

under which the prophet wrote or spoke, and then seek to understand the object which he had in view. This method requires us to go back to the sources, or rather to begin at the sources, and travel down the stream of prophecy. The opposite course, however, is commonly pursued. Most persons hold that prophecy can be understood only from the standpoint of supposed fulfilment. Such an opinion is unreasonable, and should never have been seriously entertained. It is subversive of the fundamental principles on which all Scripture knowledge rests.

Acting on this opinion, however, expositors in the past have come down to the New Testament to discover what a prophetic passage *seems* to mean here before going back to the Old Testament to find out what it *ought* to mean there. In this way, they have imported New Testament conceptions into Old Testament statements. They have read a certain meaning into prophecy, and then they have read it out again. They have made a prophetic passage teach just what they believed it must teach from its New Testament connection, irrespective of what it might teach or should teach from its Old Testament context. The practice of interpreting prophecy in the light of supposed fulfilment is analogous to the habit of looking at the answer of a problem before attempting its solution.

The prophets, we have seen, were ministers of a progressive revelation. The Old Testament Scriptures were a growth. By disregarding their historical interpretation, we fail to appreciate the constant expansion of moral truth and the gradual development of religious doctrine. Indeed, "by this means," as another has said, "we fall under a double disadvantage; for while, on the one hand, we attribute to the Old Testament Church a greater amount of evangelical knowledge than it really possessed, we fail, on the other hand, to realize the interesting growth of its true knowledge." Old Testament writers must not be accredited with conceptions which they did not cherish, or with notions which they could not entertain. Moreover, by failing to observe the peculiar difference between the Old and the New Testament use of a passage, its essential meaning will be misconceived, and its original application overlooked. Owing to this failure, a certain significance has been