

WHAT IS A PROPHET?

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts."—PETER.

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It is said to be an article of Mahomedan belief that madmen are the special favourites of Heaven, and every mark of insanity is considered a convincing proof of inspiration.

This, of course, is treated by Christians as ridiculous; and if their own ideas concerning inspired mortals were fit to stand the test of reasoning analysis, their views upon the subject might be entitled to profound respect. But, in our endeavours to answer the question which heads this article, we may perhaps find that Christians and Mahomedans, after all, do not so very widely disagree on the subject. The further we are removed from any object, whether by time or distance, the more we are apt to draw upon the fertility of imagination, and less upon the ungarished verity of facts; and if we have never seen the subject of our cogitations, this peculiarity is proportionably increased. Cloudy visions enveloped in the mists of tradition or imperfect description flit before our mind's eye, till fancy seizes the shadowy outlines and creates an ideal which becomes at once the object of our reverence and admiration, or our detestation and disgust,—in either case unjust as regards the primary cause.

This is pre-eminently the case with respect to the popular theory concerning inspired men. Not only disbelieving in their present existence, but confining them to a period which the driest histo-

rian cannot approach without entering into the fanciful realms of poetry, it is no wonder they have surrounded them with a poetical garb more imaginary than real; and when we consider that age after age has added some colouring or touch to the ideals of the preceding one, we have no reason to be surprised, should the solemn fact be thrust before us, that the popular ideas concerning inspired men are the fictions of inventive imaginations.

We will proceed to demonstrate the truth of this; and having done so, we shall have discovered why it is that moderns are generally so slow to believe in existing Prophets, as it would be impossible for individuals to exist (other than lunatics) like the ideals they have created for themselves, of men wrapt in prophetic vision and gazing on the secrets of the future. But we will first describe the supposed characteristics of inspiration. Imagine, then, an individual of tall, commanding appearance, with features of rigid sternness and sepulchral solemnity, eyes glaring with a strange unearthly fire, rolling in frenzied wildness or fixed on vacuity, hair thrown back from a lofty forehead of unnatural whiteness and floating in unkempt masses over the shoulders, lips muttering strange and unconnected sentences, and the whole appearance bearing unmistakable tokens of an utter disregard to personal appear-

ance and an entire contempt of everything connected with this mundane existence, and you have before you a veritable likeness of an ideal prophet, such as many of this generation suppose the ancient Prophets were. That this picture is not overdrawn the many descriptive works published illustrative of eminent inspired characters fully confirm. Now, if such a character was described to any intelligent individual of the present day as existing in his neighbourhood, he would unhesitatingly pronounce him a fit subject for a lunatic asylum. But gather round him the garments of departed centuries, and the case becomes instantly changed. Imagination usurps the place of plain, matter-of-fact, common sense, and conjures up some supposed ascetic or holy man of old, whose name figures prominently in the well-filled calendar of saints, garbed in the fanciful trappings of a Dante, a Milton, an Angelo, or a Raphael.

Thus far, then, and no farther, despite assertions to the contrary, do Mahomedans and Christians disagree—that while the latter confine their ideals to a period of time ceasing some eighteen centuries ago, the former respect and venerate their presumed favourites of Heaven as living among them now.

Johnson has defined inspiration to be “An infusion of supernatural ideas;” and here the great lexicographer has fallen into the common error. Everything that exists is guided by certain fixed principles, and every apparent departure from these principles is not an infringement of the laws of nature, but the operation of some power or principle with which we are unacquainted. There can exist no such thing as supernatural causes or effects. Superhuman is the only expression admissible when treating of the cause of inspiration; and as the Bible is the only authentic record of inspiration professedly believed in by the bulk of Christendom, to it we refer to demonstrate what prophets and inspired men are, and wherein they differ from other mortals.

Noah was a man peculiarly favoured of Heaven and blessed with a foreknowledge of that deluge which baptised the earth for the cleansing away of the corruptions under which it was groaning, and swept from its surface the wicked generation contemporary with him. We have no account of his having received

any assistance, except from his own family, in constructing the ark in which they were preserved. He therefore must have laboured as a ship-carpenter to secure his own and family's temporal salvation. After the deluge, he turned his attention to agriculture and vine-dressing, enjoying the fruits of his labours. Thus he was carpenter, farmer, and vine-dresser, all of which required the practical, every-day attention of a mind free from frenzy, calm and calculating. Abraham was remarkably blessed of the Lord, enjoying the society and converse of angels and visitants from the courts of glory. As shepherd, friend, or warlike chieftain, he performed his duties well and faithfully, attended to the cares of his flocks, settled disputes with his neighbours, washed the feet of his guests, and with the promptitude and vigour of a veteran in war attacked and defeated the spoilers and captors of his kinsmen. Thus did he display the various characters of shepherd, entertainer, soldier, and friend, and fully sustained his patriarchal dignity.

The character of Moses, who was *par excellence* the Jewish Prophet, is pertinently exemplary of that elastic range of capacity which many of the servants of God displayed. After eighty years' probation, forty of which he passed as an humble shepherd in the wilds of Midian, he was called forth to lead the hosts of Israel. As leader, judge, legislator, or architect, we find him equally alive to his onerous duties and sagely carrying out the instructions of Jehovah to bless, benefit, and advance the interests of the people under his control. We can but briefly glance at the leading characteristics of Joshua, the able general and surveyor,—of Samuel, the wise and fatherly judge,—of David, the adept in war, kingcraft, and music,—and of Elisha, the ploughman-prophet, while the fact remains before our minds that these men were not mere visionary characters given up to the wild frenzy which some suppose inspired men were the subjects of, but leading members among an enlightened and powerful people, whose genius and works have stamped them as practicalists of no common order. Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, while following his daily avocations, was filled with the visions of heaven, and his prophecies pointedly referred to events subsequent to his own day, some of which are even now

under fulfilment,—while his son Isaiah, “the evangelical Prophet,” was found to act as counsellor and adviser, and in one recorded instance as physician. (2 Kings xx. 7.) Daniel, raised to be second in power to a potentate, next claims our attention, as, in that capacity and the various others which he filled, profound wisdom and a calm, unclouded mind were absolutely necessary. We might speak of a Peter, a Paul, and a host of others who manifested untiring zeal, indomitable perseverance, and unflinching determination in the propagation of the noble truths they taught,—all bright luminaries of inspiration and abundantly gifted with the prophetic spirit, but were yet found, when occasion or necessity required it, working at their crafts, temporally unnoticed and undistinguished. But enough has been advanced to support the answer that we are about to give to our leading question.

We have found men filled with the spirit of prophecy acting in their various positions among carpenters, farmers, vine-dressers, shepherds, patriarchal chieftains, leaders, legislators, judges, architects, generals, surveyors, kings, musicians, ploughmen, herdsmen, counsellors, physicians, provincial satraps, fishermen, and tentmakers, and in each of these capacities acting well their parts as men who fully understood and were capable of practically carrying out the duties devolving upon them. The only legitimate conclusion we can come to from the fore-

going is that a Prophet of God is like another man in personal appearance, general characteristics, and avocations, but one who is specially called of God, inspired from on high, and commissioned with a message bearing on the future and fraught with deep-meaning interest to all to whom it is addressed.

There are many individuals amongst politicians, statesmen, and theologians, who can, by comparing the past with the present and understanding the natural and consequent bearing of human events, based upon a knowledge of human nature, confidently predict certain events from known causes. Such are prophets, inasmuch as they predict events to come. Yet they are not Prophets of God, nor commissioned from on high, though gifted with superior wisdom, as their most confident assertions and sanguine anticipations may prove baseless, and *must* do so, if placed in juxtaposition to the purposes of the Eternal.

But by such men is the world led. Yet the futility of many of their anticipations will appear when the winding-up scene of the last dispensation is unfolded, and those who now walk in our midst scarcely noticed, yet bearing faithful testimony of Jehovah's designs, are recognized as God's accredited agents upon earth, to unfold the curtain of the future and lay bare the dark and mystic events whose advent has unmistakeably cast their shadows on the foreground.

S.

THE ESSAYIST.

SYSTEMATIC RELIGION.

The last number of the Essayist considered man in his religious character. His essential nature was the subject, however, rather than the wants growing out of that nature, and *systems* of religion were not contemplated in the view then taken. But we have now come to treat of those wants and to deal with “systematic religion.”

The best illustrator of human nature is man himself, and the best authority upon the wants of man is the actual manifestation of those wants. If we can discover what has actually grown up among man-

kind, and what in their various characters and relations they have manifested in the experience of thousands of years, that growth will show to us what is natural to man, and those manifestations will declare his wants. We can thus obtain for the basis of conclusions the ground of positive philosophy, which in all cases is preferable to the uncertainties of speculative philosophy.

We find growing up among mankind organizations, institutions, systems, and societies. Organizations, institutions, systems, and societies are therefore natural