

PROPHECY CONSIDERED NEGATIVELY.

The argument from the fulfilment of prophecy which appears so strong and conclusive in its affirmative aspect, is no less so when the negative mode of reasoning is adopted. We may waive, for example, the idea of a divine intelligence operating in the annunciation and fulfilment of prophecy, and attempt to account for the facts mentioned in some other way. But upon what other principle can we account for them? The prophetic scheme is evidently too vast and multifarious for human agency; and this excluded, there remains only the hypothesis of chance—the negation of all intelligence, human and divine. The law of events, under this supposition, is the same as that by which probabilities are calculated in some of the pursuits and occupations of life; and an argument on this point, therefore, resolves itself into a mere application of the theory of probabilities to the subjects of prophecy. If it result from such application that the fulfilment was an event to be calculated upon with some degree of reasonableness, independently of any intelligent supervision, then are we at liberty to adopt the philosophy of chance; but otherwise we are bound to reject it.

The laws of chance, applicable to the case, may be briefly stated as follows: When circumstances seem to determine an event equally, in two different ways, the chances are said to be equal; and the expectation of either result is expressed with evident truth, by the fraction $\frac{1}{2}$. But when the determining circumstances are unequally divided, so that any proportion, more or less than half of the whole number, operates in favor of a particular result, the chance of that result is expressed by the corresponding fraction. If a ball, for example, is to be drawn from a bag containing equal numbers of white and black, the probability of a white one being drawn is expressed numerically by $\frac{1}{2}$; but if there be only one fifth of the whole number white, the ratio of expectation will be $\frac{1}{5}$, and so for any other proportion: and this is the general law of simple probability.

The probability of a joint occurrence, when two independent events are expected, is determined by the product of their simple ratios; for there must evidently be, in this case, a whole range of possible results, as regards one event, corresponding to each possible result of the other; and by a parity of reasoning, the same truth is made evident for any number of events jointly considered. If balls, for example, are to be drawn concurrently from two or more bags, containing different proportions of black and white, the probability of the whole result being white will be found in the compound ratio of all those proportions: thus, if one contains $\frac{1}{3}$ white, another $\frac{1}{5}$ th, another $\frac{1}{8}$ th, and another $\frac{1}{10}$ th, there will be one chance in 800 that, in drawing one ball from each, the whole four will be white; and this is the general law of compound probability.

With these premises let us open the book of prophecy, and select an example from among the various remarkable events there predicted. We choose one of so extraordinary a character as to place it among the most improbable events (humanly speaking) of any age or nation; but to be quite sure that we do not over-estimate it, we suppose it to have an equal chance of general fulfilment; expressed as we have said by the fraction $\frac{1}{2}$. This does not, however, include the particularities of time and place, both of which are comprehended in the terms of the prediction. With regard to time, we observe, that as there is no natural circumstance to determine the event spoken of to one age or period more than another, the probability of exact fulfilment in this respect must be inversely as the whole number of ages in which it might have taken place. This if we allow forty years for the average duration of an age, is about sixty; and the fraction $\frac{1}{60}$ th, therefore, expresses the contingency of time in the case supposed. With regard to place, the probability of exact fulfilment is evidently determined by the relation of the locality named to the whole world. This, in the case referred to, is not greater than that of one to 100,000; and the fraction $\frac{1}{100,000}$ th, therefore, is the numerical factor for this element of probability. Combining these three ratios, we obtain an aggregate of no less than twelve millions of chances against the fulfilment of the assumed event at the time and place designated; and this event is the personal appearance of Jesus Christ upon earth as the Saviour of the world.

Remarkably associated with this appearance in many ancient predictions, was the continuance of the Jewish dominion, and of the temple at Jerusalem; the joint contingency of which, according to the principles explained, cannot be rated at less than $\frac{1}{340}$. A multitude of predictions are found, also, in various parts of Scripture, relative to extraordinary particulars in the life, character, and death, of our Saviour, as well as with reference to the political and social aspect of the times in which he appeared. Many of them are so nearly miraculous in their nature, or so minute and circumstantial in their details as almost to preclude the idea of chance in any sense. And we are very sure, therefore, that we do not assume too much in assigning to twenty of them an average equal chance of non-concurrence. Proceeding upon this ground, we find the probability of their joint occurrence opposed by a disparity of more than a million of chances to one; and it results from the combination of all the ratios thus found, that the

advent of our Saviour, in all its characteristic circumstances and relations, could not have been calculated upon as a matter of fortuitous occurrence, with more than one in four thousand millions of millions of chances. The term probability can scarcely be applied with propriety to a case so very remote; but the argument does not stop here.

Our Saviour, at a time when all the calculations of human forethought were diametrically opposed to him, predicted the general dissemination of his gospel, and the consummation of prophecy with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem, in the short space of a single generation: and so it turned out. By the laws of probability, neither event had, at the utmost, more than one chance in ninety of occurring at that particular time; and there was, therefore, only one in 8,100 of their joint occurrence.

The predictions relative to the siege of Jerusalem, the subjugation of Judea, and the dispersion and subsequent condition of the Jews, present many particulars equally remarkable in character and fulfilment. We select twenty-four, which have severally a degree of probability not greater than $\frac{1}{2}$, and the result is an aggregate of nearly seventeen millions of chances opposed to their joint occurrence.

The predictions of the Old and New Testament relative to the state and condition of the Church in various ages, and its influence upon the moral and political welfare of mankind, furnish another class of particulars which have been singularly verified. The individual probability of most of them would be much less than $\frac{1}{2}$; but we concede this, and limit ourselves to twelve points, the aggregate contingency of which is about $\frac{1}{4000}$ th.

Finally, the prophecies of the Old Testament relative to the Gentile nations around India, and the great empires Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, etc. present about fifty particulars worthy of notice in this calculation. To avoid, however, all possibility of error, we consider only half that number, from which we deduce the expectation of their united fulfilment in about the ratio of one to thirty-three millions.

There remains still a vast number of correlative and circumstantial details, not reducible to any of the foregoing heads, which are found scattered through the pages of Scripture, and furnish a thick array of corroborative evidence for the affirmative view of the subject; but we need not fear to waive the use of them in the present calculation. The composition of the ratios already determined gives an aggregate which it requires nearly forty places of figures to enumerate, and which the utmost powers of the human mind may vainly attempt to appreciate. If we should even assume a single grain of sand for the numerator of the fraction, the whole globe of the earth, repeated many millions of times, would scarcely suffice for its denominator; and such is the extreme improbability of any consistent fulfilment of the scriptural prophecies on the principles of chance.

It will not be objected to this calculation that it regards the different subjects of prophecy as parts of one and the same system; for although they were in fact uttered by different prophets and in different ages of the world, they are all united by a common subject; and that with a degree of consistency and harmony scarcely less wonderful than the fulfilment itself.—*McIlvaine's Evidences of Christianity.*

Philip's Beauties of Female Holiness.

THE PROMISES.

"Among those who waited for the 'Consolation of Israel,' none in Beersheba had appeared in Zion so often as Sheshbazzar. From year to year he had cheered the aged, and charmed the young, on their pilgrimage. His proverbs met all cases, and his smiles or tears suited all hearts. He wept with the weeping and rejoiced with the joyful. And yet Sheshbazzar was a man that had seen affliction. The Angel of Death had said twice, 'Write that man a widower;' and the 'desire of his eyes' was taken away at a stroke. The Angel of Death stood on the tomb of his grief, and said again, 'Write that man childless;' and it was done. His heart bled but it never murmured. He said that each loss had become a new link between his heart and heaven; and that now like the High Priest's breast-plate, it was so linked, all around, that it could not fall. The young wondered and the aged blessed the God of Israel, who gave consolation in trouble, 'and songs in the night.'

"His fellow-pilgrims regarded him as almost a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, whilst journeying with him in the wilderness. They resolved to ask him what was the secret of his consolation under so many calamities. They asked and the old man answered with a heavenly smile, 'I shake the mulberry trees.' It was a dark saying, and they understood him not; but knowing that he never spake unadvisedly with his lips, they pondered that saying in their hearts.

"Sheshbazzar knew that their curiosity was neither idle nor impertinent, and said, 'When we come to the valley of Baca, I will explain myself.' They came to the valley of Baca, and behold, it was very dry! The streams in the desert were passed away like the summer brook, and the heavens gave no sign of rain. The pilgrims were panting 'as the hart for the water brooks,' but found none. All eyes were turned to Sheshbazzar. 'Shake the mulberry trees,' said he. They shook them, and

dew, pure and plenteous as 'the dew of Hermon,' began to pour from every leaf. They made wells around the mulberry trees to prevent the showers from being absorbed in the sand of the desert, and then shook the trees again. They drank; but, though refreshed they were not satisfied. They looked to Sheshbazzar again. His eyes were up unto God. He raised 'the song of Degrees' in that 'house of their pilgrimage.'—All joined in it, and sung, 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.' The pilgrims paused. No cloud appeared on Carmel, and no sound of rain was heard from the wings of the wind. 'Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious?' was a question quivering on the parched lips of many. Sheshbazzar alone was utterly unmoved. He raised again the song of Degrees, and his rich and mellow-toned voice sounded in the wilderness like the jubilee trumpet among the mountains of Jerusalem. The pilgrims listened as if an angel had sung; 'He will not suffer thy root to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. The Lord is thy keeper: The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in from this time forth, and for evermore.' He paused, and bowed his head, and worshipped. The pilgrims felt their faith in God reviving, and renewed their part of the song: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.' And whilst they sung, 'the Lord gave a plenteous rain' to refresh his weary heritage in the wilderness.

"When they had drank and were satisfied, and had blessed the God of their fathers, Sheshbazzar said,—'My children! the Promises of God are the mulberry trees in this valley of tears. The dew of heaven lies all night on their branches, and some dew may always be shaken from them. When I was widowed like our father Jacob, I shook the unfading mulberry tree, 'The Lord liveth; blessed be the rock of my salvation.' When like David, our king, I was bereaved of my children, I shook that broad branching mulberry tree, 'I will be unto thee a better portion than sons or daughters. Accordingly, I have found no trial without finding some dew of consolation upon the trees of promise, when I shook them. And when more was necessary, God has strengthened me with strength in my soul.'"

ANECDOTES OF DR. RUSH.—The doctor once informed me that when he was a young man, he had been invited on some occasions to dine in company with Robert Morris, Esq., a man celebrated for the part he took in the American revolution. It so happened that the company had waited some time for Mr. Morris, who, on his appearance apologized for detaining them by saying that he had been engaged in reading a sermon of a clergyman who had just gone to England to receive orders. 'Well, Mr. Morris,' said the doctor, 'how did you like the sermon? I have heard it highly extolled.' 'Why, doctor,' said he, 'I did not like it at all. It is too smooth and tame for me.' Mr. Morris, 'replied the doctor, 'what sort of a sermon do you like?' 'I like, sir,' replied Mr. Morris, 'that preaching which drives a man up into the corner of his pew, and makes him think the d—l is after him.'

I heard him reprove his medical class once for restlessness, during one of his lectures, by saying, 'Gentlemen, I fear I do not make you happy. The happy are always contented.' This gentle rebuke pleased me so well that after lecture I thanked him for it, observing that 'when occasion should offer, I would try the effect of it upon my congregation.'—'No,' said the doctor, 'I hope you will not.—It is no compliment to a minister of the Gospel to reprove his congregation for inattention. He should be able to keep their attention.' Adding that 'Dr. M's congregations were always attentive.'

Dr. Rush was perhaps one of the most untiring students that ever lived. Two young physicians were conversing in his presence once, and one of them said 'When I finished my studies,'—'When you finished your studies!' said the doctor abruptly, 'Why, you must be a happy man to have finished so young.' I do not expect to finish mine while I live.'

The writer once asked him, how he had been able to collect such an immense amount of information and facts as his publications and lectures contained. 'I have been enabled to do it replied he, 'by economizing my time as Wesley did. I have not lost an hour in amusement for the last thirty years.' And taking a small note book from his pocket, and showing it to me, he said, 'I fill such a book as this once a week with observations and thoughts which occur to me, and facts collected in the rooms of my patients, and these are all preserved and used.'

Dr. Rush was a great enemy to theatrical amusements. He told me that he was once in conversation with a lady, a professor of religion, who was speaking of the pleasure she anticipated at the theatre, in the evening.—'Why madam,' said he, 'do you go to the theatre?' 'Yes, was the reply: 'and don't you go? Do you think it sinful?' said she. He replied, 'I never will publish to the world that I think Jesus Christ a hard master and religion an unsatisfying portion, which I should do if I went on the d—l's ground in quest of happiness.' This argument was short but conclusive. The lady determined not to go.