

Jesus said to his disciples. Whom do you say that I am?

Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answering, said to him. Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my father who is in heaven. AND I SAY TO THEE. THAT THOU ART PETER, AND UPON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT.

AND I SHALL GIVE TO THEE THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven. S. Matthew xvi. 15-19.



Was anything concealed from Peter, who was styled the Rock on which the Church was built, who received the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the power of loosing and binding in Heaven and on earth?—TERTULLIAN Prætorip xxii.

There is one God, and one Church, and one Chair founded by the voice of the Lord upon Peter. That any other Altar be erected, or a new Priesthood established, besides that one Altar, and one Priesthood, is impossible. Whosoever gathers elsewhere, scatters. Whatever is devised by human frenzy, in violation of the Divine Ordinance, is adulterous, impious, sacrilegious.—St. Cyprian Ep. 43 ad plebam.

All of them remaining silent, for the doctrine was beyond the reach of man, Peter the Prince of the Apostles and the supreme herald of the Church, not following his own inventions, nor persuaded by human reasoning, but enlightened by the Father, says to him: Thou art Christ, and not this alone, but the Son of the living God.—St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Cat. xi. 1.

Calendar.

- October 1—Sunday—XVI after Pent I Oct Holy Rosary G Doub
- 2—Monday—Angels Guardian Doub
- 3—Tuesday—Eleutherius P M Doub from 1st June.
- 4—Wednesday—St Francis of Assisi-um C Doub
- 5—Thursday—St. Galla, Widow Doub Sup com &c.
- 6—Friday—St Bruno, C Doub.
- 7—Saturday—St. Mark P C Doub Sup com &c.

POPULAR PROPHECIES.

BY F. A. PALEY, M. A.

In every age of the world there has existed a class of imposters, who have made it their profession to foretell coming events, on the pretence of possessing the power of interpreting the Divine Mind by signs, omens, portents, and auguries, or of being favoured with a direct inspiration from the Supreme Being Himself, to declare His will and counsel long before they were destined to be realized. From the time of Homer downwards, the writings of the Greeks and Romans seem with the allusions to the prophetic office.—So perfect a belief had they in the possibility of anticipating the decrees of Providence, that they seldom commenced any project of importance without duly consulting the entrails of victims, the flight and sounds of birds, &c, or without having previously obtained the answer of certain established oracles, by which they thought themselves able to calculate on the prospects of success. The art of the augur was a mere technical science; the gift of prophecy was an enthusiasm only vouchsafed to the priests, priestesses, and votaries of certain gods. The prophecies of the Cur van sibyl were among the most famous of antiquity:

"Magnam cui mentis anomumque Delius inspirat vates, apertique futura."

They were supposed to contain the destinies of the Roman empire, and were guarded with the most jealous care, along with other books and documents of similar purport, by officers expressly appointed to the charge. And they were solemnly consulted, by order of the senate, when any emergency arose in the state.

We are told by Thucydides, that before the commencement of the great Peloponnesian war (about 430 years before the Christian era,) many oracles were uttered, and many predictions in verse were sung by popular prophets, not only among those about to engage in the war, but in other places. Moreover, Delos was stirred by an earthquake, for the first time within the memory of the Greeks. All which were considered, and generally asserted, to portend the coming events. And if anything of the like kind would chance to happen, it was duly taken into account.

Again, after the disastrous expedition of the Athenians against Sicily [a. c. 413.] the same historian tells us that they "were enraged with the prophets and oracle-mongers, and with all who by their pretended divinations had put them on the hope of subduing Sicily."

Once more after the terrible plague which devastated Athens (a. c. 430), "they remembered, as was natural, an old verse, which declared that

"A Dorian war should come, and with it sickness bring."

Respecting which a dispute arose, whether the evil pretended was 'sickness' or 'famine.'—

However it was voted for the present that it was 'sickness,' for men adapted their reminiscences of the verse to the calamity they were suffering, albeit I doubt not but that if another Dorian war should occur, and a famine should happen along with it, men would suit this very prophecy to the occasion."

The persons who promulgated these delusive predictions, interpreted them in reference to the circumstances or prospects of the times, were called oracle-mongers, by the Athenians; and we may infer from the comic poet Aristophanes, that they were the very pests of society in his time, by alarming and perverting men's minds, as well as by meddling in political matters with which they had no concern. These men kept budgets of old and often spurious prophecies, oracles, and ambiguous predictions; no doubt they composed many more *ex tempore*, being a kind of improvisatori, that is, possessed of a certain facility of versification in the genuine oracular style;—obscure, bombastic, and verbose." The Alexandrine Greek poem, called the *Cassandra*, of Lycophron, may be cited as an example of a prophecy (composed, indeed, long after the events, and therefore merely a poetical fiction), principally interesting for being the most complete specimen we possess of this sort of Greek literature.

Of oracles it is impossible to speak at length in a brief paper. The subject is very curious; for the number of undoubtedly genuine oracles, preserved by Herodotus and other writers, makes it highly probable that they were real predictions, and something more than—what many suppose them to have been—mere political guesses, inferences from analogy, or ingenious riddles, susceptible of almost any interpretation. Their supernatural character is confirmed, if not positively proved, by the circumstance which was noticed by the Pagans themselves,* that after the birth of Christ the ancient oracles ceased to act, that is, lost the former power, and with it the confidence of the heathen nations. Whence it is clear (and indeed there is no reason to doubt it,) that such a power must have been Satanic; and it is an awful subject to approach on these very grounds. For, if Satan could thus speak to pagans, we know not how far, nor in what way, he may yet be permitted to deceive Christians. Oracles may have ceased, and yet the world be as rife as ever with his frauds and cunning delusions.

To the cessation of oracles the learned John Milton alludes in that sublimest of lyric compositions, the "Ode to the Nativity."

"The oracles are dumb:
No voice or hideous hum

Runs through the arch'd roof in words deceiving:
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine

With hollow shriek the sleep of Delphos leaving;
No nightly trance nor breathed spell
Inspires the pale-eyed priest in the prophetic cell."

In the times of the early Roman emperors the imperial city was infested by a set of astrologers and false prophets, who, under the name of *Chaldaei* and *Mathematici*, exercised an influence so extensive and so pernicious, that their expulsion from the city is frequently recorded by Tacitus; reminding us of the charges alleged in more modern times against the Jesuits, and of the similar consequences of the suspicion entertained of their power over the minds of the great. The city was filled with prophecies of all kinds; not fewer than 2000 were burnt by order of Au-

* Plutarch, *De Defectu Oraculorum*.

gustus. The Emperor Tiberius was the most superstitious of mortals, and ever had in his retirement a body of astrologers about him, to which Juvenal alludes in the well known lines, "Principis angusta. Caprearum in rivos sedentis Cum grege Chaldaeo," &c.

In the Christian Church the prophetic power has in all ages obtained more or less credence.—The belief in dreams, omens, spells, magic, and similar attempts to explore the Divine counsels, she has ever condemned as wicked superstitions; but she has not decided against the faculty of prophecy, and more than against that of working miracles; being content with cautioning the faithful against ignorant credulity, and the blighting of unattested cases. The human mind has a strong desire to dive into futurity, and forestall the ordered course of events; so that circumspection is manifestly necessary, lest we should be given over to the effects of superstitious credulity, and "God should send us a wonder-working of deception, to believe in a lie." No sensible person, be he Catholic or Protestant can deny that such superstition has prevailed, and does yet prevail, among those who listen to every recorded miracle, every old wife's prophecy, every local legend and family tradition, every account which may come to their knowledge, however slight or dubious the evidence of its authenticity, of calamities foretold and accomplished according to the very letter of the prediction, or foretold and not yet realized. Superstition is as much a part of human nature as the principle of evil. Neither learning, nor civilization, nor the force of religion, nor the wisdom of the Church, will ever succeed in driving it out of the world.

"Dici non potest," says an old Catholic writer of high authority, "quantum curiositas vel cognoscendi futura et occulta, vel miracula videnti vel fiantis, sefellit plurimus, et a vera religione frequenter avertit. Hinc superstitiones in populis quæ religionem inficiunt Christianam, dum sicut olim Judæi sola signo quærunt, dum hominibus necdum canonizatis, scripturis quoque non authenticis plusquam sanctis et evangelio præstant fidem. That is, "It is incredible what mischief has been done to true religion by vain curiosity about miracles and prophecies, which men believe in which more implicit faith than in the Gospel itself."

The argument intended to be conveyed by the preliminary remarks in the present paper, is one used by St. Augustine; viz. to prove that credulity in supernatural revelations is essentially a heathen principle. "Respecting deceptive visions,"† "let them read what is written, that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Let them hear also what marvellous visions and miracles the pagans relate of their gods and their temples; and yet the gods of the Gentiles were devils."

That many real revolutions have been made to the holy saints, no Catholic will presume to doubt. To do so would be as unreasonable as to give credence to every idle tale which artful or designing persons may choose to promulgate.—"Despise not prophecies," is the injunction of the same Apostle who elsewhere warns his disciples against one "whoso presence is according

* 2 Thess. ii. 10. Neither the Protestant nor the Catholic version gives the exact meaning of the original.

† Jean Garson, Chancellor of the University of Paris. Quoted in St. Jure's *L'Homme Spirituel*, p. 206, ed. 1685.

‡ *De unitate Ecclesie*, cap. 16. Quoted in the work just referred to, p. 223. Thess. v. 29.

to the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and portents of falsehood." And again, St. John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they be of God; for many false prophets have gone forth into the world." It is plain, therefore, that too ready credulity is not safe. We must use all diligence to ascertain the authenticity of every alleged instance of supernatural power, before we yield any assent to it. This is a safe rule, and a truly Catholic one, too. Credulity is no part of Catholic doctrine; but rather, inasmuch as it partakes of superstition, is condemned by the Church. No Catholic is bound to believe *de fide*, in any particular miracle, vision, or prophecy whatever, beside those recorded in the inspired Scriptures. Even in well attested cases, and those which come to us with the sanction of the Church, if we have full liberty to hold a neutral course. To scoff at and deride them would be profane and faithless; to place the same kind and degree of confidence in their absolute truth as we do in those of the Scriptures, is both unwise and unnecessary. We knew not the extent of the devil's power in deceiving us, neither can we be sure of the motives of those who relate wonderful events. Hence there are always two points to be considered; first, whether supernatural warnings, predictions, and visions are true, (i. e. whether they be not mere lying inventions) secondly, whether, if so, they probably proceeded from a good source or a bad one. And what is said of prophecies, equally applies to dreams, apparitions, miracles, and every sort of occurrence beyond or contrary to what we call "the law of Nature."

These remarks have been made in reference to certain prophecies concerning the late French Revolution, which appear to have gained an amount of credence, both in England and France, truly extraordinary in those days of enlightened and philosophic enquiry. Of these prophecies no less than three have come under the actual observation of the writer; but one only has been published in this country. They all profess to have predicted the great Revolution of 1792, and more or less distinctly, the events up to the last tragical scenes in Paris inclusively, adding details of horrors unparalleled and triumphs unprecedented yet to come in both nations. Of course, at the present crisis, such predictions are eagerly bought up by the ignorant and the turbulent; for which reason alone it may well be questioned if their publication is advisable. The same credulity which made men rush in crowds to purchase Murphey's Weather Almanack, a few years ago, will make political alarmists place faith in the wildest rhapsody that was ever indited from the mouth of an imposter. It is not asserted that the prophecies in question are all or any of them impostures; that is the point to be proved; but that the blindest confidence is reposed in them even by well-born and well-educated persons is a positive fact.

"The Prophecy of Orval," purports to be a fragment of one which, under the title of "Provisions of a Solitary," is said to have been printed at Luxemburg in 1544. On considering the evidences of authenticity adduced in the

* 2 Thess. ii. 9. † 1 Ep. iv. 1.
‡ From processes of Canonization.
§ By Mr. Burns, July 1848. The others are of similar import, one in manuscript by Pere Neaton, a Jesuit father who died at the close of the last century, and who is said by those who handed down his prediction to have resuscitated a dead child by his prayers, another by a noted astrologer, born in Florence in 1503, called Nardamus (Michel de Nostradamus), which has been for centuries past in print.