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"Hid from common sight
Through the mazes of the breast
Softly steal by night."

But he has little of the power of captivating hearts that are unlike his own, and moulding them into his own image. He cannot paint to them ideal worlds, of which they have had no conception, with the startling vividness of life. It is doubtful whether he has any talent for dramatic writing. "*König Roderick*," the only piece which he has written for the stage, is unworthy of notice. His works indicate a greater aptness for Epic than for dramatic poetry. But it is evident that lyric poetry is his field of excellence. On the whole, however, it is rather as a pure and a Christian poet, than as a great and a brilliant poet, that he deserves our respect and esteem. We regard him with interest as one of the heralds and instruments of a great spiritual change. We fondly hope that his songs are but the preludes to the national anthems that shall yet rise triumphant from that land of saints and martyrs. We trust that the holy light which is shed from his works, is but the faint ray of morning, which shall yet be blended with the brilliant light of the full and perfect day.

ARTICLE V.

THE ELEMENT OF TIME IN PROPHECY.

By E. P. Barrows, Professor at Andover.

THE Prophecies of the Old Testament may be distributed into two classes: those in which the succession of events in time is more or less clearly indicated, and those in which this indication is wanting. Of the former class of prophecies we have a fine illustration in the revelation made to Abraham concerning the servitude of his posterity in Egypt, and their deliverance and return to Canaan: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and

they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."¹ Here the element of time makes a prominent part of the revelation. The limit of servitude is exactly specified: "they shall afflict them four hundred years." The order of events is also distinctly marked. The affliction is not to come in Abraham's day, but afterwards: "thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age:" it is to be brought to a close by God's judgments upon the nation whom they shall serve, and "afterward shall they come out with great substance;" and, finally, the time for their return to Canaan is specified: "and in the fourth generation shall they come hither again."

To the same class may be assigned, also, many of the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel and in the Apocalypse, as must be plain to the most cursory reader; but upon these we will not dwell.

Of the other class of prophecies, in which the element of time is wanting, a pure specimen may be found in the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah. Let us examine this magnificent vision of the latter-day glory in connection with the preceding context. In the fifty-ninth chapter the prophet occupies himself with rebuking the sins of God's ancient covenant people, and shows that these are the occasion of their present distress: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear."² Of these sins he gives a long and black catalogue, and then adds: "Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; and for salvation, but it is far off from us."³ As the prophet had intro-

¹ Gen. 15: 13—16.

² Vs. 1, 2.

³ Vs. 9—11.

duced this description of the desolate condition of God's people with a catalogue of their sins, so now he closes it with a new portraiture of the same. Their corruption is universal and irremediable by any human power. "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor."¹ The decisive moment has now come when the cause of truth and righteousness must be lost, or Jehovah must himself interpose for the glory of his own name. Accordingly he appears in awful majesty to vindicate his cause: "Therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense."² The result of this Divine interposition is the universal diffusion of the knowledge and fear of the Lord: "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."³ Next follows a promise that "the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob;"⁴ and, finally, a statement of God's everlasting covenant with his church, which secures to the end of time her perpetuity and triumph over all her foes: "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever."⁵

Such is the preface to this bright vision of the latter-day glory. The prophet's position is manifestly that of his own age. The abounding iniquities which he describes are those to which his own eyes and ears are witnesses. Wickedness, darkness, and misery encompass him, such as no human power can overcome.

¹ Vs. 14—16.² Vs. 16—18.³ V. 19.⁴ V. 20.⁵ V. 21.

The interposition of Jehovah is his only hope, and this he sees approaching in the form of a black cloud of wrath, full of awful thunder, and ready to fall upon his guilty countrymen with resistless power. But beyond this storm of vengeance he sees the Redeemer enthroned on Zion, her summit crowned with eternal sunshine, and all nations bringing their glory and honor unto her.

But *when* shall these things be? How long shall the present abounding iniquity continue before Jehovah shall clothe himself with the garments of vengeance and destroy his and Zion's enemies? Shall this be a single interposition, or a series of interpositions; and, if a series, how large a space in the history of God's church shall it cover? When shall the Redeemer come to Zion, and men "fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun?" On all these questions, which involve the element of time, the prophecy maintains a majestic silence. And in this silence we may hear the still small voice of God saying to his people: "The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure;" but "it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." So far as any hint can be gathered from the prophet's words, the advent of the Redeemer may be in his day, or it may be a thousand years removed from it.

And when we contemplate "the glory that should follow," as it is represented to us in the sixtieth chapter, we find the same absence of all way-marks of time. The glory itself we see rising upon Zion; the forces of the Gentiles coming to her; the camels and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah covering her; all the flocks of Kedar and rams of Nebaioth gathered together unto her; the nations flocking to her from all parts of the earth, as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows; the isles bringing home in the ships of Tarshish her sons and her daughters; the sons of strangers building her walls, and their kings ministering to her; all her persecutors bowing themselves down at the soles of her feet; and herself made an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Brighter and still brighter do her glories become, until heaven itself comes down into the midst of her, and she is filled with the light and blessedness of God's own presence: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no

more thy light by day: neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time."¹

That this prophetic picture covers "the last days" of Zion's glory, all "the good things to come" in this her earthly state, needs no demonstration. We can conceive of no amount of peace and prosperity, no fulness of union and communion with her God and Saviour, that shall rise above its glowing colors. Whether the prophet's vision does not extend beyond time into eternity may well be doubted. But that he sees the church in her full millennial glory no one can doubt. Equally certain is it that the description covers the primitive days of Christianity; for it is introduced with the promise that "the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob." But what space of time shall its fulfilment occupy, and what shall be the order and progress of events? Here, again, the Saviour's words apply in their full force: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power."

Another very remarkable specimen of this kind of prophecy is contained in the fourth chapter of Isaiah, as viewed in connection with the preceding context. Here, also, it is certain that the prophet's position is that of his own day. He writes at a time when heavy calamities are impending over his countrymen, and these calamities he describes in terms which must apply *primarily* to the Babylonish captivity. "Behold the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Judah and Jerusalem the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be

¹ Vs. 18—22.

their princes, and babes shall rule over them."¹ The denunciation of God's wrath upon "Judah and Jerusalem," and upon "the daughters of Zion," proceeds to the end of the third chapter, which closes with these terrible words: "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she, being desolate, shall sit upon the ground."² And to complete the picture of desolation, it is added in the beginning of the fourth chapter: "And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach."³ The obvious meaning of this last threatening is, that the mass of the men shall perish in war, so that the surviving women cannot find husbands; and seven of them shall ask of one man the privilege of being called each his wife, while they voluntarily offer to resign all the usual advantages of that relation.

Thus far the prophet has proceeded in a strain of threatening. But now there is a sudden transition to promise, and promise of such a character that it must cover the whole future period of the Messiah's kingdom. "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel."⁴ By "the branch of the Lord," we understand the Messiah.⁵ And this "branch" shall be "beautiful and glorious" "*in that day*," that is, in that day when the severe judgments which the prophet has been describing shall be executed upon Judah and Jerusalem. Here we have, indeed, in a certain sense, an indication of time. But it is wholly indefinite. It gives no date for the fulfilment of the prophecy, nor any chronological order for the succession of events. It simply describes the growth of "the branch of the Lord" as existing in connection with these judgments, and as promoted by them, so that we are not here to inquire after any single exact date. Then, "when the Lord

¹ Isa. 3: 1—4. How literally this threatening was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity may be seen by comparing it with 2 Kings 24: 12—16.

² Vs. 25, 26.

³ 4: 1.

⁴ V. 2.

⁵ 11: 1. Jer. 23: 5. 33: 15. Zech. 3: 8. 6: 12, 13. It does not seem to be, however, the Messiah alone in his simple personality, apart from his body the church, but rather the Messiah in his church as her Head, and the author of all her fruitfulness both before and after his advent, that is described in the present passage. In other words, this "branch" is "the true vine," of which Christ is the root and trunk, and his disciples are the branches. John 15: 1—8.

shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning," every one of the remnant that escape these judgments "shall be called holy." "And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain."¹

We have seen that the prophet began with the judgments that were impending over his countrymen. We now see that he ends with the full glory of Christ's kingdom; for the description so plainly comprises the characteristics of the Messiah's reign that, in the words of Alexander, "it is commonly agreed that this prediction has been only partially fulfilled, and that its complete fulfilment is to be expected, not in the literal Mount Zion or Jerusalem, but in those various assemblies or societies of true believers, which now possess in common the privilege once exclusively enjoyed by the Holy City and the chosen race of which it was the centre and metropolis."² The prophecy extends, then, from the prophet's day to "the time of the end," but without any way-marks which may serve to indicate the space of time in the world's history which it occupies. It is a scroll in which are written lamentation and mourning and woe for Zion's enemies, and for her friends light and gladness, but its unrolling is reserved for the providence of God, and how many ages it shall occupy no one can tell.

Examples of this method of prophecy might be multiplied indefinitely, but the two now given will abundantly suffice for the purpose of illustration. It is not meant that between this class of predictions and the former, in which time and succession are prominent, a clear and definite boundary can always be traced. Like the colors of the rainbow the two pass into each other by insensible gradations. Sometimes a prophecy, otherwise wholly indefinite, contains a single loose indication of time, as in that recorded by Isaiah and Micah, beginning with the words: "And it shall come to pass *in the last days*, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of

¹ Vs. 3—6.

² Earlier Prophecies, *in loco*.

the mountain,"¹ etc. And again, the removal of one particular hindrance is specified as necessary to prepare the way for the fulfilment of some great event, which is itself to be antecedent to another event; as in the case of the Apostle Paul's prophecy concerning the "man of sin,"² where we have the order of succession very distinctly indicated, but without a limited date within which it is to be accomplished.

If, now, we institute an examination, we shall find that the prophecies in which the element of time is wanting, or is indicated only in a vague and general way, are not only more numerous than those in which it is exactly specified, but that they penetrate deeper into the inward being of the church, and unfold more fully the indestructible Divine life and power which animate her, and which are steadily bearing her onward towards her final destiny — victory complete and eternal over all the powers of darkness. And we can, perhaps, discern a reason why this should be so.

Times and successions belong rather to the outward machinery of God's providential government. They are, so to speak, the wheels and bands and shafts which connect one movement with another, and all the parts with each other. Though fixed and definite for the history of this world, yet they are in their nature variable according to the will of the great Architect, and might have been differently ordered, had he so chosen. But the perpetual inward force of the church and the end towards which she is continually moving, come not within the categories of time and succession. They belong rather to her vital nature, and the immutable purpose of God concerning her. When the prophet's theme is, as in the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, the unconquerable power of Zion and the universal victory that awaits her through the everlasting covenant which God has made with her,³ then it is natural that these should shine forth with such brightness as to obscure, and even hide altogether, the subordinate circumstances of time and succession.

A distinguished writer on Messianic prophecy, to whom the Christian church of the present age is largely indebted, finds an explanation of the absence of definite connections of events in prophecy as well as of definite distinctions of time, in the nature of prophecy. According to him, the prophets of the Old Testa-

¹ Isaiah 2: 2—4. Micah 4: 1—4. ² 2 Thess. 2: 1—12. ³ Isaiah 59: 21.

ment were in a state of ecstasy in which intelligent consciousness was suppressed. Between their inspiration and that of the apostles he makes a distinction. "All Divine revelations were known by the prophets through an immediate perception. While, in the case of the apostles, the illumination of the Holy Ghost pervaded alike all the powers of the soul, without excluding the activity of the understanding, in their case the impressions were all made upon the inner sense. This was made fruitful by the Spirit, while reflection and the external sense remained at rest."¹ Everything was represented to them in the present time in vision. Hence it is not surprising if the prophets speak of occurrences and persons that belong to the remote and even the most distant future as they see them before their view, or even point to them as to present objects. Hence also, according to him, is to be explained their want of exactness in the use of tenses, since they view things not in time but in space. For the same reason it was necessary, as a general rule, that the distance of time should remain unknown to the prophets, and this was always the case except when a special Divine revelation was added to make it known. For example, Isaiah makes the liberation of his countrymen through the Messiah follow immediately upon their liberation from the Assyrians, passing over all the intervening space of time.²

Much to the same purport is the view of prophetic inspiration given by Barnes in the Introduction to his Commentary on Isaiah, though in one particular he dissents from Hengstenberg, maintaining that "there is no evidence that the true prophets were divested of intelligent consciousness so that they were ignorant of what they uttered; or that the Spirit made use of them *merely* as organs, or as unconscious agents to utter his truth."³ "The prophecies are usually to be regarded as seen *in space*, and not *in time*."⁴ To the prophet's view the objects thus seen "may have lain near each other. They may have been so closely grouped that he could not separate them even in the description. The words appropriate to the one may have naturally and easily fallen into the form of appropriate description

¹ Hengstenberg's *Christologie*, I. I. p. 299. We quote from the first German edition of the *Christology*, and have not been able to find in the volume of the second edition now published any clear indication how far the author may have changed or modified the view here given.

² *Ib.* pp. 305—308.

³ *Vol.* I. p. xliv.

⁴ *Ib.* p. I.

of the other. And the objects may have been so contiguous, and the transition in the mind of the prophet so rapid, that he may have been scarcely conscious of the change, and his narrative may seem to flow on as one continued description. Thus the object with which he commenced, may have sunk out of view, and the mind be occupied entirely in the contemplation of that which was at first secondary. Such seems to have been in a remarkable manner the peculiarity of the mind of Isaiah. Whatever is the object or event with which he *commences*, the description usually closes with the Messiah. His mind glances rapidly from the object immediately before him, and fixes on that which is more remote, and the first object gradually sinks away; the language rises in dignity and beauty; the mind is full, and the description proceeds with a statement respecting the Prince of Peace. This is not double sense: it is RAPID TRANSITION under the laws of PROPHETIC SUGGESTION; and, though at first some object immediately before the prophet was the subject of his contemplation, yet, before he closes, his mind is totally absorbed in some distant event that has been presented, and his language is designedly such as is adapted to that."¹

Hävernick rejects the idea of the loss of intelligent consciousness in prophetic vision, and also that of the commingling and flowing together of different events, rightly maintaining that the events of the future which the prophets see in close connection with each other, have a true connection in God's plan, though not necessarily that of proximity in time. But, at the same time, he finds, in the fact that an inward direct vision lies at the ground of all prophetic representation, an explanation of its peculiar manner of exhibiting the future.²

Now whatever of truth or error there may be in this view of the nature of prophetic vision, it is certain that it cannot be received as a *final* explanation of the manner in which the prophets represent the future as it regards time, and the succession of events. For, *first*, the question remains to be answered: Why does the Holy Spirit choose this method of representation? Let it be granted that, in the majority of cases at least, the prophets received their revelations in ecstasy through the direct vision of

¹ Introduction to Commentary on Isaiah. In this idea of the commingling and flowing together of different events in prophetic vision he follows Velthusen, Hengstenberg, and others.

² Einleitung in das A. T. II. II. § 200.

the inner sense. It will not be contended by any one who believes in the reality of revelation that the Divine Spirit was shut up to this method of communication. God is above humanity, and free to work in the soul of man as he pleases; only it must not be in a way contradictory to his nature, for this would be to contradict himself, the Author of human nature. But that he should give, and man should receive, clear and definite revelations of the future in its exact chronological order, is plainly not contradictory to human nature. But, *secondly*, we have historical proof in abundance that prophetic vision does not exclude exact specifications of time and succession. That Abraham foresaw in prophetic ecstasy the servitude of his children in Egypt is maintained by Hengstenberg. But this vision contains, as we have seen, definite specifications of time. Still more remarkable in this respect are the revelations made to Noah concerning the approaching deluge.¹ Let any one consider what a multitude of exact specifications is contained in God's communications to him, respecting the form and size of the ark, the place of the door, the number of beasts clean and unclean to be admitted, the providing of food, etc., including also definite statements of time — "Yet *seven days*, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth *forty days and forty nights*," — and then say whether it is possible to believe that the revelation of dates and successions of events to any extent is incompatible with prophetic vision. Samuel foresees in their exact order and locality the events that shall befall Saul in his journey homeward.² The same Spirit who made to the seer this revelation was competent to reveal to him also the whole future history of the kingdom of Saul and of the kingdom of David that followed in the same exact order and locality. The occasional specifications of time which occur in the later prophets, as those of Isaiah respecting Moab,³ and Kedar;⁴ and Jeremiah respecting the death of Hananiah,⁵ and the duration of the Babylonish captivity⁶ (not to mention the dates contained in the book of Daniel), are only examples of what the Spirit of prophecy might have revealed to any extent, had it seemed good to him to do so. The peculiar system of numbers that prevails in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and which seems designed to bear an enigmatical character,

¹ Gen. 6: 13—7: 4.² 1 Sam. 10: 2—6.³ Isa. 16: 14.⁴ Isa. 21: 16.⁵ Jer. 28: 16, 17.⁶ Jer. 25: 11, 12. 29: 10.

cannot be explained from the nature of prophetic vision; for he who revealed to the prophet's inner vision such dates as "a time and times and dividing of times,"¹ "five months,"² "an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year"³ (not to mention such dates as "two thousand and three hundred days,"⁴ "a thousand two hundred and ninety days,"⁵ "the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days,"⁶ which certainly look like exact specifications), could plainly have revealed any dates whatever.

We must, then, seek a solution of the present problem from a higher position than that of the nature of prophetic vision, even a position which shall enable us to solve the question: Why has prophetic vision this nature? We shall find it in *the inward nature of the plan of redemption* as it exists in the purpose of God and is in process of development according to that plan. A reverent examination of this plan in its inner vitality God does not forbid, but rather invites. And such an examination will reveal a glorious harmony between the nature of prophetic vision and the nature of "the kingdom of heaven" with which that vision is occupied. We shall find that the manner in which the Old Testament prophets represent the future of this kingdom, has its foundation in the unity of the plan of redemption, the end towards which it is tending, the perpetual indications of that end which are given in the process of its development, and the fact that the end is itself the chief object of interest in prophetic representation.

I. *The plan of redemption has a unity*; that is, all its parts from beginning to end are so connected as to form one whole. A well known living author has said of the "contexture" of nature: "While all [its parts] have a perpetual source, and a conditioned order of succession, this warp of all lines of causation is also woven across with the connecting woof of reciprocal influences," and "thus nature has its complete *contexture* which may be held as one web of a determined experience, and which no more adheres continuously than it also coheres laterally."⁷

This view of the unity of nature may be extended in all its fulness to the plan of redemption, only that the development of this plan is conditioned by entirely different principles, namely, the free personal activity of God moulding and guiding, without

¹ Dan. 7: 25.² Rev. 9: 5.³ Rev. 9: 15.⁴ Dan. 8: 14.⁵ Dan. 12: 11.⁶ Dan. 12: 12.⁷ Hickok's Rational Psychology, p. 409.

either destroying or impairing, the free personal activity of man; while at the same time it accomplishes, as in the case of the atonement, results that lie wholly outside of the sphere of human freedom. Carrying out the figure of a "*contexture*," we may say that, while the shuttle of time is constantly flying under God's superintendence and lengthening out, from age to age, the web of redemption by an unbroken woof of events, every thread of its warp extends from the fall of Adam to the archangel's trump, as it was arranged by God himself in the counsels of eternity, so that the whole has an indivisible connection both laterally and from beginning to end. Thus the call of Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, his removal to the land of Canaan, the birth of Isaac, Isaac's marriage with Rebecca, the birth of Esau and Jacob, Esau's sale of his birthright, Jacob's flight to the former home of his mother, his residence there and the whole history of his family, his return to the land of Canaan, the envy of Joseph's brethren, his sale into Egypt, the descent of Jacob's family into Egypt, their servitude there, and their deliverance thence by signs and wonders and a stretched-out arm — all these were not simply a *loose series* of particular events, each succeeding the other without any connection except that of proximity in time, but they constituted a continuous *development* in which each event of the history naturally grew out of what had preceded. And so we might follow down in its several "lines of causation" the history of God's church to the present hour. Especially might we take up its great epochs, as the deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the Law at Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, the establishment of David's royal line, the schism of the ten tribes, the Babylonish captivity, the return to Palestine under Cyrus, the advent of Christ, the bloody conflict of the Christian church first with Judaism and afterwards with Paganism, her victory over Paganism, the corruption that followed her alliance with the State, the irruption of the northern nations with the whole history of the dark ages, the revival of learning in the west, the reformation in Luther's day, etc.; and show that each of these epochs, though it may have been immediately produced by the introduction of a new force, yet necessarily implied all that had gone before, and actually contained in itself the influences of all the past; that (to dwell more fully on one or two points) the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, implied their previous preparation for this work in the wilderness by the giving of the

Law in connection with a long and severe discipline; and that the advent of Christ, though it was a *new* element from above, was yet not a *heterogeneous* element, but one for the reception of which the church had been prepared by all her previous training. This gives us the connection of the web of redemption backwards and forwards in time.

In like manner may we discover its *lateral* connections, not only in its several parts, but also in its relations to the world without. In Abraham's vision of the servitude and deliverance of his posterity occur these words: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full."¹ There was then, in the plan of God, a correspondence between the history of his own covenant people and that of the Amorite. The development of these two histories went on separately and independently for four hundred years, and yet, in accordance with the Divine purpose, they came in contact with each other at the only right juncture, when the iniquity of the Amorite was now full. That before this consummation of iniquity the Amorite should have been destroyed by the sword of Israel would have been incongruous with the Divine principle of dealing with nations.

Again: the kingdom of Egypt had attained to its zenith of power without any outward connection with Abraham's family. But there it was at the right time, ready, first to receive and preserve the Israelites, and afterwards to enslave them. And the monarch, too, under whom was to be made the trial between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt was every way adapted to the Divine purpose. Besides immense outward resources he possessed a lion-like stoutness of resolution that could resist to the last. If he found the hand of Israel's God too heavy to be endured, it was certain that a fair trial had been made of what human might could do in opposition to the Most High. In all this we discern a unity of Divine foreordination, an all-comprehending plan of Jehovah that disposed the history of nations without the church as well as her own history for the manifestation of his own glory. This corresponds with the Divine declaration to Pharaoh: "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth."²

¹ Gen. 15: 16.

² Ex. 9: 16.

And, if we follow down the history of the Israelitish nation through the whole period of the theocracy, to its final overthrow by the Romans, we shall find that all along its path the Gentile nations stood ready to be the unconscious ministers of God's wrath or mercy towards his chosen people. For their chastisement they were raised to power, and for their deliverance they were humbled; so that their history entered as a component part into God's plan respecting his church, and is to be explained by its relations to her. Viewed on the human side, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome had each a beginning, progress, and end under the ordinary laws of human activity. But, viewed on the side of the Divine foreordination, their history had a wonderful harmony with that of his covenant people and was inseparably blended with it into one perfect whole. Was chastisement necessary, we find a Sennacherib or a Nebuchadnezzar ready to inflict it; and thus, while he is seeking his own ends, accomplishing God's ends: "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in mine hand is their indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets." This is the Divine side; then follows the human side: "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few."¹ Is deliverance needed, there is a Cyrus at hand to let go God's captives "not for price nor reward."²

Thus the plan of redemption is seen to cover the whole field of human history. If there be remote nations whose history thus far has seemed to be wholly outside of it, we are not competent to affirm that it is so; for we can neither discern all the present connections that exist in the universal web of human affairs, nor affirm what future connections God may see good to establish. Besides this, the suffering of some nations for dreary ages of darkness, degradation, and misery, to walk in their own ways, without receiving any influences from the visible church — this may be itself a part of the plan of redemption, having for one of its ends to show what will be the course of human nature when left to itself, and how necessary it is that God should interpose to raise it from its present fallen condition.

¹ Isa. 10: 5—7.

² Isa. 45: 13.

When we have once attained to a clear idea of this unity in the plan of redemption, and seen how all its parts are inseparably interwoven into one perfect whole, we shall cease to measure the relation of events by their mere proximity in time. The higher connection of cause and effect, or, to speak more appropriately, the connection of continuous development, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear," will prevail over the lower connections of time and place, and will make all the parts of God's plan appear, as they are in reality, near to each other. We do not mean simply that they will be near in God's estimate, with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," but they will be near also in our finite apprehension, for the simple reason that we shall see them and think of them in their inner relations to each other. The more fully we are able to apprehend any portion of history, say that of the American revolution, as a whole (and this is the only true apprehension of it), the more are we disposed to think and speak of its several parts, even those which are most remote in time, in connection with each other. The mere chronicler of events, who should look at the several campaigns and battles of that memorable struggle as so many separate items of history, would abound in precise details. He would say: The surrender of Burgoyne took place October 17th, 1777; the treaty with France, February 6th, 1778; the surrender of Cornwallis, October 19th, 1781. Now it is no part of our plan to decry details. Without them history cannot be given. But they are not themselves history, any more than a separate and independent description of each bone of the human frame, from the crown of the head downward to the toes, is anatomy. Anatomy has to do, not merely with the individual bones, but with the bones as a system, and with the relations of this system to the other parts of the human frame. So true history gives the events which it records not only in their chronological, but also in their causal, connections. It considers each in its relations to all the rest, and endeavors to comprehend, as far as possible, the whole in a single view.

Now the design of prophecy is not to gratify idle curiosity by announcing beforehand the events of the future, with their exact dates and distances from each other in time, but rather to nourish the faith and hope of the church by opening to her vision comprehensive glances at the future, which shall contain not the

chronological details, but its very soul and substance. From this its main scope it naturally follows that it should occupy itself more with the grand current of the church's history, viewed in its interior relations, than with the mere outward connections of time. It matters not how many years may intervene between two events in the history of the church. If they are connected in God's plan, they may be exhibited in this connection, while the intervening events are passed over in silence. The latter event must always have a special prominence and significancy in the development of the church's history. It must, to return to the idea of optical vision, tower above every intervening object. But the prominence of the former need not always be *absolute*; it may be simply *relative*, arising from its nearness to the prophet's own time.

It is upon precisely this principle that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are constructed. The prophet's mind, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, has a deep superhuman insight into the distant future in its connection with the present, and hence he naturally passes from the present to the future; or from the near future to the more remote. As Barnes has well remarked of Isaiah (and the same is true of the other prophets): "Whatever is the object or event with which he *commences*, the description usually *closes* with the Messiah."¹ Several striking illustrations of this method of transition were given in the beginning of this Article, and others might be added almost without end. We shall limit ourselves to a single additional example: The tenth chapter of Isaiah is occupied with an account, first, of the conquests of the Assyrian monarch, and, secondly, of the destruction which God shall bring upon him. The prophet in vision sees him approaching Jerusalem from the north, and filling with terror all the cities and villages that lie in his course. Arrived in the vicinity of Jerusalem, "he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." But here his career of victory terminates: "Behold the Lord, the Lord of hosts shall lop the bough with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."² Immediately upon this prediction of the overthrow of Sennacherib follows a

¹ Introduction to Commentary on Isaiah, ubi supra.

² 10: 32—34.

prophecy of the Messiah: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."¹ The intention of the prophet to represent these two events as so connected that one follows as a natural sequel to the other, is unmistakable. And this is a true representation; for the promise of the Messiah implies the overthrow of the enemies of the church before his advent, and by their overthrow, moreover, is the way prepared for her to receive him in "the fulness of time." Nor is it any valid objection to this view that several intervening centuries of her history are passed over in silence; since it is not necessary that the prophet should specify every particular sequel of this deliverance. It is natural that he should rather fasten his thoughts upon that one sequel which comprehends in itself all the rest, "God manifest in the flesh."

But again: the prophet, in this same chapter, represents the Messiah's kingdom as one of continuous victorious progress till "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,"² without indicating in any way an intervening period of darkness and depression. The explanation here is the same as in the preceding case. The reader's particular attention is called to this eleventh chapter of Isaiah, in the connection of its several parts with each other and of the whole with the preceding context, because we shall have occasion to refer to it again more than once in the course of the present Article.

II. *The plan of redemption is continually tending towards a high end.* In what we have said of the *unity* of God's plan, this tendency towards an end has been necessarily anticipated; since it is impossible to consider the one idea without bringing into view the other, at least in some measure. Nevertheless the two ideas are essentially distinct, and the former does not necessarily imply the latter. Though we cannot conceive of continuous progress without unity, we can of unity without progress. The changes of the weather are all connected as parts of one whole. Were we able to comprehend and combine all the laws under which they take place in both their intensity and their mode of operation, we could predict a hundred years beforehand the beginning, progress, and termination of a storm, as well as of an eclipse. These changes, then, considered as a system condi-

¹ II: 1.² Vs. 1—9.

tioned by permanent laws, have *unity*, but we cannot predicate of them *progress towards an end*. Like the alternations of the seasons and of day and night, they find their end in present subserviency to man's wants, and not in some remote result towards which they are tending.

But the moment we come into the domain of reason and freedom we have *history*, that is, *progress with reference to an end*. The ground of this is laid deep down in the nature of man. Though he is and must always remain finite, yet his spiritual faculties are capable of expansion and development without limit. His present attainments in knowledge and experience he makes, at least he can make, a starting-place for higher knowledge and experience, and so onward without end. His errors and mistakes are themselves a part of his progress, for he learns by that in which he fails not less than by that in which he succeeds. Now society is an organization of individuals; and just as the individual man plants himself upon the platform of his past attainments as a means of further attainments, and makes his experience of past follies a protection against their recurrence, so does one generation make, within certain limits, the experience of preceding generations its starting-place for new progress.

All this, however, presupposes a *supernatural element* of grace and guidance. We have no evidence that fallen humanity, left wholly to itself, has any upward tendency in either the individual man, or in society, but much painful evidence to the contrary. Such a fixed condition of brutal degradation as belongs to the cannibals of Borneo, such a terrible downward course as marks the latter centuries of the Roman empire, this seems to be a true manifestation of what apostate man is and whither he tends, when left to himself. What we mean is, that under God's gracious help and guidance the history both of individuals and of society constitutes a continual development and progress towards a high end; in the case of individuals, meetness to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;" in the case of society, the latter-day glory of Zion, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." That the course of God's kingdom on earth, viewed on the great scale, must be ever forward and never retrograde, we know from the very idea of a Divine plan. If God proposes to himself, as in the work of redemption, both an end to be accomplished and a

method of accomplishment, we are certain that all parts of the method must have a bearing upon the final issue, since infinite wisdom can undertake nothing in vain. If at any time the course of the church seems to be retrograde, it is because we take a narrow and partial view of it. He carries forward her history through the agency of men, frail, imperfect men, and this too in opposition to the kingdom of Satan. It follows, from the nature of the instrumentality which he employs, that his kingdom must experience those outward vicissitudes that belong to all human history. His spiritual vine must, like the natural vine, encounter storms and drought, mildew and locusts. Sometimes he suffers the enemy to break down her hedge, so that "the boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it."¹ But all the while it is striking its roots still deeper, and every violent lopping off which its boughs suffer is followed by a more vigorous growth and a richer vintage. It is not in such bright eras as those of the deliverance from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, the reign of David, the restoration from captivity under Cyrus, the advent of Christ, the overthrow of Roman paganism, the reformation which began in Luther's day, the planting and growth of the Christian church in this country — it is not in these bright eras alone, when we can see with our own eyes that God is working salvation for Zion, that she is advancing towards her promised inheritance of all nations; but also in those darker periods when for her transgressions God visits her with desolating judgments, and it seems to the eye of sense as if she were about to be utterly annihilated. Then in a special sense is God purging the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning;" and we may be sure that he will afterwards fulfil his promise to the remnant, "even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem," that "the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon all her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." "The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm." When his judgments fall upon his covenant people "as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing," he is always present to see that the visitation shall not destroy, but rather purify the true Israel, and thus

¹ Psalm 80: 12, 13.

prepare it for future enlargement. A striking illustration of this we have in the Babylonish captivity. This event, apparently so disastrous to the cause of true religion, had been preceded by a conflict of almost a thousand years' duration between idolatry and the worship of the true God; and, during the latter centuries of this conflict the cause of idolatry had to human appearance been continually gaining strength. By the terrible blow of the Babylonish captivity the battle seemed to be utterly lost to the cause of truth, and idolatry left in undisputed possession of the field. But this was in reality the beginning of victory to God's cause. It was by the rivers of Babylon, where the captive Jews sat down and wept as they remembered Zion, and hanged their harps in the willows of Euphrates, that they learned to abhor the worship of false gods, and cleave steadfastly to Jehovah's service. After their restoration by Cyrus they remained faithful to the God of their fathers, at least so far as his outward worship was concerned. The field had been won, and won, not for themselves alone, but for all coming ages. There is not now on the face of the globe a people that has risen above idolatry except through the influence of that great victory gained by ancient Israel, and gained, as we have seen, in the dark night of Babylonish captivity.

If, now, we follow down the history of the church to our own day, we see the same alternation of depressions and consequent enlargements; but through them all we find her steadily advancing towards her final destiny. If there ever was a time when the cause of true religion could be called retrograde, it was during the long dark night of ignorance and priestly usurpation in the Middle Ages. Then, the pure and solid religion of the Bible having been mainly excluded from the church, a spurious religion was substituted in its place, made up of man-invented penances and ceremonies. The priest's hell was, as a writer has well expressed it, a "papal hell," not made, like the hell of the Bible, for "the blasphemer and the impenitent;" "the murderer, the thief, the liar, the slanderer, the impure, the adulterer, the perjured person, and the rapacious;" but "to serve the turns of the hierarchy" and be a prison for heretics;¹ while all crimes except insubordination to the priest might be commuted for money. Was it possible that any lower depth should be reached?

¹ Fanaticism, by I. Taylor, § VI.

But the passage of the church through this lowest depth (which came through the false principles which she had admitted in the earlier part of her history) was itself a part of her progress. It is sometimes necessary for a ship, before she can reach her destined port, to cross a broad and strong adverse current by which she is carried backward many a league. Yet we can truly say of her, when she has reached the opposite side of the current, that she is nearer her haven than when she entered it. She has encountered and overcome, once for all, an obstacle that lay in her path. So the church of Christ is coming out of the dark ages (for however we of this boasting nineteenth century may vainly imagine, she is not yet fully out of them), richly laden with lessons of Divine wisdom inculcated in the fiery furnace of suffering, and which will not, we may confidently trust, need to be repeated. Her position now that she is emerging, how immensely in advance of that which she occupied when entering! In proportion to the length and severity of the conflict is the harvest of new strength and heavenly illumination which she has begun to reap from it, and shall continue to reap in all coming ages.

We come thus to the idea that the plan of redemption has not only complete unity in all its parts, but also *continual progress* towards a high end. It may be compared to a majestic river that stays not a moment in its course towards the ocean. It does not always pursue a straight path, but in its path it is always pressing forward. Sometimes, like the Arar which Caesar describes, it winds through level plains with a current so gentle and noiseless that the eye cannot determine in which direction it is moving; then, again, it plunges, like the Niagara, over foaming rapids and awful precipices with fearful velocity, roaring, and boiling, and shaking the very earth with its mighty cataracts. But, though the *visible signs* of its progress are more manifest in the latter case than in the former, the progress itself is equally real in both cases, and equally irresistible. To arrest its current in the level meadow is as impossible as to stop it on the brink of the terrible precipice. In truth, it is simply because it meets with no obstacle in the meadow that it makes no cataract there. No amount of resistance can overcome its strength; it can only make that strength more manifest. An inward power, which nothing can destroy or withstand, is pressing forward every one of its particles, and thus the whole stream, towards the ocean,

and thither it must go. Its current can be guided, but not stopped; much less rolled back to its mountain springs.

And this current has a history and a development. It has not sprung up out of nothing in all its present strength and grandeur, but it has grown to its present size by innumerable contributions all along its course from the mountain-lake whence it first issued. What the Mississippi is at New Orleans, it is by virtue of all its tributaries from the Rocky Mountains to the Alleghanies. It has in itself their united contributions, even as each of them contains the united contributions of all the streams in its own particular vale. Thus every lake and spring and shower of rain throughout all the mighty valley of the Mississippi is represented in the tide of waters which empties itself into the Gulf of Mexico. So also God's church, in her perpetual and resistless course towards universal dominion, has in her present condition all the history of the past. What she is to day, she is by virtue of all the labor that has been expended upon her from the beginning to the present hour.

But this continuity of progress we cannot always discern by reason of the narrowness of our vision. The events of the present seem to us in a great measure disjointed and fragmentary. Their connection with the past we often find it difficult to establish in its completeness, and their bearing upon the future lies still more beyond the range of our comprehension. Some of them may be intended to establish principles that shall mould the history of the distant future; others, though destined to bring about results comparatively near, may yet be operating in ways so silent and unobtrusive that we utterly fail to discern their true significancy. The history of *uninspired* predictions shows that in nothing do men commit grosser errors than in their attempts to foretell the results of the present movements of God's providence in coming ages. But the *inspired* prophet, who speaks not of himself but as he is moved by the Holy Ghost, sees the true bearing of the present upon the future, whether that future be immediately before him or a thousand years distant. Because the future is, under the guiding hand of Providence, a real development out of the present, he sees it as such a development, and he always sees the final end towards which the whole is tending. We need not wonder, then, when we find him perpetually connecting every event, be it joyous or calamitous, with that end. Does he predict the overthrow of Sennacherib's army;

he connects this, as we have seen, immediately with the advent of the Messiah, for that is the very end towards which it looks. Does he, again, exhibit the beginning of the Messiah's kingdom; he does not stop with its beginning, but goes forward to its glorious consummation, since Christ came that he might "put down all rule, and all authority, and power." Or does he exhibit to us a suffering Messiah "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs;" he is sure to add in immediate connection with his humiliation "the glory that should follow:" "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."¹ He connects the exaltation with the humiliation, because the former is the true sequel of the latter, as the Apostle Paul shows: "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."² So also, if it be some desolating judgment upon God's own people which he describes, he sees in this too, not the destruction of Zion, but her purification and enlargement. After the storm of thunder and lightning and hail there always follows a serene light "as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Thus the twenty-fourth chapter of Isaiah announces in terms of terrible strength and vividness the coming judgments of God upon his people, because "they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant." For these sins "in the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction."³ But he immediately adds: "When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, and as the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea."⁴ In like manner the prophet Micah addresses the wicked rulers of Jerusalem with words of threatening: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest;"⁵ but immediately adds that glorious prediction beginning with the words: "But in

¹ Isa. 53: 12.² Phil. 2: 8, 9.³ Isa. 24: 12.⁴ Isa. 24: 13, 14.⁵ Micah 3: 12.

the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains," etc.;¹ because in the ploughing of Zion as a field he sees a judgment that has for its true result the preparation of the way for the latter-day glory. The mind of the inspired bard hastens onward to the end of God's judgments and mercies without pausing to give us, what it is not necessary that we should know, the chronological distance of that end.

III. *In the development of the plan of redemption God is continually giving indications of the end towards which it is tending.* As this end is the complete overthrow of the kingdom of Satan and the establishment in its stead of Christ's kingdom throughout the whole earth, every indication must be of the nature of an earnest or pledge that this result shall be accomplished. Such an earnest or pledge must, again, contain in itself a manifestation both of God's absolute power and his absolute purpose to accomplish the result. Such indications are given in several ways.

1. Generally, in the *deliverances* which he vouchsafes to his people. Here it is natural to think, *first*, of *miraculous* deliverances, like that from Egyptian servitude. As this was the first great interposition of God in behalf of Israel, so was it, also, in its very nature, a pledge of all needful help for the future; for it had both the above-named elements of a pledge in their perfection. God's judgments upon Pharaoh contained a manifestation, not simply of power *enough* to overthrow him, but of *unlimited* and *resistless* power. He spake and all the elements of nature obeyed. It was manifest that in the hands of Israel's God were the souls of all living, and that he could take life at pleasure; that he could not only inflict *these* judgments, but *all* judgments that he should choose to inflict! Thus the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was, so to speak, a super-abundant demonstration to all coming ages of his almighty power to save. In it there lies the proof that, however long he may leave his people to the oppression of their enemies, the reason cannot be found in his want of strength to deliver them.

The same miraculous event contained also in its perfection the other element of a pledge — God's purpose to save his people; for it was in fulfilment of his covenant made with Abraham,

¹ Micah 4: 1.

and renewed to Isaac and Jacob. The sacred historian informs us that, when God heard the groaning of his people in Egypt, he "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."¹ He addressed Moses from the bush as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;"² and commanded him to deliver to the children of Israel this message: "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."³ The covenant with these patriarchs had been made for all generations, and here he solemnly acknowledges its validity, and appears for the salvation of the Israelites in accordance with its provisions. Thus he declares his immutable purpose to stand by his covenant people and help them "to all generations."

Accordingly we find the Israelites in their triumphal song using this deliverance as an earnest and pledge of future victories over their foes.⁴ The full idea embodied in it they sum up in the closing sentence of the song: "THE LORD SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER."⁵ What is true of the deliverance from Egyptian servitude, is true also of all the other miraculous deliverances recorded in the history of the Israelites. In each of them separately, and the whole collectively, lies the promise: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."⁶ That the manifestation, in the fulness of time, of God in the flesh, which is itself the sum of all supernatural interpositions, is, in like manner, an absolute pledge to the church of perfect victory over all her foes, is too evident to require further illustration.

Secondly, the *providential* interpositions of God for his people give equally clear indications of the end towards which his kingdom is tending. If in miracles God manifests himself as above nature and her Author, in providence he shows himself to be

¹ Ex. 2: 24.² Ex. 3: 6.³ Ex. 3: 15.⁴ Ex. 15: 14—17.⁵ Ex. 15: 18.⁶ Isa. 41: 14—16.

above human history and the controller of its course. This is especially true of those providential deliverances which are, like that from Babylonish captivity, the subjects of prophecy. For here, although the events themselves are not supernatural, they are shown in a supernatural way to be under God's absolute control and guidance. Thus viewed, such an event as the return of the Jews to Palestine under Cyrus, contains a perpetual pledge of like deliverances and enlargements in the future; for it has in itself both the elements of such a pledge — God's power to control the movements of history for the welfare of his people, and his purpose so to do.

The final triumph of God's cause is indicated with peculiar clearness in that *overruling* agency by which he turns the counsels of the wicked against themselves, and makes their schemes to destroy his church the means of her enlargement. "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made," — this declaration of inspiration applies not less to the persecutions of God's church, than to the malice of wicked men against her individual members. The example of Haman, who had devised a deep-laid and, as he supposed, a sure plot for the destruction of "all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus," may serve as a representative of the final issue, under God's overruling hand, of all such mischievous devices.

2. We have indications of the final end towards which the plan of redemption is tending in the *chastisements* which God inflicts upon his people. So far as these come through the agency of wicked men who seek the injury of the church, they are in part covered by the remarks already made concerning God's overruling providence. But we wish now to consider them as expressions of his displeasure against his people for their sins. Thus viewed they are of course manifestations of God's holiness and his determination to punish sin. But so are also his judgments upon the enemies of his church. That we may find in them the same indications of the final destiny of the church which we have already found in the *deliverances* which God vouchsafes to her, we must consider these chastisements in their manner and results. However severe they may be, they are always so ordered that the church is never destroyed, but always purified by their power, and thus the way is prepared for her future enlargement. Though at the time of their infliction

it may seem as if they were about to engulf everything, yet she always emerges from them stronger than when they fell upon her, and it becomes gloriously manifest that their end was not her destruction but her salvation. With the enemies of Zion God's judgments have no such result. Upon them they exert an annihilating and not a purifying power. Of this radical difference the Holy Scriptures often take notice: "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished."¹ Of Moab it is said: "Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill,"² and no promise is added. But of Judah and Jerusalem it is said: "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years."³ As representatives of this purifying and saving power of God's chastisements upon Zion, the two great events of the Babylonish captivity and the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans stand preëminently forth in the history of God's kingdom. And they contain in themselves a pledge that all God's future chastisements shall work the same blessed results. Thus they are, not less than the deliverances above noticed, perpetual indications of the high end towards which God is conducting his people.

3. We have indications, lastly, of the end towards which God's kingdom is tending in *the inward power of the Holy Spirit* as manifested in its history. Thus far we have considered God's miraculous and providential interpositions for his church in the way of both mercies and judgments. These constitute a glorious manifestation of his infinite attributes, and they also operate to remove hindrances and furnish facilities in her progress towards universal victory over the kingdom of darkness. But they do not reach to the inward life of holiness in the soul, which is the spring of her unconquerable power. However they may dazzle by their brightness, and amaze by the visible proofs which they

¹ Jer. 30: 11.

² Isa. 25: 10.

³ Mal. 3: 2-4.

furnish of God's presence and omnipotent power, they cannot take away the heart of stone and give in its place a heart of flesh. That is the peculiar prerogative of the Holy Spirit. His presence and power sustain the inward life of the church, without which all outward interpositions in her behalf would be of no avail. Accordingly the prophets of the Old Testament ascribe her perpetuation and increase from age to age to the continual presence of God's Spirit and God's word, which is the sword of his Spirit. The remarkable representation of her millennial glory in the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, which we have already considered, is introduced by these words: "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and forever."¹ The spiritual life of the church was from the beginning produced and perpetuated by the presence of God's Spirit, but his more remarkable manifestations were reserved for "the last days." What the deliverance from Egyptian bondage was in the way of *outward interposition*, that the pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost was in respect to *the communication of spiritual life and power* — an earnest and pledge for all coming ages of whatever inward help Christ's disciples might need in the work of evangelizing all nations. And accordingly the prophet Joel, in foretelling it, connects immediately with it the last great conflict which is to end in the overthrow of all Zion's enemies and her establishment in perpetual peace and security.²

In all the ways above specified God is continually indicating the high end towards which his kingdom is tending. His interpositions in behalf of his church, whether miraculous or providential; the judgments by which he purifies her, and which always result in her enlargement; the effusion of his Holy Spirit by which her inward life is sustained and increased — all these are so many earnest and pledges of her final victory. Why then should we wonder if in all of them the prophets see this victory mirrored forth, and exhibit it to us in immediate connection with them? This is no fantastic vision, but a deep insight into their true significancy. They actually contain in themselves

¹ Isa. 59: 21.

² Joel 2: 28—32, compared with the third chapter, which is introduced by the words "in those days."

an assurance of the absolute triumph of God's cause, and through them the prophets see that triumph and represent it to us as they see it. The destruction of Sennacherib's army was a pledge of the fulfilment of God's promise to David that his throne should be established forever; and what more natural, or more true to the reality, than that Isaiah should see, in immediate connection with that event, the Messiah, in whom David's throne was to be thus established, coming forth "out of the root of Jesse?"¹ In like manner the return from the Babylonish captivity was an earnest of the final deliverance of God's people from all oppression. For this reason the prophets never exhibit it as an event complete in itself, but as one to which the whole glorious future attaches itself by an inward and inseparable union. Again, the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, as foreseen by Isaiah in prophetic vision, signifies, not the destruction of God's people, but their purification "by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning," and thus their preparation for future enlargement and blessedness. And, in accordance with this its true significancy, he proceeds in the very next verse to say, that "the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence."² But how long a period shall elapse between the indication of final victory and the victory itself, or by how many successive struggles that victory shall be won, are particulars which do not belong to the primary design of prophecy. God may see good to indicate them to a greater or less extent, but if he withhold all indications of them, the essence of prophetic vision remains uninjured.

And here, did our limits permit, it would be pertinent to consider the *representative use* which the Old Testament prophets make of the events in the history of the church; that is, their habit of representing the future under the drapery of the present and past. But this would lead us into a discussion of the whole question of literal and figurative interpretation, which is foreign to our present purpose.

IV. *The end itself, towards which the plan of redemption tends, is the chief object of interest in prophetic representation.* To nourish the faith and hope of the church, to invigorate her in her

¹ Isaiah, ubi supra.

² Isaiah 4: 5.

present struggles by an assurance that her cause shall in the final issue be triumphant, this, and not the gratification of a prurient curiosity respecting the exact dates of "times and seasons," is the main design of prophecy. It is far from our intention to deny that prophecy has other important ends. Its very idea is that of a supernatural intuition of the future. It challenges for itself the attribute of omniscience, and its fulfilment is a proof of the validity of the claim, and thus of the reality of the revelation with which it is connected. That this manifestation of the presence of omniscience is one of the uses of prophecy is plain from the fact, that the true prophets appeal to their predictions of future events, and challenge the patrons of idolatry to produce like predictions. "Behold the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them."¹ "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done."² "Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."³ And the more numerous and specific the events which prophecy comprehends, and the further removed from the range of mere human foresight, the clearer is the evidence that it comes from an omniscient mind. This may be one of the ends to be accomplished by prophecies containing, like some of those in Daniel and the Apocalypse, exact specifications of dates and the succession of events. Yet even here it seems to be God's purpose to veil those dates in such a way that their exact chronological position in history can never be determined before the fulfilment of the events to which they belong. Either the *terminus a quo*, or the *terminus ad quem*, or the symbolism of the dates, or the place which the whole series of predicted events holds in the general history of the church, is involved in obscurity. A retrospective view from the position of the future, such as we of the present day can take of the history of Babylon, might make all plain to our apprehension; but, inasmuch as we have no power thus to place ourselves forward into the future, our apprehension of unfulfilled prophecy, or that which is now in the process of fulfilment, must necessarily be partial and fragmentary, and, therefore, ever liable to error. One thing at least is certain: they who have occupied themselves with the computation of such dates as Daniel's "time and times and the dividing of time,"

¹ Isaiah 42: 9.² Isaiah 46: 10.³ Isaiah 41: 23.

his "thousand two hundred and ninety days," and "thousand three hundred and five and thirty days," and the apocalyptic "forty-and-two months," for the purpose of assigning beforehand the events to which they relate to their precise year in the Christian era, have hitherto utterly failed of success, and been convicted by history herself of error. This experience teaches, not that we ought wholly to withdraw ourselves from inquiries of this kind, but that to pursue them in a confident and dogmatic spirit, as if we had been admitted into the very council-chamber of heaven, and had there learned the very day and hour in which the papal throne must fall, or our Lord himself reappear on earth, is an evidence of extreme weakness and folly. To allow our interest to become wholly absorbed in these calculations respecting "times and seasons," is positively degrading in its influence upon the spiritual life; for it is nothing else but elevating the subordinate and circumstantial in prophecy to the place of the essential.

We have seen that it is no part of the design of prophecy to gratify idle curiosity respecting exact dates and successions of events. We have further seen that the testimony which its fulfilment bears to the truth of Divine revelation, is one of its uses. But here we cannot find its *main* design. This has a nearer relation to the inward life of the church. "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people*" — this is the key-note of all prophecy. It is a perennial fountain of consolation springing out of the throne of God, by which he nourishes the faith and hope of his people through all ages. The *end* of their conflict with the powers of darkness, this is what prophetic vision is continually presenting in its Divine brightness for their encouragement. However long and severe may be the struggle, it assures them that in the final issue they shall come off victorious. This is the point of chief interest to those who love God; and accordingly the prophets make it, and not the exact number of years that is to elapse before the final consummation, the prominent point. If we will go to them for the unworthy purpose of anticipating the dates of history, doubtless we shall be as much disappointed as were the disciples in their inquiry: "Lord wilt thou *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?" But if we ask of them: "Whose shall be the kingdom?" here they give us a certain answer; and this answer will satisfy us in the same proportion in which we have the true spirit of Christianity, in contrast with the spirit

of the annalist. Some great crises in the church's history prophecy indicates in such a way that they who can discern "the signs of the times," may understand beforehand that they are near. For example, the general expectation of the Messiah's advent at the time when he actually appeared, had its foundation, not in the vagaries of fancy, but in a sober comparison of the prophecies with the existing condition of the church. The present belief, so universal among Christians, that the time for the final overthrow of the triple league between Satan, kings, and priests for the forcible suppression of the Gospel, is near at hand, rests, we doubt not, on the same solid ground. But further than a general conviction of the nearness of this great event we cannot go in harmony with the true spirit of prophecy. When we attempt to fix the year and the day for the downfall of Antichrist or the second coming of our Lord, we are out of our reckoning, and history will soon make our folly manifest to all men. And why should such an exact arrangement beforehand of the events of prophecy in their chronological order, seem necessary to us? Dates and periods are not the kernel of prophecy but only its outward shell, about which the Scriptures do not encourage us to be over-curious. It is enough for us to know that he who has foretold the victory of his kingdom over the powers of darkness, "will hasten it in his time." To us it is of comparatively little consequence in what part of the battle our lot is cast, or how long before it shall be brought to a termination. One thing we know: the victory shall be ours, and every believer from Abel to the archangel's trump shall have his share in it, without respect to nearness or distance of time.