacrificial ideas, and showed them that divine and deeper purposes and transactions were accomplished by Christ. So indeed, may the other writers of the New Testament, in their affirmations of Christ's fulfilments of Old Testament prophecies, have mainly intended to show how far more gloriously this spiritual Messiah could fulfil the old national hopes than any agitator, warrior, or king.

But we need not be surprised at the most literal appropriation of old records as prophecies of new events. We have only to remember the history of the Christian Church, from its first centuries until now. What the New Testament writers did, the Fathers did,

the old Presbyterians and Puritans did, Oliver Cromwell did, Joseph Smith did. One of our own writers* has well indicated that fact:—"Some persons have found, in every individual thing in Jewish Scriptures, a type and prophecy of something in the Christian. Swedenborg imagined a spiritual mystical sense to belong to the commonest incidents of the patriarchal and Jewish history. The Puritans and Scotch Covenanters applied to themselves, with undoubting faith, all the Old Testament promises and exhortations delivered to the Jews as the people of God; and they heartily launched against Popery, Prelacy, and Monarchy, all the woes of the Hebrew Scriptures against Babylon, Tyre and Edom, the heathen and their idols!" The very morning on which I wrote these words, I saw a report of a statement, made by a popular preacher, that the Bible is everything or nothing, and that, as it was in his opinion, everything, you must find in it prophecies of the late French and German war, of Mr. Gladstone's assault upon the Vatican, and of all the Papal and anti-Papal struggles yet to come. How much more necessary would it appear to the New Testament writers, to find somewhere and somehow, in the New Testament, references to one whom they believed to be the flower and consummation of the ages!

These observations have now led us on to the very heart of the subject. Admitting that the New Testament writers quote alleged prophecies from the Old, and that they held their literal fulfilment by and in the Christ of the New, it remains for us as we have seen, to ask:—But what did the original writers themselves intend to say? Now, fortunately, we can answer that question. We have not only the Septuagint, from which the New Testament writers quoted, but the Hebrew Bible, with a vast amount of knowledge concerning it, far beyond that possessed by those writers; so that, in point of fact, we are better able to understand the Old Testament than they. But it needs no learning or profound research: it needs only honest English reading to get at the facts. The common plan is to cut out half-a-dozen lines, or to isolate a few verses, or, at most, a chapter, from the body of the work, and to read the passage by itself, altogether apart from the context. In that way you could make a passage mean almost anything. The only remedy for this is to go back to the original records, and to read straight on. If that be done, the plainest man who can read his English Bible will have the key to the alleged prophecies. And what he will find out is this: that, in every case, the alleged prophecy is more or less obviously, as a rule is quite obviously, a reference to current events, national and political. The so-called prophet will be seen to be an ardent politician, moralist, or reformer, profoundly interested in what is passing around him, and intent upon the working out of his own thoughts for the good of the nation. Sometimes he is the prophet of hope, sometimes of sorrow—now telling of empire, and glory, and prosperity, and

* Higginson's *Spirit of the Bible*, Vol. II., p. 165.

peace, and now of despoiling, and desolation, and woe; but, always and everywhere, he is an observer of the signs of the times, he lives in the present or the immediate future, his heart beats in unison with the mourning or the exultation of his day. Dr. Milman, in his history of the Jews, points out that the writings of the prophets are "magnificent lyric odes" which give "a poetical history" of their "momentous times," and describe not only the futures of "the two Hebrew nations," but the fate "of the adjacent kingdoms likewise." "As each independent tribe or monarchy was swallowed up in the great universal empire of Assyria, the seers of Judah watched the progress of the invader, and uttered their sublime funeral anthems over the greatness and prosperity and independence of Moab and Ammon, Damascus and Tyre." "The poets of Judea," says Dr. Milman, "were pre-eminently national. It is on the existing state, the impending dangers and future prospects of Ephraim and Judah, that they usually dwell." We cannot follow this writer in his after-thought, that at least one of the prophets mixed up with his political and national utterances prophecies of a Messiah whose advent should be delayed for more than 700 years. Any theory of that kind appears to me to be in the highest degree unnatural, forced, and arbitrary.

Mr. Jowett plainly says that the Old Testament passages quoted by New Testament writers, are used "almost always without reference to the connection in which they originally occur, and in a different sense from that in which the Prophet or Psalmist intended them:" and it is that fact which makes it necessary to examine the alleged prophecies, and to resolutely see what it was that the original writer really meant. It is in doing this that we come across the undoubted fact that all the alleged prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament relate, in the original records, not to any remote future, not to any person unconnected with events then happening, but to scenes, circumstances, events, and persons all livingly connected with the prophet's own time.

Having got thus far, our way is perfectly clear; and all I have to do is to follow these alleged prophecies home to their source, and see what they really mean there. It will be an interesting and a curious investigation, and one that will well repay us in the end. If, however, in prosecuting this inquiry, any of those who rely upon external evidences should lament to see one of the great buttresses crumble beneath our hand, let this be remembered,—that it cannot be a bad thing to know the truth, that it must be a bad thing to be depending on that which is ready to pass away, and that it can only be useful and good to lead God's children to rely upon the manifestations of Himself in the living soul.

LECTURE II.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

HAVING cleared the way by considering a variety of facts concerning the alleged prophecies in the Old Testament and their fulfilment in the New, I proceed now to name two principles concerning a genuine case of fulfilment of prophecy. First: a prophecy can only be recognised as such when it is simple and direct. If we allow that a prophecy may be complex and cloudy, we open the door to all sorts of impositions and vain imaginations, and men's fancies or prejudices will create endless arbitrary meanings and interpretations; then, second, the *event* said to be predicted ought also to be clear, and as little ambiguous as the language that is said to predict it; for, if the language is not clear, the alleged prophecy may be made to mean almost anything; and, if the event is not explicitly stated, we have no guarantee that the alleged prediction and the event are related to one another. To this I will only add Priestley's shrewd remark, that if the passage in question was "not a prophecy when it was originally composed, it could not become one afterwards."

If these are sound rules concerning prophecy,—and I think they are,—we shall have solid ground to stand on, and good honest light to walk by in our examination of the alleged prophecies concerning Christ in the Old Testament, and we shall know what to do with statements such as that once made by a famous theologian,—that the "same prophecies have frequently a double meaning, and refer to different events—the one near, and the other remote—the one temporal, the other spiritual, or, perhaps, eternal. . . . The prophets thus having several events in view, their expressions may be partly applicable to one, and partly to another." We shall know, I say, what to do with statements like that—we shall dismiss them, as a mere contrivance for buttressing up a delusion. For what does that kind of argument come to? It comes to this, that you may make the alleged prophecy mean two things or anything. It would, therefore, be useless to show that the supposed prophecy referred to a political event in the days of the speaker; for, if we allow the loose accommodation of the theologians, the reply will be—"Yes, it is true that the prediction *primarily* related to the political event in the days of the speaker, but it also related to a spiritual event that should happen hundreds of years after the speaker's death." By proceeding in that way you can do just what you like with the record. The only safe, the only honest, the only legitimate method is—to find out the speaker's or the writer's meaning, and to stick to that. It is told of a great modern preacher that, in expounding a passage denouncing judgment upon the "young lions" of a people (whatever that meant), he said this undoubtedly referred to England, for were not three young lions quartered on the royal arms? And I believe it was

a bishop who said that Isaiah predicted the modern locomotive and the railroad when he said—"And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly." However absurd that seems, it is not a whit less absurd than nine-tenths of the expositions of grave divines concerning the so-called prophecies.

I proceed, then, at once to ask—And what in relation to the predictions to be found in the Old Testament *was* the one meaning and intention? I put the question in that form on purpose, to convey the idea that, in the main the predictions in the Old Testament *were* related, and *did* refer, to one thing. What was that one thing? I reply, The restoration of the ancient Jewish people to their country from captivity, and the new splendour of their recovered national life; or the fortunes of the nation when beset by the foreign foe. These were genuine predictions, but they referred to pending events—to political changes already near at hand, needing no supernatural power to foretell, and admitting of no reference to altogether different and far-off events.

I shall now proceed to show this, dealing first with the alleged prophecies concerning Christ, which clearly relate to pending political or national events; and then considering the alleged prophecies,—which are not prophecies at all, still less predictions,—concerning Christ, but which are purely personal descriptions of present or even past experiences; and, as being the richest of the so-called prophetic writings, I shall take, first, the prophecies of Isaiah. The first passage I shall refer to is one quoted in Matt. i. 21-23:—

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying; Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

The reference is to Isaiah vii. 14. We turn to the passage, and what do we find? We find an account of the siege of Jerusalem by the King of Syria and the son of the King of Israel, and of the going of the prophet to the King of Judah, to reassure him, at the command of Jehovah, who tells him to say to the king, "Be not faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands," and to promise that the confederacy shall not prosper. Then Jehovah tells the king to ask for a sign to encourage him, but he declines, and then Jehovah says He Himself will give him a sign; and this very sign is described in the verse which is quoted by Matthew and applied to Christ. Here is the whole passage:—

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

First of all note here, that the Hebrew word translated "virgin" is rendered "young woman" by the very best authorities; Dr Vance Smith even suggests "young wife" with the article "the,"

and that "shall conceive" is not the future but the perfect tense, "has conceived." But, in particular, note that this is a sign for Ahaz, the king, to reassure him amid his political troubles, and in view of his capital being at that time besieged by two kings. The prophet expressly says: You shall not be defeated: this confederacy of the two powers will come to nothing; and I promise that before the time a child, now about to be born, is able to refuse the evil and choose the good, and while as yet it is eating infants' food, you shall see the destruction of your enemies. In plain English: Do not be afraid of these two kings, for in a few months they shall be destroyed in or from their own kingdoms. And this really happened. A year after, one of the kings was slain; and the other the year following. That the child, who was designated as marking the time, should be called *Immanuel* (or God with us), suggests nothing uncommon. It was an ordinary event, that children should be called by names indicative of God's presence and help. Thus the prophet's name itself, *Isaiah*, means the salvation of Jehovah; but it was a common custom among the Jews to give these symbolical names, and it was perfectly appropriate that the child, which was to mark the period of the king's deliverance and triumph, should be called *Immanuel*, or "God with us." In the very next chapter (viii. 10), this same word *Immanuel* is translated "God is with us," and in connection with a reference to the King of Assyria and the political and military events of the prophet's own day. Barnes, one of the most orthodox of commentators, fairly says of this use of the name of God or Jehovah in giving names to children, "In none of these instances is the fact that the name of God is incorporated with the proper name of the individual any argument in respect to his rank or character." The great probability is, that the woman named was the prophet's own wife, mentioned in the very next chapter, as conceiving a son under the very same circumstances. That son, Jehovah told the prophet to call by another symbolic name; that son also he used and gave as a sign; for, said Jehovah, "before the child shall have knowledge to cry, 'my father and my mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the King of Assyria." This, in the 8th chapter, is a precisely similar case to that under consideration in the 7th; and as, in the second case, the wife of the prophet is expressly mentioned as the woman who conceived the son who should be given for a sign, it may reasonably be supposed that the woman in the first case is the same or a similar person. But, be this as it may, three things are plain,—that the birth designated was a sign for a particular and very near event; that the sign related simply and solely to Ahaz and his political needs; and that the child to be born would be eating child's food in a few months from the utterance of the prediction; for it expressly says—Before this child shall have done eating child's food, the two kings that now distress you shall be destroyed. This being the case, it is preposterous to say that the prediction referred to a birth 750 years ahead! What sign would *that* have been to Ahaz? and what rela-

tion would *that* have had to the overthrow of two kings 750 years before?

But a few verses towards the end of chapter viii. clinch the whole thing. After comforting his king concerning the two kings against him, and describing the coming deliverance of the one and the destruction of the others, the prophet bursts into a defiance of the opposing kings and armies, and ends in this remarkable manner: "Now bind up the testimony"—or prediction, which I have uttered. "I will now wait for my God. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel." What children? Why, the two children just mentioned—the one to be called *Immanuel*, and the other *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*—whose period of infancy would mark the limit of the existence of the invading kings, and who were called by symbolic names, indicating the help of God, and the swiftness of coming doom. But Matthew applies the prediction to Christ? I know he does; but that does not make it a proper thing to do. The prediction is perfectly clear, definite, and circumstantial; it related to particular persons, events, and circumstances in the days of the speaker, and in immediate connection with those persons, events, and circumstances. To take a prediction whose fulfilment is strictly limited to a year or two, and to make it apply to an event 750 years after, is altogether intolerable, especially when, by doing so, it has to be torn from its connection, and violently applied to a set of circumstances utterly different.

A little farther on, in chap. ix. 6, we come upon a passage which has been enormously relied on by those who have desired to find the God-man predicted in the Old Testament, but I will venture to say that the evidence is overwhelming that the wish has here been father to the thought. The verse runs thus:—

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Now, keep well in your minds that this verse is a portion of the political writings we have just been considering. It is, in fact, only separated by ten verses from the prophet's outburst about his own children being signs of coming triumphs for his country and his king. Immediately upon that, he breaks out into an exultant song of hope about the rising hope of the nation, the king's young son, then only a few years old. All who know anything about the rhapsodies of loyalty, and the exigencies of the State, especially in troublous times, will understand perfectly well the prophet-courtier's joyous burst of song over this hope of the nation, young Hezekiah.* The whole chapter is a torrent of mingled fury and joy—fury against the enemies of Judah, and joy over the nation's hope, the child born to the king. The prophet describes the horrible destructions that will come upon his enemies, and, at the end of every

* Another reading of the history of the time would make this refer to young Hezekiah's first child, whose birth, two or three years before the death of his grandfather Ahaz, would naturally cause great rejoicing.

picture of woe, he shouts—"For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still,"—stretched out, that is, to crush and scatter yet more completely the enemies of Judah. And it is at the head, or in the very midst of this vivid description of approaching desolation, on the one hand, and triumph, on the other, that the verse occurs, "Unto us a child is born." The chapter is full of life, and eagerness, and haste; it relates altogether to surrounding and impending changes; and the "noise," and the "fire," and the "garments rolled in blood," are already there; the very kings and kingdoms are named that will be crushed or ruled by this child that "is born." Now, I submit that it is a monstrous thing to take the verse from its connection and apply it to the birth of a person 750 years farther on—to a person utterly unrelated to the circumstances here vividly described, and utterly unlike the individuals here clearly portrayed. The very verse before this describes a battle scene: let us read the two verses together:—"For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." What a positive incongruity it is, to introduce a description of Christ with a description of a battle-scene, with its "warriors," its "confused noise," its "garments rolled in blood," and its "burning and fuel of fire"! Equally incongruous is it to follow a description of Christ with a description of his sitting on the throne of David as a ruler and a king. But it is a most likely and admirable description of a young king, the living hope of a struggling people, of whom it fitly says, "the government shall be upon his shoulders." But he is called "the mighty God," and "the everlasting Father"? Certainly he is, and with great appropriateness, if you understand the words and their meaning. The names or qualities attributed to this child are—wonderful, counsellor, the mighty god, the everlasting father, the prince of peace. The only words at all requiring notice here are the two names, "the mighty god" and "the everlasting father." The last need mean no more than that the coming monarch would be the abiding father of his country—the glorious ancestor of an unbroken line of kings, as the next verse indicates; and in this very book (xxii. 21) a government administrator is called "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." As regards the phrase "The mighty god," note that the particle *the* is not in the original; it is just a character attributed to the child, and not a personal and peculiar nature. As for the word "god," the Hebrew of that by no means necessarily refers to Deity. Moses is called a god (Exod. vii. 1): "And God said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron, thy brother, shall be thy prophet." In the Psalms the judges are called gods (Ps lxxxii. 6): "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High;" and Jesus recognised that fact, in

John x. 35. But this word here rendered "god" is a frequent one in the Old Testament, and is often not translated god. In Job xli. 25, the word is translated "mighty." In Ezekiel xxxi. 11, it is again translated, "mighty," and is applied to the strong king Nebuchadnezzar, to whom this very word is applied, and who is equally called a god. In Ezekiel xxxii. 21 the word is translated "strong," applied to departed *heroes*. So, in the verse before us, the same word is used, and the greatest scholars in the world read it *hero* or *potentate*, or render it by a phrase indicating a mighty ruler and conqueror. Martin Luther, in his German Bible, rendered it by two words meaning "mighty" and "hero." The other words require hardly any explanation; for, even as they stand, they are all applicable to such a king as the prophet longed for and hoped for, to rule over the hard-pressed nation; and it was with the genuine fervour and hopefulness of a poet-prophet that he hailed him as—Wonderful, counsellor, mighty hero, the abiding father of his country, the prince of peace.

I would only add, with regard to the application of this passage to Christ, that people who take the words "The mighty God" in their bare literality, and apply them to Christ, will find themselves in a serious difficulty when they come to the words, "The everlasting Father." Are *they* also to be taken in their bare literality? If not, why not? If yes, then will any orthodox believer explain to us how he is going to avoid "confounding the persons" when he accepts the statement that Christ was not only the *Son* of God, but "the everlasting Father" too?

With two verses in the beginning of this chapter (Isaiah ix. 1, 2), I will conclude this lecture. These are quoted not very accurately, in Matt. iv. 15, 16. The quotation runs thus in Matthew:—

"And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying; The Land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

Here, a few words from the chapter in Isaiah are lifted clean out of their connection, and made to apply to Christ, just because he is said to have left Nazareth, and gone to live in Capernaum; and this change of residence, we are asked to believe, was predicted 750 years before! It is too much to ask. But turn to the passage itself in Isaiah, and you find what I have all along been pointing out, that it is part of a long, connected, and sustained description of political events then happening, and that it relates purely to these. In Isaiah the passage is descriptive, not prophetic: it tells of something that has happened, not of something that will happen in 750 years. It tells of a great political event *then* interesting the nation, the prophet, the court, and the king; and is entirely connected with the invasion of Judah by two kings, the hopes centered in the young prince, and the coming triumph of the nation over all its foes. It is the merest piece of accommodation to cut out this

passage, or a part of it, as Matthew does, and apply it to an event altogether different, to a date unthought of by the writer, and to a set of circumstances as different from those described in the original record as anything could be. Isaiah is writing of kings, and courts, and peoples, and invasions, and battles, and burnings, and the alternations of hope and fear, light and darkness, among the people; and Matthew violently transfers the picture to a scene 750 years after, and to a man who had nothing to do with these things. Of course, it is open for any one to believe that Isaiah had two things in his mind—the burning events of his own day and the change of residence of Christ, 750 years after—and that he merged the two events into one prediction. But he who would believe that would believe anything, and all I can do is to lay the evidence before him, and pass on. But if I were to offer such an one advice, it would be this:—Whatever faith you have in Jesus, rest it on surer foundations than on predictions that may fail you at any moment; rest it, as you surely can, upon a moral and spiritual basis which can never fail you—upon the rock of your own deepest convictions, which texts of Scripture can neither give nor take away.

LECTURE III.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

I now proceed with my examination of the passages alleged to be prophecies concerning Christ in the Book of Isaiah. In chapter xl. 3-5, we have the following:—

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

This is quoted in Matthew iii. 1-3, where it is applied to John the Baptist, as the forerunner and herald of Jesus. The opening of the prophecy, however, is itself conclusive as to its application. The chapter (xl.) and those that follow it are by a new writer, but we have the old familiar cry of the consoling teacher to a troubled nation:—“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished.” It is obviously the cry of hope to a people on the eve of redemption from its troubles. All difficulties will disappear, the crooked will be made straight and the rough will become plain, and, to “the cities of Judah,” the cry will go forth—“Behold your God.” It is the word of the Lord to His oppressed “people:” it is a promise of deliverance and return: and it can only be applied to Christ or to John the Baptist as his herald, by unlimited adjustment and arbitrary adaptation.

The passage in chapter xlii. 1-3. is much relied upon:—

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

This is quoted in Matthew xii. 14-21:—

“Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and charged them that they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.”

The point of similarity here is that Jesus did not hasten to assert himself, but charged the people not to make him known: and this is taken as a fulfilment of the prophecy, “He shall not cry, nor lift

up, &c.,”—a remarkable illustration of the ease with which predictions were found.*

But the “servant” spoken of in the prophecy is not a person at all, but Israel or Jacob, the *people* personified.† The Septuagint, indeed, actually reads it so, “Jacob my servant, and Israel mine elect:” but this is plain from the two previous chapters. On the same page as this very prophecy, we read (chapter xli. 8), But thou *Israel*, art my servant,” and, in the previous chapter (xl. 27), Jehovah addresses “Jacob” and “Israel,” pleading with them. In this same chapter (xlii. 19) He speaks of His “servant” again, and asks “Who is blind, but my servant?”—evidently referring to the people Israel, who could not understand the leadings of God. A little farther on, after many warnings, and descriptions of experiences, and promises of help and comfort, Jehovah again addresses the nation (xliv. 1), “Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen.” So that this verse, “Behold my servant, &c.,” comes right in the very midst of a whole cluster of passages relating to the Jewish *people* as God’s “servant,” and referring to circumstances and events all occurring in the prophet’s day. The identification is perfect. It was that *people* who were called God’s “servant;” it was that people that should be gentle, gracious, and influential: and it was for *their* sakes that “God would go forth as a mighty man,” and “stir up jealousy like a man of war,” and “cry, yea, roar,” and “prevail against his enemies.” All that is in connection with the prediction which Matthew applies to Christ; but the merest glance shews how utterly inappropriate it is in relation to him, who certainly was not “blind,” and who knew nothing of God as “a man of war” strong “against his enemies.” But the whole thing is quite in harmony with the connected picture of a hard-pressed, suffering people, comforted by God as His “servant,” and promised help and deliverance and a new career of glory and prosperity, even to the judging of the Gentiles. The passage can only be applied to Christ by sheer force of arbitrary accommodation.‡

* See a similar case, applying to the people, as this is made to apply to Christ. In Matthew xv. 7, we read, “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me.” But the passage in Isaiah (xxix. 13) is evidently addressed to the people of his own day. Perhaps all that Christ meant was:—“Ye hypocrites, the words of Isaiah fit you well, when he said, &c.”

† Mr. Sharpe is of opinion that this and other allusions to the “servant” refer to Zerubbabel, the viceroy or “prince” appointed by Cyrus to conduct the people to Jerusalem from Babylon. See Ezra ii. 1-2, Haggai i. &c., and Zech. iv. 6-9.

‡ Of the sixth verse of this chapter, Matthew Arnold says:—“We are familiar with the application of this to Christ; but it is said in the first instance of the ideal Israel, immediately represented to the speaker by God’s faithful prophets bent on declaring his commandments and promises, and by the pious part of the nation persisting, in spite of their exile among an idolatrous people, in their reliance on God and in the pure worship of him. The ideal Israel, thus conceived, was to be God’s mediator with the more backward mass of the Jewish nation, and the bringer of the saving light and health of the God of Israel to the rest of mankind.” “*The Great Prophecy of Israel’s Restoration.*”—Page 47.

In the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, we have a long description of Jehovah's "servant," in humiliation and sorrow, the whole of which has been applied to Christ, and with considerable shew of plausibility: but the analogy vanishes before a steady reading of the chapter, with its connections, before and after. You know the chapter well:—

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him *there is no beauty that we should desire him*. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not, &c."

Now I feel that any one who sets out to prove that this was never written concerning Christ has a very difficult task before him, not because the evidence is defective, but because he will have a dead weight of sentiment, habit, and prepossession against him: and I confess that I myself find it very difficult to dissociate Christ from the words "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." But it must be done.

And, in the first place, note that we must not isolate this chapter, or consider it apart from what goes before and comes after. The division into chapters is purely arbitrary and may really mislead. The description of this supposed person really begins with chapter lii, 13. In that verse we suddenly find ourselves before what turns out to be a sustained description of a sorrowful witness-bearer, now despised, rejected, or unknown, but soon to be the wonder of many nations. The last verse of lii. and the first verse of liii. are livingly related to one another. They contain a striking contrast which the break sadly destroys. "The kings," says Isaiah, "shall shut their mouths before him" (with reverence and wonder), for "they shall see what they have not heard of," but *we*, he adds, *did* hear, and yet who of us believed? In fact, the 53rd chapter is inextricably bound up with all that goes before, and it is plain that reference is again to the *people* Israel, the servant of Jehovah, who, *all through, is addressed as His "servant."** It is plain, too, that the circumstances referred to are either then existing, or just past, or at the very door; and these circumstances are all national and political.

* The suggestion has been made that the reference is to some well-known representative of the righteous part of the nation—some suffering confessor or martyr—who would be sufficiently recognised by the description given of him, and whose life and death stood as a testimony against the nation in general, seeing that it was the prevailing iniquity and faithlessness that made him necessary and that sealed his doom. It is certainly suggestive that in chapter i. 5-6, we have this servant of God represented as saying "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." But this speaker is evidently supposed to be existing in Isaiah's day. See also chapter lvii. 1, where we have a pathetic reference to the central fact that "the righteous perish and no man layeth it to heart." See too chapter lviii. 1, where the prophet is summoned to "shew the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." The 53rd chapter deals, in a highly poetic form, with the national sorrow on the one hand, and the national sin on the other:—that is the central fact.

In the previous chapter the prophet calls upon Zion to awake, and upon Jerusalem to arise, to shake herself from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments. Direct reference is made to the people's captivity in Egypt and Assyria, and Jehovah announces His resolve to restore them. Then the prophet breaks out into that splendid cry—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." What "good tidings"? It goes on to tell us. The good tidings are such to the watchmen upon the poor crumbling walls, to the mourners in the "waste places of Jerusalem;" for the Lord, it says, "has made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations." Therefore the cry comes,—“Depart ye, depart ye,”—that is from captivity—"ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be in the rear." What is all that but the plainest possible description of a great *national* event—even the restoration of the captive "servant" of the Lord, the people Israel, to its own land? And yet we are asked to believe that the very next verse leaps over more than 500 years, and, without any warning or reason, commences a description of circumstances and scenes, and of a person altogether unrelated to what has just been discussed with so much point and fervour:—yes! and unrelated to what comes *after*; for, when this chapter ends, the reference again becomes obvious to a *people* regaining its place among the nations and shining with fresh glory. The widowed and childless nation shall return from captivity; it shall "break forth on the right hand and on the left:" its children "shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited;" and "no weapon that is formed against it shall prosper." All that is only capable of one explanation—and that explanation is the *historical* one,—that the predictions of these chapters relate solely to *Israel* as the servant of the Lord and to its fortunes in captivity and restoration. The 52nd chapter is political and national; the 54th chapter is political and national; and the 53rd chapter is surely the same. It is simply incredible that between two chapters, plainly referring to present or impending local and political events, a chapter should occur, referring to events altogether different and to characters and transactions more than 500 years ahead.

The *person* of chapter 53, then, is obviously a *people*—the people all along treated and spoken of as a person; all along called God's "servant,"—the people also spoken of in Hosea xi. 1, where it is expressly said;—"When Israel was a *child*, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt:" *i.e.* when the *people* Israel was in its infancy, I brought it up out of the land of Egypt. It is the *nation*, then, that is called God's servant or son: it is the *nation* that is now sorrowing, "despised and rejected:" and the sorrows and sufferings of the *nation* were truly described as borne on account of the sins and follies of individuals. The prophet-poet, with a striking fervour of imagery, pictures the servant of Jehovah, the Jewish nation, in captivity: and *we* sent him there, he cries,—*we* with our sins and wanderings: "all *we* like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on him (*i.e.* on the nation, on His

servant Israel) the iniquity of us all." In other words—the nation suffers for the people's sins. And now Israel, he says, is like a lamb brought to the slaughter; the nation has gone to its grave, with the wicked rich despoilers." The nation itself is personified, and upheld as a separate thing—not in itself base or evil. *It*, says Isaiah, had not been violent or false: *it* was still God's servant, God's chosen, or, as Hosea actually calls it, God's *son*; the sins of individuals had ruined it for a time, but God would bring it again from the degradation to which those sins had hurled it; and once again it should shine and rule, and "divide a portion with the great," and "divide the spoil with the strong." All this harmonizes with the chapters that go before and after, carries out the figure of the nation as a beloved and chosen servant of God, and leads on to the splendid promises that follow, connected with the restoration of the oppressed nation to its country and its prosperity.

The 49th and 50th chapters give a striking instance of the vivid way in which the nation could be personified and treated as a person. In the 21st verse of the 49th chapter the nation is pictured as a once childless mother rejoicing in children, with kings and queens as nursing fathers and mothers. Then in the first verse of the 50th chapter it is treated as a woman who might possibly have been divorced. But the book abounds with this poetic treatment of the nation. I admit that it is not easy to see the meaning of every reference in the 53rd chapter, on the hypothesis that the person spoken of is really the people Israel; but we ought not to expect that: and yet I feel sure that a plain translation and a careful reading of it will bring out the meaning very much more clearly than most people would suppose.* Grasp well the fact that, *all through*, the people Israel is personified and addressed as God's servant: grasp also the fact that the prophet draws a sharp distinction between the chosen beloved nation and the individuals that are included in it: grasp finally the fact that the one burning thought in his mind is the restoration of this poor crushed sorrowing people to the old land; and I believe the chapter, with the chapters that go before and follow after, will be wonderfully clear. But, if we take it violently out of its historical connections and make it refer to a person and to events 500 years ahead; if, in a word, we read it as an extended prophecy of Christ, we shall still find it difficult to see the meaning of every reference. What, for instance, are we to understand by Christ seeing his seed or his descendants, by his prolonging his days, by his dividing a portion with the great, and

* Take, for instance, verse 9, which contains more than one misrendering of the Hebrew. The verse reads:—"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth:" and the margin gives us a reference to Matt. xxvii. 57-60, where, curiously enough, a "rich" man is said to secure the body of Jesus;—a wonderful fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy! thinks the reader. But the true sense is:—Although he was neither violent nor deceitful, he made his grave with the wicked, and was with sinners in his death. The authorised version bears *improbability* on the face of it, and adequate knowledge has decided against it.

dividing the spoil with the strong? And yet all these are features in the description; and they have great significance when applied to the picture of a nation rising triumphant above its sorrows and its foes.

It is a curious thing that we find in the book of Jeremiah (chapter xi. 19) a very close resemblance to one portion of the description given in the chapter before us:—

“But I *was* like a lamb or an ox *that* is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, *saying*, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be no more remembered.”

This is Jeremiah's description of his own case, and the suggestion has been made that Isaiah's description of the man “despised and rejected” referred to Jeremiah. But one thing appears to be certain,—that Isaiah wrote entirely concerning his own times, that he referred entirely to the condition of the nation in his day, and that only by arbitrary accommodation and adjustment can his words be taken as descriptive of *Christ*.

To show how loosely the Evangelists quoted passages from the Old Testament as predictions, just take the reference to the 4th verse of this chapter, in Matt. viii. 16-17.

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed of devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore *our* sicknesses.”

This is quoted as a direct case of fulfilment; but what is the fact? In the Gospel the case is one of *healing* physical sicknesses, of taking sicknesses away: in Isaiah, as we have seen, the case is one of the bearing of sorrow for another, in consequence of moral evil,—a totally *different* thing; and yet Matthew calls it a *fulfilment* of the prophecy!

Another well-known passage is in chapter vi. 9-10:—

“And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.”

This is quoted in John xii. 37-41:—

“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.”

Now, note here first that the writer attributes to Christ the cry of Isaiah, “Lord, who hath believed our report?” The people did not believe in Christ, and the writer says that Isaiah foresaw this 750 years before, and referred to that, in fact prophesied that, when he said, “Lord, who hath believed, &c.” This is a striking instance

of the loose way in which such old sayings were lifted out of their place in the Old Testament and made to apply to the events of the New. The other quotation will shew the same thing. The writer of "John" expressly says that the unbelief of Christ's hearers was a *fulfilment* of the prediction "He hath blinded their eyes, &c." The writer of John goes so far as to say that the people *could* not believe *because* Isaiah had said that, and that Isaiah said it, having Christ in his eye, 750 years before. What are the facts? Turn to the place where Isaiah has recorded this alleged prophecy of Christ, and what do you find? You find that the reference to the prophet himself is as direct, as explicit, and as limited as anything could be. He tells us how, in the year that king Uzziah died, he saw a vision, in which the Lord spoke to him and said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then he replied, "Here I am; send me." And the Lord sent him, giving him this charge;—(see verses 9-10.) But not only does the *narrative* distinctly limit the whole thing to the prophet and the people of his time: the prophet's *question*, after receiving the charge, and the reply to his question, still more definitely fix it: for he asks, "Lord, how long?" and the reply is given, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate;" a description of things having no relation to anything in the life of Christ, but very true to events that happened in the days of the prophet.

The passage in chapter xi. 1-2, though widely regarded as a prophecy concerning Christ, is seen to be equally inapplicable to him when the context is read. The passage reads:—

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

But the moment we turn to the passage, and read what goes before and after, the connection of Christ with the passage utterly vanishes. This promised "Branch" from the stem of Jesse will, it says, be as an "ensign," which shall rally the people, who will be delivered out of the hands of their oppressors, the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the other unfriendly powers. (See verses 10-16.) The whole reference is purely national and political, relating to the prophet's own day or to a time very near to it. To this "Branch," Zechariah (who wrote about the same time) refers (iii. 8 and vi. 12), and nothing is plainer than that it points to a political leader and deliverer in his own time. See also Isaiah iv. 2, where this "Branch" is promised, again in connection with escape from captivity. The "Branch" is probably Zerubbabel.

A passage in Isaiah lix. 20, is referred to in Romans xi. 26. In Isaiah it reads:—

"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord."

In Romans it reads:—

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

There is considerable difference between the two, but this is a common occurrence. The difference in the words, however, is nothing compared with the difference in sense. Paul quoted the words in relation only to the saving of all Israel, but Isaiah wrote them concerning a salvation accompanied by "vengeance" and "fury" against the enemies of the Lord. In short, Isaiah had in his mind the destruction of political enemies and the triumphs of the nation, (see chapter lix. from verse 17 to lx. verse 14,) while Paul thought only of a spiritual redemption. He quoted words that were moderately apt, but no real prophecy.

Isaiah lxiii. 1 is not quoted in the New Testament, but is often referred to as having a reference to Christ. It is a perilous passage to quote; for this Saviour, whoever he is, is not only like Christ because he comes in "righteousness" and is "red" as with blood, but he is also one who treads his enemies in his anger, and tramples them in his fury: and it is *their* blood and not his own that stains this awful Saviour.

The last passage I shall quote from Isaiah is that beautiful one said to have been quoted by Christ. It will in a very striking manner illustrate the loose way in which fragments of the Old Testament were taken from their connection and applied to the fresh incidents recorded by the New. The passage in Isaiah, chap. lxi. 1-2, is as follows:—

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are bound*; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;"

This is quoted by Christ in Luke iv. 16-21, and applied to himself thus:—

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down; and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Thus far the parallel seems sufficiently striking, and if we idly took the matter for granted it would seem as though Isaiah had, in some way, foretold the advent of such a teacher. But a little thought will dispel that idea. In the first place this description of the gracious speaker was probably written about the year 425 B.C.* and there is nothing so peculiar in that description as to compel us to look so

* The reader will note that various dates are assigned to different portions of this book. This is in accordance with a now generally accepted theory, that the book was written by different hands at different times, from the days of Ahaz to the time of Nehemiah, covering a period of about 300 years.

far ahead for a person of whom it should be true. Whom does it describe? Plainly, the writer himself. He says "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;" and he undoubtedly thought he had been commissioned to preach good tidings to his fellow-countrymen. In a previous chapter (l. 4) similar words are used:—"The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, *that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.*" This is all he professes in the verses before us; for all he does is to describe a good teacher, who should preach good tidings to the meek, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim freedom to the bound, and tell of the judgments of the Lord. That is all: but the description might have applied to many persons during those 425 years, as well as to the prophet himself. But, beyond that, go to the passage in Isaiah, and what do you find? You find features that not only are not found in Christ and in his circumstances, but you find features that make the description utterly inapplicable to him. In fact, the quotation in Luke stops in a very curious manner just at the place where the inappropriateness of it begins to be manifest. It quotes the words "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," but it does not add, as the verse in Isaiah does, "and the day of vengeance of our God." That "day of vengeance" was appropriate in Isaiah's day, but not in Christ's. The truth is that the passage in Isaiah, like all the other passages adduced, relates to national and political events in or near the prophet's own time. In the previous chapter there is a florid description of the coming glory of the nation,—"*Arise, shine,*" it says, "*for thy light is come:*" and, to make it certain that the reference is to the nation, we find the statement,—"*For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall utterly perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.*" What can that be but a reference to political ascendancy and national glory? Then it goes on to say: "*The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet.*" It would puzzle the cleverest commentator to extract from that a spiritual meaning or a reference to Christ, but its appropriateness as a description of national ascendancy is obvious. Then comes the passage before us, with its description of the comforting and sympathetic teacher, who proclaims freedom for the captive, and the day of divine vengeance;—thus continuing the story of the nation's deliverance from its oppressors. Immediately following this, we find the promise, "*They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.*" And that is a vital part of the passage which, nevertheless, is quoted by Christ as fulfilled in himself. The merest glance at it shows that his explanation is purely arbitrary, that the fragment he takes out is violently sundered from its connection, and that in no real sense can the passage be taken as a prophecy concerning Christ,—as it clearly relates to a long and sustained description of national and political events, connected with the Jews and referring to events happening or about to happen in the prophet's day.

What then? must we accuse Christ of error or falsification? By no means, though we should be obliged to do so if we accepted the orthodox theory that he meant to say Isaiah really wrote the passage as a prophecy to be fulfilled in Christ. My explanation is that Jesus meant to say no such thing—that he simply read the words as a kind of text or motto, and that his announcement of fulfilment only meant that he had the old tidings to tell; and perhaps there was also the feeling that he could tell those tidings in a purer form, in a more spiritual form, uncontaminated with the old thirst for vengeance, and unlimited by local and political references.* In that sense it was true that the old description of the consoling teacher was fulfilled in Christ;—not because Isaiah had the slightest idea of describing any one but himself or some one in his day, but because his description of a consoling teacher was *once more* realised, and that in a very pure and perfect form. It was a case of simple adaptation of old words to new events, not as fulfilments of prophecies, but as appropriate illustrations of character.

This finishes our examination of the great prophetic Book of Isaiah, and I am not sorry that it ends with Christ himself quoting that Book; for that leads us to a glimpse of the truth—that he fulfilled old hopes by surpassing them, and realised old dreams by making them more than true. He did not fulfil ancient prophecies concerning himself, for there are none: but he came in the spirit of the old hopes and longings, sifted out the things that were local, earthly, and temporary, and made them universal, spiritual, and eternal: and it will be well for us if our faith in him be based upon things that are universal, spiritual, and eternal too.

* "Believe in Christ's life and doctrine," said Rowland Williams, "you will see how the lisping utterances of a province grew from childhood to a world-wide stature of spiritual manhood."

LECTURE IV.

MISCELLANEOUS PASSAGES.

I SHALL proceed now to an examination of the *miscellaneous* passages which are supposed to be prophecies concerning Christ, but which really are references to passing or impending national and political events. In Genesis xlix. 10, we read:—

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*.”

I shall not dwell long on this: the only wonder is that it should ever have been cited as a prophecy concerning Christ, more than 1600 years before he came. The passage itself, though put into the mouth of Jacob, had, in all probability, no existence till many centuries after Jacob's day,—till, in fact, “Judah” had become a power under David; and then it expressed the fervid or defiant hope of the rising tribe. The word “Shiloh” points out, not a person, but a place, and the correct translation probably is, not “until Shiloh come,” but until *he* (*i.e.* Judah) *come to Shiloh*. The very same words are used in 1 Samuel iv. 12: of one who “came to Shiloh.” The reference to Shiloh is obvious. It was a sacred city of Israel, whom Judah envied; and the poet predicts that Judah shall yet possess it. Or “Shiloh,” as the symbol of *rest* (with which word it is connected), may stand for the culmination of Judah's triumphs. Anyhow, it is to *Judah* that the “gathering of the people” is to be, and Judah is personified and glorified all through. A comparison of this “blessing” by Jacob with the “blessing” by Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 7) brings out this meaning in a striking manner. Moses is made to beg for Judah that “his people” may be brought to him, *i.e.*, that this tribe may occupy the first place and be, in fact, the ruling power. In both cases it is perfectly obvious that the reference is to the political fortunes of a tribe, and not to the spiritual reign of a Messiah. Applied to Christ, the prophecy is not only inappropriate but untrue, for the sceptre *did* depart from Judah before Christ came: it ceased in fact nearly 600 years before he came. But the application to Christ can best be shewn to be inadmissible by applying my favourite test,—by reading what comes before and goes after. Listen then to the whole passage:—

“Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until he come to Shiloh; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.”

Who would apply the *last* half of the prediction to Christ? But the language might very well serve as a description of a jubilant and successful tribe.

In Deuteronomy xviii. 15, we have a passage that is quoted in the New Testament in one place, and believed to be referred to in another. The passage is :—

“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”

This verse, Peter quotes in Acts iii. 22, applying it to Christ; and, in John v. 46, Christ himself, without quoting any particular passage, refers to Moses who “wrote,” he says, of him. Now, to begin with, it is, one may say, absolutely certain that Moses did *not* write the Book of Deuteronomy at all. If Christ thought he did, he only shared the general tradition of his day; but the facts are irresistible, and it is no longer possible to believe that Moses wrote the words before us. But, whoever wrote the passage, it cannot be applied to Christ. It is part of a message from Jehovah to the children of Israel, and it must be taken as a whole. The occasion was the remembrance of the shrinking of the people before Sinai, when they entreated that God would not speak by thunder and lightning, but through Moses: and it is upon that, that Moses is told to promise them a prophet “from among their brethren” like himself. What an utterly inappropriate thing it would have been to have promised them a prophet in 1600 years! The whole point of it lies in having the prophet now or soon. They trembled at the thunder and lightning of Sinai, they begged for the voice of a man and not the thunder of a God; and what they ask is promised them. But the special use of this prophet is explicitly stated. In the land to which they are going there are “abominations,”—cruel-sacrifices, divinations, enchanters, witches, charmers, spirit mediums, (verses 9-12). But they must not hearken to these, for God will raise them up a true prophet, to whom alone they must listen.

The time and circumstances then are fixed, and the prophet like unto Moses, that shall be raised up “from among” them, is to be useful to the very persons addressed. But a succession of prophets is indicated, for the chapter goes on to distinguish between the good and the bad, the false and the true prophets, and a test is given whereby the true prophet can be known; and then the next chapter still further clinches the reference to the time of the speaker by dwelling upon the entrance of the Jews into the promised land. Besides, Christ was not a prophet “like unto” Moses: he was utterly unlike him; so unlike him that the Gospels contrast them again and again: so unlike him that in every point and on every ground the prophecy fails to be at all related to Christ, unless, indeed, we “spiritualize” the local promise, and see in Christ, what indeed we well may see, the culmination of the prophetic office in him; but *that* does not any more make the passage in Deuteronomy a prophecy of him.

A passage in Jeremiah xxxi. 15, is quoted in Matthew ii. 17-18,

as having been fulfilled by the weeping of the Jewish mothers for their young children, slain by Herod. The passage in Jeremiah is;—

“ Thus saith the Lord ; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping ; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not.”

And in Matthew it says that the weeping of the Hebrew mothers in the time of Christ fulfilled that. But the verse is a statement of fact and not a prediction ; and what does the following verse in Jeremiah say ? It says that God *consolated* the mourners, by saying, “ Refrain from weeping . . . for they shall come again from the enemy . . . and there is hope that thy children shall come again to their own border :”—a perfectly monstrous reply if we think of the weeping of the Hebrew mothers for their dead children, but an equally rational reply if we think of what is clearly *meant*—the weeping of Hebrew mothers for their children gone into captivity. The taking of that passage out of its connection and its application to the time of Christ cannot be defended for a moment, while its reference to an ancient raid upon Judah is as obvious. The “ Rahel ” (or Rachel) of the passage is doubtless the wife of Jacob and the mother of Benjamin, the founder of the tribe to whom Ramah belonged. She is here poetically represented as weeping for her afflicted descendants, more than a thousand years after her death.

A passage in Zechariah xii. 10, would never have been pressed into service as a messianic prophecy, if it had not been quoted in the Gospels, as fulfilled by Christ. It runs thus :—

“ And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications : and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn.”

The reference to this is in John xix. 37, when, after the record of the piercing of Christ, the passage is added,

“ For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

It looks just as though any phrase that seemed applicable sufficed as a prophecy ; though here the passage is not even *said* to be a prophecy, but is only quoted as an apt saying : but that suggests a great deal as to quotations in general of Old Testament scripture. A reference to the passage in Zechariah, and a mere glance at the context shews its utter irrelevancy as a prophecy concerning Christ. In the first place, it is to be noted that the word “ me ” and the word “ him ” refer to the same person : the verse itself shews that. It says, “ they shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him* .”—plainly it should be “ they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for him.” This is the reading of the best manuscripts. The person pierced and the person mourned for are one. The reference is to some person of very great political and national importance ; for it adds ;—

"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . . and the land shall mourn, every family apart,"—a state of things utterly opposed to the reality when *Christ* was pierced. But the lines that follow make it even ridiculous to apply the statement to Christ: for it says that every one shall mourn for the pierced one,—

"Every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart."

Need anything be added to shew that the prophecy could not have referred to Christ, and that it is from first to last inapplicable to him? The time indicated is one during which a siege of Jerusalem is going on (verses 2 and 8), the end of it being the destruction of the besiegers (verse 9.) But nothing of the kind happened in the time of Jesus. Then, so far from mourning for him, they execrated him, and, as one has said, "curse him and his followers even to this day." The meaning of the passage probably is that they shall mourn for king Jehoiakim as they had before mourned for king Josiah, who was slain in the valley of Meggidon.

In the passage I quoted just now, John xix. 36, you would notice the statement that certain things were done (to Christ) "that the scripture should be fulfilled,—*"A bone of him shall not be broken."* This referred to the piercing of Christ's side in place of breaking his legs. But the quotation from the Old Testament is woefully far-fetched; is, in fact, about as bad a case of accommodation as could be found. The passage referred to is in Exodus xii. 46, where the direction is given not to break a bone of the passover lamb. This use of the words "For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled" shews how loosely that formula could be used, and out of what unlikely and inappropriate material a prediction, a prophecy, or a promise could be extracted.

In this same book, we have a passage which, in like manner, is quoted, in the New Testament as applicable to Christ. The verse is in Zechariah ix. 9.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon (or even upon) a colt the foal of an ass." *

The passage in which it is quoted is Matthew xxi. 4-5, where we find a record of Christ's riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, and the usual addition, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." In the Hebrew the "ass" and the "colt the foal of an ass" are one and the same: but the writer in Matthew suspiciously blunders, and lands us in the absurdity of Christ's riding on two animals; for it says:—"And the dis-

* The passage is mistranslated. We should read:—"Thy king cometh to thee (he is just, and hath been saved), lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass." Probably, the person meant is king Hezekiah, who during some part of the Assyrian invasion had been in danger of being captured by Sennacherib.

ciples brought the ass and the colt, and put on *them* their clothes, and they set Jesus thereon." If we turn to the place we shall see that this is another case of arbitrary procedure on the part of the evangelist, in the taking of a scrap from a description of one event and violently applying it to another. The king spoken of in Zechariah is evidently a *political* king, and one possessed or looked for in the time of Zechariah. That king is utterly unlike Christ. He rides indeed into Jerusalem, but that is the whole of the analogy. He is a ruler over vast domains, stretching from sea to sea; and, it immediately adds, the chariot, and the battle horse, and the bow shall be abolished, and the king shall be on peaceful terms with the Gentiles round about; and *this* is the king that rides into Jerusalem on an ass! The picture is perfectly consistent and clear, but it is a picture which excludes Christ. It is the picture of a rejoicing people welcoming their peaceful but mighty monarch,—his enemies subdued or reconciled, and his dominion secure from sea to sea. It is worthy of note that in the 72nd Psalm we have a precisely similar description of the Jewish king's happy reign; and *that* too has been taken as a prophecy concerning Christ; but the inapplicability of it is manifest. The king there described is a *political* potentate, and phrases can only be applied to Christ by isolating them from their connection or spiritualizing the whole.

I shall quote one more passage from Zechariah. It is in chapter xiii. 7.

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is* my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

This has actually been quoted, not only as a prophecy concerning Christ, but as a proof of his Deity; since God here calls this "man" His "fellow"; although the Hebrew word only means a *friend*. The passage is quoted in Matthew xxvi. 31.

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."

Here again, no affirmation is made that the passage from Zechariah is a prophecy now to be fulfilled. It only says "for it is written": but it has been freely taken as a prophecy. Turn to the place and what do you find?—You find a description of a sorrowful time for the nation. Its "shepherd," or leader, is to be struck down, and "in all the land," it says, two thirds shall be cut off and die, and the remaining third shall be purified, and learn to call Jehovah their God. Not a word of this is applicable to Christ, but it is all a part of Zechariah's description of the scene connected with the smiting of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep. It is simply a description of a terribly destructive invasion, and the scrap of it applied to Christ can only be made applicable by taking it utterly away from its connection. In all probability, the person meant is king Jehoiachin the successor of Jehoiakim above mentioned.

A passage in Hosea xi. 1 is quoted in Matthew ii. 13-15 as fulfilled

by Christ. The passage in Hosea reads—"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." The passage in Matthew reads:—

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

This is a case of direct assertion of prophecy; and a very bad case it is. We have already seen, by proofs that are overwhelming, that the people of Israel were constantly personified, and called the servant or son of God. It is so here. "When Israel was a child," that is—when the *people* of Israel were in the infancy of their national life, "I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt"; and so, according to the record, He did, bringing forth the children of Israel out of Egypt. That the nation is intended is plain from the next verse, where we read that this "child" fell into idolatry, and "sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images." Then it adds,—“He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return” (or repent). What is this but an explicit limiting of the picture to the child of God, the people of Israel, called out of Egypt, then fallen into idolatry, and then sent to captivity? And yet Matthew, violently cutting half a dozen words out of their connection, perverts them into a prophecy concerning Christ! I do not wonder that acute persons have been led to say that the story of Christ's being taken into Egypt was itself invented to match the invented prophecy. The case is made more palpably bad by the fact that the verse is not a prediction at all, but an historical statement. It told of something past, not of something to come—"I *called* my son out of Egypt." But they who read the whole passage will see that the reference to the people Israel is clear. It must be noted, too, that "Ephraim" is also spoken of, and in a similar manner, (verse 8). Using the same beautiful and touching figure, and representing Jehovah as a Father dealing with children, the prophet says, speaking for God, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms."

A similar passage, similarly treated, is to be found in Micah v. 2.

"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

In Matthew ii. 1-6, we read:—

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the

"est among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

Here, the interpretation of the prophecy is attributed to "the chief priests and scribes," which, to say the least of it, is unlikely. In any case, test the passage in Matthew, by an original reading of the passage in Micah. Its application to Christ will then be a burst bubble. The ruler who is to come out of Bethlehem is definitely described (verse 5) as a man who shall deliver the Jews from the Assyrians, and waste the land of Nimrod; and the rest of the chapter is taken up with references to the cutting off of enemies, the destruction of chariots, the throwing down of strongholds, the abolishing of witchcraft, and the smashing of idols: all of which is utterly inapplicable to Christ, and yet it all occurs in the description of the ruler from Bethlehem and the events of his expected reign. The reference to the Assyrians limits and localises the prediction, and makes it inapplicable to Christ, in whose days the Assyrians had ceased to be an independent people.

The last passage I shall refer to is in Malachi iii. 1, which is quoted in Matthew xi. 10, as a prophecy concerning Christ's "messenger," John the Baptist. It reads thus:—

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."

This "messenger" is, in Matthew xi. 10, distinctly said to be John the Baptist. But a reference to the passage in Malachi shews that this "messenger" is to herald in a time altogether different from that occupied by the life of Christ. It is a time of terror that is foretold. The very next verse asks, "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" "The Lord" will come with swift judgment. That day will "burn as an oven," and the wicked will be like "stubble," in that "great and dreadful day of the Lord:"—all of which does not at all apply either to John the Baptist, to Christ, or to his times. But further; the burden of the chapter is neglected "ordinances," and unpaid "tithes." On account of *these*, God will judge the people; and, to remind them of *these*, His "messenger" will come. The end will be accomplished in the purification of "the sons of Levi" (verse 3), that they may attend to the "offering" or ordinances of the temple "as in the days of old," and in the peace and prosperity of the nation, dwelling in its "delightful land" (verse 11-12). Besides, this "messenger" of the covenant is one in whom the Jews "delight." I need not dwell upon this, to point out the utter inappropriateness of all that to John, to Jesus, or to his times.

Thus, one by one, the broken reeds disappear:—and what then? What good will it do to tell these things? I answer;—Much good. It put you in possession of the truth, and that is always good. It takes away a false buttress to the pernicious dogmas of the infallibility of the Bible and the Deity of Jesus. It helps you to really understand the Old Testament, and that is a great gain: and

finally, it teaches you to use your reason, to exercise your judgment, to cultivate your independence and freedom.

If these do not appear to you to be good things, I can only express the hope that something may happen to you to compel you to think for yourselves,—to cease to be children and to begin your intellectual lives as self-reliant women and thoughtful men.

LECTURE V.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

THERE is something so supremely ridiculous about the allegation that the Song of Solomon was intended to be a spiritual allegory of the tender relation between Christ and the Church, that only the most overwhelming evidence would serve to convince any one that this was seriously maintained. But, maintained it *is*, as any one knows who is acquainted with the average teaching given from the ordinary pulpits. But the very headings of the chapters suffice; for the translators of the authorised version, assuming with cool audacity or childlike simplicity that the Song *did* tell the story of the relationship between Christ and the Church, have placed a commentary at the head of every chapter: and these commentaries, when combined, form the following "orthodox" view of the book:—

The church's love unto Christ. She confesseth her deformity, and prayeth to be directed to his flock. Christ directeth her to the shepherds' tents: and shewing his love to her, giveth her gracious promises. The church and Christ congratulate one another. The mutual love of Christ and his church. The hope and calling of the church. Christ's care of the church. The profession of the church, her faith and hope. The church's fight and victory in temptation. The church glorieth in Christ. Christ setteth forth the graces of the church. He sheweth his love to her. The church prayeth to be made fit for his presence. Christ awaketh the church with his calling. The church having a taste of Christ's love is sick of love. A description of Christ by his graces. The church professeth her faith in Christ. Christ sheweth the graces of the church, and his love towards her. A further description of the church's graces. The church professeth her faith and desire. The love of the church to Christ. The vehemency of love. The calling of the Gentiles. The church prayeth for Christ's coming.

Matthew Henry, quaintest, shrewdest, and yet most orthodox of commentators, though he solemnly asserts the ordinary orthodox view, confesses that "it seems as hard as any part of Scripture to be made 'a savour of life unto life.'" The Jewish doctors, he says, advised their young people not to read it till they were 30. He admits further, that the name of God is not in it, that it is never quoted in the New Testament, and that it has not in it "any expressions of natural religion or pious devotion." He goes so far as to say that we need to forget that we have bodies in studying it. He expresses the opinion, however, that it is a most *profound* book: "there are depths in it," he says, "in which an elephant may swim." He is right; and he might have added—in which an army of commentators might drown. "It requires some pains," says this commentator, "to find out what may probably be the meaning of the Holy Spirit, in the several parts of this book,"—a commentator's way of saying,—It is really very difficult to make anything of it! and yet we are warned that we may "wrest it" to our "destruction." A famous divine, quoted by Matthew Henry, says that if we ridicule this book, *i.e.*, if we do not believe it is an allegory of Christ and the Church, we are "guilty of blasphemy against the

Most High." "Why will you set God at defiance?" he asks, "and add fresh fuel to His wrath?" Now it is perhaps difficult for some people to institute a really free examination of the book, in the face of such fearful threats, but I am going to do it, having long ceased to pay any attention to the threats of theologians.* But I shall not "ridicule" this book, I shall only tell part of the *truth* about it.

First, as to the *author*. The book is attributed to Solomon—but it is very doubtful whether he wrote a word of it. If he did, it has a suspicious origin. The commentators say that "Solomon's songs were a thousand and five," and the Book of Kings says that he had a thousand wives and concubines. The coincidence is curious: This gives us a lady for every song, with five songs to spare; but, as the Book of Kings also tells us that, in addition to the thousand, he "loved many strange women," the spare songs are easily accounted for. Now, if any one calls that *ridiculing* the Book, all I can say is,—it is not *meant* as ridicule: it is meant as a plain statement of fact concerning the very significant and important question of *authorship*; for when the commentator says "It is not certain when Solomon penned this sacred song," it suggests that if he penned it at all, he penned it with far more reference to concubines than to Christ; and it sustains me in the assertion that one of the greatest scandals of Christendom is that the passionate, sensuous, and, in some cases, indecent language of a love poem like this should be applied to Christ: for it is only by a treatment of it which is both arbitrary and grotesque that it can be made even passably reputable.

After the point of authorship, comes the question of *intention*: and here the interest centres. But the intention lies, only too manifestly, on the surface. The book is an unmitigated love poem; and no one would have been more astonished than the author, to hear people gravely putting a religious and mystical meaning into it. A few local and personal references will make this plain:—
Chapter i. 5:—

"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of *Jerusalem*, as the tents of *Kedar*, as the curtains of *Solomon*."

Chapter ii. 7:—

"I charge you, O ye daughters of *Jerusalem*, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please."

Chapter iii. 7-10:—

"Behold his bed, which is *Solomon's*; threescore valiant men *are* about it, of the valiant of *Israel*. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. King Solomon made himself a chariot (or, a bed) of the wood of *Lebanon*. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of *Jerusalem*."

Chapter viii. 11-13:—

"*Solomon* had a vineyard at *Baal-hamon*; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand *pieces* of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: thou, O *Solomon*, must have a thou-

sand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear it."

In addition to these personal and local references that prove intention, the actual narrative and the style of it, are, of course, important evidence. I freely admit that there are a few lovely touches in the poem—as exquisite as anything Thomas Moore ever wrote—but, mixed up with these, are passages of the most questionable character—contemptible as third class love poetry—frightful as allegorical of Christ and the Church. Take this, for instance. Chapter iv. 1-5 :—

"Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men."

I dare not read you the amazing description in chapter vii.; but Bishop Patrick says of the highly indecent second verse, that it refers to the baptismal font and to the Lord's Supper. To shew you, however, how the commentators "wrest" the thing to *their* "destruction," I will point out how Matthew Henry deals with the passage I just read. The song says that the beloved one's hair "is as a flock of goats"—a most outrageous comparison; but the commentator, nothing daunted, drags in the hair of the Magdalene and the passage,—"*the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*" The song says that her teeth are "*like a flock of sheep, that are even shorn, which came up from the washing:*" again an outrageous comparison, but the commentator says that, by teeth, "*ministers*" are meant, for, says he, "*they, as nurses, chew the meat for the babes of Christ,*"—an unconsciously true saying; for it is too often the case that ministers treat their hearers as babes, and keep them so, even to the chewing of their intellectual food for them,—to use the commentator's simile. The song says her lips are like a thread of scarlet, and what this means is evident,—that she had pretty bright red thin lips!—but the grave divine sees in the scarlet lips "*the blood of Christ*" in which, he says, we are to be washed. And so the ridiculous far-fetched allegorising goes on; and the commentator who warned us against wresting the Book to our destruction, wrests it with a vengeance to his own.

A third point is the *plot*, or the *characters* that appear in the poem. The popular orthodox view gives us just *two* characters—Christ and the Church; but this lands us in endless confusion; for no two people, however absurdly in love, ever talked so incoherently, debated so unreasonably, acted so ridiculously, quarrelled, flirted, and contradicted one another so bewilderingly. In fact, if only two persons form the *dramatis personæ*, one or both of them must be insane. The only lucid explanation is that several persons speak during the poem—that, in fact, the poem is either a series of ama-

tory pieces, or a kind of love *play*. This is the view now held by the very best authorities, who have gone so far as to disentangle the parts of the various characters, and to give us the play in regular dramatic form. The characters are, say, at least six; and the poem or play is divided into about ten acts: so says Sharpe the translator. The characters are,—the Bride, called Shulamite; Solomon; and attendants. Shulamite is only the Hebrew feminine form of Solomon. Solomon and Shulamite, therefore, are similar to our Charles and Charlotte, Henry and Henrietta. It is easy to prove that there are more than the two characters concerned—the Bride and Solomon. Take, for instance, chapter vi. 1-3.—

“Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee. My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.”

Who asks that question in verse 1? It is evidently some one who addresses the Bride; and, as she is asked where her beloved is gone, the questioner cannot be the beloved. It must be some third character. Early in the Book, a curious instance of this occurs. Some one (of course the Bride) is made to say, “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.” Spoken by *one* person, this is the most contradictory incoherence. She is made to say she is “black” (or sunburnt) and yet “comely;” like the dark tents of Kedar and yet like the beautiful curtains of Solomon. The sense is seen for the first time when the verse is treated as a kind of dialogue, or soliloquy and chorus. The Bride laments—“I am sun-tanned!” then the women-chorus respond,—“but comely.” “Like the dark tents of Kedar!” she mourns: “like the lovely curtains of Solomon,” they reply. This is genuine love poetry, and is pretty enough in its way. It only becomes grotesque and nonsensical when grave divines take it on their reverend lips, and try to make it serve the purposes of religion.

Thus whether we consider the reputed authorship of the poem; the evident intention of it, gathered from the local and personal references in it and from the character of the narrative and the style; or the characters that appear in the poem, it seems plain that the Book is just what it appears to be,—a love-poem or amatory play, neither better nor worse than a multitude of oriental songs of the same nature.

A detailed examination of the poem would abundantly shew this:—one little illustration must suffice; and I quote this because I can give it to you in the words of an accredited orthodox commentator, the late Dr. Eadie. Explaining the word “Shulamite,” (chapter vi. 13,) he says, “In the passage, the scene lies in a garden, where the bride was unexpectedly seen by her lover. At once she retires. Her lover exclaims in ardour,—

“Return, return, Shulamith,
Return, return, that I may look upon thee.”

Such being contrary to Oriental manners and etiquette, she promptly and indignantly replies,—

“What! will ye gaze upon Shulamith
As ye would upon a troop of dancing girls?”

In the authorised version, this absurdly reads like a question and answer; “What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies:”—a marvellously insane reply! But even Dr. Eadie, with his keen eye to the true character of this love-making scene, indulges in the usual orthodox somnambulism, and says that this name *Shulamite* is “a poetical figurative title of the church personified”!

What lesson then do we learn from this exposure of the vain imaginations of theory-makers,—from this glance at the gross absurdities into which men may fall who once forsake the homely ways of simple common sense? I think the lesson is simply this,—that we should be guided in all things by sober *reasoning* and solid *fact*. When we read the Bible, we should read it with our eyes open; and with our ordinary faculties on the alert: we should not seek far-fetched meanings, and give way to loose imaginations; but in all things rely upon common sense, and stick to the plain and obvious interpretation. If what is written is bad, let us frankly say so; if it is foolish or erroneous, let us honestly admit it: for, to be bound by a theory of inspiration that prevents our being reasonable and honest, can neither be right nor good.

Thank God, all this is possible for us who worship here; for we are free to inquire, and to follow out any result of our inquiry; and, above all, we are delivered from the injurious old superstition that acceptance with God depends upon any opinion we come to respecting Church, or creed, or book.

LECTURE V.

THE PSALMS.

THE second order of passages commonly regarded as prophecies concerning Christ are mainly to be found in the Book of Psalms. For the sake of simplicity I shall confine this class to that Book, and may even go so far as to include all the passages cited from the Psalms as belonging to that class. This is not to be wondered at when we consider that the Psalms are really personal poems, meditative, devotional, and political. I shall hope to shew that the passages which have been taken, (or which have been even quoted in the New Testament,) as applying to Christ, really relate to experiences in the lives of the original writers, and that these passages can only be applied to Christ as mottoes or illustrative sayings might be applied to any one passing through similar experiences.

In the Hebrews, chapter i. 5-13, we have a cluster of references to the Psalms, all intended in some way to set forth the exalted nature or office of Christ. Into these I shall enter only for the purpose of shewing the real character of the original writings, leaving, as beside the question, the aim of the writer of the Epistle in applying such passages to Christ. The first quotation is from Psalm ii. 7, a passage which is also quoted in Acts xiii. 33. It simply consists of the words

“Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.”

It is believed that the Psalm from which these words are taken was written 1000 years before Christ, and it would certainly require very decisive evidence to induce us to read it as applying to Christ. But the evidence is all the other way. The Psalm from beginning to end is a purely personal one, and descriptive of what is going on at the time. The writer glances at the kings of the earth setting themselves and taking counsel together against the Hebrew monarch, perhaps himself; and then he cries out exultingly, “I will declare the decree,” as though he had read the book of fate. And what is the decree?—Simply that God has chosen the monarch as His son. That this is so is plain from the very next verse, in which God tells this son to ask for a wide extending dominion, and promises that he shall “break” the Gentiles or heathen “with a rod of iron,” and “dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” How absurd to apply that to *Christ*,—the poor, peaceful, unwarlike, and uninfluential teacher! And yet it is a part of the description of the reign of the person here addressed as God’s son. The Psalm ends with a significant piece of counsel to the kings of the earth, to be wise and come to terms with this son of God, lest they anger him and be crushed. The Psalm from first to last is descriptive of a king before the poet’s eye, for whom he predicts, in the glowing language of the East, all the power and dominion and glory a warrior-king could desire;—not a scrap of it agreeing with the life of *Christ*.

It may be useful to remark that there was nothing extraordinary in speaking of a Hebrew monarch as a "son" of God, "begotten" by God. The word "son" need indicate no more than filial affection; and "begotten" must mean adopted or chosen, for the being who is addressed as "begotten" that day, *exists*, and the "begotten" must therefore relate to position and acceptance with God.

A similar passage is quoted from II. Samuel vii. 14, where we find that the words "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son," are distinctly spoken of Solomon the son of David; the words being simply wrenched from their connection and applied to Christ without the slightest justification.

The next passage is Psalm xcvii. 7; or, at all events, that is the nearest we can come to the quotation, in verse 6 of Hebrews i. "And let all the angels of God worship him." In the Psalm, the verse reads, "Worship him all ye gods," the word "god," as is common in the Old Testament, meaning *mighty one*. But the call here is a call to the worship of Jehovah, before whom all are told to bow. It is the impassioned poet's personal cry that we find here;—"Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols, worship *him*, all ye gods." The words not only do not speak of a person besides God; they exclude any such person.

The next passage is Hebrews i. 8-9,—

"But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, *is for ever and ever*: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, *even thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

This is from Psalm xlv. 6-7. The person here addressed is evidently a very different person from Christ. He is called upon to gird his sword upon his thigh, and it is said that his "arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies." His garments are said to "smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces." "King's daughters," it says, are among his "honourable women," and upon his right hand sits "the queen in gold of Ophir:" and in the very midst of this picture of the person addressed, occurs the passage "Thy throne, O god, is for ever and ever." Dr. Davidson says that the proper translation here is "Thy *God's* throne, *i.e.*, thy throne given and protected by God, is for ever and ever:" but, even retaining the phrase "Thy throne, O god," we can quite well understand it as meaning, Thy throne, O mighty *hero*; for so it is often used in the Old Testament,* and the verses before and after shew plainly that a glorious earthly king is meant.

The next passage is Hebrews i. 10-12.

"And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

The passage is taken from Psalm cii. 25-7, where we clearly find it

* See Lecture II.

as an address to God, the Creator. Its application to Christ in any way is purely arbitrary and without warrant.

The last passage in this cluster is Hebrews i. 13.

"But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?"

The reference is to Psalm cx. 1, and as to that passage I have a few words of some importance to say, by way of introduction to a general view of the whole of that interesting Psalm. In the 1st verse, "The Lord said unto my lord," there are in the original two words for "lord" which unfortunately are merged in the translation. The one word for "lord" means *Jehovah*; the other word for "lord" means any dignitary. The verse is evidently addressed to the king by the poet, who calls the king "my lord" and says—"Jehovah has said to my lord—'Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.'" Matthew Arnold renders the words, "The Eternal said unto my lord the king," and adds, that it is "a simple promise of victory to a prince of God's chosen people." But at the very beginning the passage is inapplicable to Christ. The picture is that of a king putting down his enemies and trampling them under his feet. The Psalm is quoted in other places besides this 1st chapter of Hebrews, and requires therefore a little elucidation. Fortunately this is perfectly easy, as the Psalm is so palpably a courtly poem addressed to the king. The nature of the Psalm, as a battle lyric, and its utter inapplicableness to Jesus, will be seen the moment it is read through. Note especially the brutal reference to the dead bodies:—"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the place with the dead bodies, he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head." There is the clang of battle all through. The king ("my lord") is to sit at the right hand of his almighty warrior-God, who will send out His rod to smite his enemies; his soldiers shall be all willing, and give themselves as a fresh and beautiful free-will offering, to fight his battles, and the end shall be the universal destruction of his foes. Any application of that psalm to Jesus can only be violent, arbitrary, or poetical. Some of the phrases are, on any hypothesis, difficult to explain; but the drift of the whole is clear; and the drift is all *away* from Christ. The verse "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" may refer to the priestly character of the kingly office, or it may be a bad translation of words meaning, *Thou shalt be great for ever, because thou shalt be a righteous king*, for the name "Melchizedek"

simply means a *righteous king*. But the application to a warrior-king is perfect; and, by consequence, its inapplicability to Christ is evident.

The passage in Psalm xci. 11-12, is chiefly interesting as affording a proof that Satan can also quote Scripture, and dig from the Old Testament passages to serve as prophecies. When tempting Christ, Satan says,—Matthew iv. 6.

“If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

The words occur in Psalm xci. very much as Satan quotes them, and his quotation is certainly not less apt than those we have been considering. In the Psalm, the verse occurs in a description of the blessedness of the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High; and the safety he enjoys is described as the result of his making the Lord his “habitation.” It might be applied to *any* good man, and, as Satan did not say it was a prophecy of Christ, but offered it as a promise or description applicable to persons who trust in God, there was a good deal of point in his quotation, and, on the whole, it is perhaps the most legitimate and respectable quotation we have had to consider.

A passage in Psalm xli. 9, is quoted by Christ in John xiii. 18, as applying to his betrayal by Judas. He refers to that event as one that will occur, “that the scripture may be fulfilled;

‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.’”

The passage in Psalm xli. is purely personal to the poet, who is describing his own sorrows, then happening, probably 1000 years before Christ. He is telling of his “enemies,” who “speak evil” of him, who speak “vanity,” who attribute to him “an evil disease” and even his “familiar friend,” whom he “trusted,” is turned against him. This is obviously a description of his own sorrows, and can only be made applicable to Christ just as it could be made applicable to any one whose case was similar. But, in fact, Christ’s case was hardly similar. Judas was not his “familiar friend” whom he “trusted.” The Psalm so describes this friend, but Jesus, we are told, knew from the beginning who should betray him; so that Judas could hardly have been regarded as a “friend,” much less a “familiar” friend, and still less as a friend to be “trusted.” The quotation is singularly inapt, and the utmost that can be said for it is, that it was a natural thing for Christ to express his sorrow in old familiar religious words, without at all intending to do what his over-eager followers made him do,—convert a description of personal sorrow into a far-reaching prophecy, and find the application in himself.

Three passages concerning the crucifixion are of some interest. One relates to the piercing of the hands and feet, and is to be found in Psalm xxii. 16. This will be best considered in connection with a second passage, in the same Psalm, verse 18, concerning the parting

of garments by casting lots for them. This latter passage is in Matthew xxvii. 35—

“And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.”

Here is a direct reference to a prophecy and a statement concerning its fulfilment. All we can do is to turn to the place and see whether it really is a prediction of a future event, and whether, if so, the prediction answers to the alleged fulfilment. My affirmation is that the whole Psalm from which this verse is taken is a purely *personal* outpouring of woe. Christ, in his death-agony, appropriates the opening words of the 1st verse of the psalm “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But the next verse shews how inapplicable the Psalm is to him; for it proceeds to speak of long-continued but unanswered prayer, day and night and assuredly Christ knew nothing of this. A little further on, we find the same person contrasting himself with his ancestors, to his own disparagement. “They cried unto Thee, and were delivered,” he says, “but I am a worm and no man:” and that likewise is not applicable to him. In fact, it is only a little scrap, severed from its place in the psalm, and read apart from the connection, that can be at all applied to Christ. In the Psalm, the cry about parting his garments and casting lots upon his vesture is followed by the cry “O my strength, haste thee to help me; deliver my soul from the sword, my darling (or my life) from the power of the dog, save me from the lion’s mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.” Here there is hope for the person spoken of, but there was none for Christ; the psalmist fears the “sword,” but Christ’s terror was the cross, and his death-blows came from the nails. Besides, this miserable being looks forward to praising God in the “congregation” with his “brethren,” and, in general, to a happy deliverance from his ill users: not one word of which applies to the crucified one. The question for us is whether we have any right to cut out two or three lines from the Psalm, and make them apply to Christ, although they form part of an extended description the greater part of which is utterly inapplicable. Those two or three lines may and do bear a striking resemblance to two or three lines in the record of Christ’s crucifixion, but many things must be taken into account;—the bias of the evangelists and of the translators, for instance, who dearly loved a prophecy and revelled in a fulfilment: but there is nothing so exceptional in the piercing of hands and feet and the dividing of the garments of a victim as to make a reference to Christ *necessary*. But such a reference is not admissible when many other portions of the description do not apply to him at all.

The other quotation connected with the crucifixion well illustrates the excessive eagerness of the Evangelists to work into their narratives the slightest scrap of Old Testament matter. In John xix. 28 we read that, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus

said "I thirst;"—a very slender quotation, and slenderly supported as any one may see who will turn to the place from which it is taken. The passage, or something like it, occurs in Psalm lxxix. 21, and I feel no hesitation in saying that the whole Psalm is as inapplicable to Christ as anything could well be. It presents us with the sorrowful complaint of a man miserable, repining, mistrustful, and bad-hearted. The poet is evidently telling of his own sorrows: the Psalm is emphatically personal to himself. He calls to God, as One who knows his "foolishness."—Would Christ have done that? He cries, "My sins are not hid from thee."—Did Christ ever do that? He says he fasted and went clothed in sackcloth.—Did Christ do that? Immediately after the statement about the vinegar for his thirst, he adds, verses 22-28, "Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents: for they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." Imagine Christ talking like that! Why, he shewed a spirit the very opposite of that revealed in these revengeful words. He cried, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." And yet, remember, these wicked imprecations in the Psalm are a part of the cry in which occur the words "in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The saying is evidently a poetic one, expressive of the unkindness of those to whom the Psalmist appealed. I was thirsty, he said, and they mocked me with vinegar. It was a poetic expression which might have occurred to any one, and which might describe any grief accompanied by pitiless neglect: but the proof is overwhelming that the Psalm is no prophecy of Christ.

The last passage I shall quote relates to the resurrection. It is found in Acts ii. 25-7, and 30-1. Speaking of the resurrection of Christ, Peter says,—

"For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Then Peter adds, explicitly, that David,

"Being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."

This is perhaps the most clear and emphatic of all alleged prophecies concerning Christ. Peter undoubtedly does say that David looked for Christ, and that he predicted his resurrection. Turn we

then to the place where the prophecy is said to be found. It is in Psalm xvi. 10-11.

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are pleasures for evermore.*"

Note, in the first place, that the very highest authorities read, not "Thy holy *one*" but "Thy holy *ones*"—making the statement general, as to the lot of *all* God's faithful and holy ones. But this, though probably correct, is not my reliance. I rely upon my old court of appeal,—the context. We, as well as Peter, can read the Psalm for ourselves, and form our own judgment. It is *one* person who speaks throughout the Psalm: it is *he* whose heart is glad and whose flesh shall rest in hope: it is *he* who expresses his confidence that God will not leave his soul in hell nor suffer His holy one to see corruption. Now who is this speaker? Evidently the Psalmist himself, who tells his own hope in God. This is clear from verse 4 where he says he will not go after other gods nor offer their "drink offerings of blood." How utterly inapplicable is all that on the lips of Christ!—how perfectly in keeping with the case of one who lived in idolatrous times, and whose own pure worshiping of God contrasted with the idolatrous worship of others! The word "hell" in the passage really means the grave, and the cry of the Psalmist is a simple, natural expression of confidence in God—that He would take care of him, and guide him through the valley of the shadow of death into the land of light beyond. If we apply that language to Christ we can only do so just as we might apply it to any other trusting child of God: and Peter himself had no business to use it in any other way.

I have now fulfilled my promise,—to trace home to their source the alleged prophecies concerning Christ in the Old Testament. We have seen that the original writers lived for their own day, and were earnestly intent upon the fortunes of the nation in their times. They uttered many glowing predictions concerning the people they loved, and pictured glorious scenes of prosperity and peace. They described mighty deliverers, wise rulers, triumphant kings, and halcyon days for Israel. But alas! their dreams did not come true. What wonder, then, that Israel took these prophecies to heart, and went on hoping for the promised golden days! what wonder that even now, broken and scattered as they are, the Jews still hug the old words to their hearts, and look for a Messiah yet to come! What wonder that the early Christians eagerly caught at the idea that all the unfulfilled hopes of Israel were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth!

And why have I tried to dispel that dream? First, because it is not good to believe even a pleasant thing if it is not true, since, above all things, it is our duty to face the truth: but chiefly because I want us to look forward, and to see that before us and not behind us lie the fairest hopes of the race. Jesus came only to shew us what we all may be. He was a messiah,—a being *sent* by God, for

that is what it means,—just as each one of us may be. He was a son of God, to make *our* sonship clear. He came to do a better thing than to fulfil predictions; for he came to create a new brotherhood. He came to do a better thing than to make past prophecies come true; for he came to give light to future ages. It is true that I have laboured in these lectures to dispel the delusion concerning Christ's Deity and concerning his supernatural origin, but, in doing that, I restore him to the race, I bring him within the circle of humanity, I find his place in the history of our kind, I make him all our own. Freed from superstition we can now come to him,—not our God—not a mysterious, doubtful, double-natured being, not something abnormal, miraculous, exceptional, monstrous, and bewildering, but our teacher, our brother, and our friend.
