

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING MODERN PROPHETS.

BY KNOXIAN.

"That girl will never make a sensible woman," says the prophet of evil. Miss Melinda Frisky, of whom this was said, quieted down as she came near twenty, married a sensible young man, took good care of her home, trained her family well, became an excellent member of the Church, a useful member of society, and in all respects one of the most worthy and respected women in the community. The prophets of evil were wrong in their predictions.

"That boy will never amount to anything," says the prophet of evil with an air of wisdom that neither Solomon, nor Solon, nor Socrates ever dared to assume. That boy goes to school, works hard, studies a profession, and at fifty is one of the leading men of the country. The prophet of evil was wrong again.

"That new firm won't stand long," says old Shylock, who thinks no young man should dare to start in business without asking his leave. Push and pull, work hard, live economically, treat the public well, and in a few years become one of the leading firms of the town. The prophet of evil was wrong again.

Prophets of good are just as likely to be wrong as prophets of evil. The man who predicts good things is a much more amiable man than the prophets of evil, but his predictions are just as liable to be wrong. In fact, prophesying is the most uncertain business in this country, and that is saying a good deal. If the list of unfulfilled predictions made in Canada alone in the last twenty years by our wisest men could be written out, the volume would probably be the largest one in the country. If the list of those made by *fools* could be published, the country would scarcely contain it.

Twenty years ago our politicians brought the political affairs of old Canada to a deadlock. To put matters right they devised the present Confederation Scheme. The air was filled with glowing predictions about the marvellous results that Confederation would bring about in a few years. There were also predictions on the other side. A great many people predicted that the Nova Scotians would fight if they were forced into the Confederacy. The prophets on both sides were wrong. Confederation did not bring half of the benefits that were predicted, and the Blue Noses didn't fight. A good many people, not by any means fools, have grave doubts as to whether Confederation ever will accomplish the hundredth of what its promoters predicted twenty odd years ago.

If anybody wishes to see a splendid illustration of how really great men fail in the realm of prophecy, let him read the speeches made in the British House of Commons during, and a few years prior to, the American Revolution. How many of the predictions made about the revolting colonists have been fulfilled? The neighbouring Republic, the second greatest English-speaking nation in the world, gives the answer.

Years ago, one of the best public men that ever served in Canada, the Hon. Robert Baldwin, devised a system of local government for the people. It was predicted by some wise men of that time that this municipal system would bring dire calamities upon the country. The municipal councils were called "Sucking Republics." What one thing in Ontario to-day works better than our municipal system? The prophets were all wrong.

Prophets abound in the Church as well as in the State. We have more prophets now than were found in the Jewish Church at any given time. They predict more things than the Jewish prophets did. Usually they resemble Jeremiah more than Isaiah.

In 1861 a union took place between the Free and United Presbyterian Churches in this country. Prophets always flourish when there is union in the air. Some of those in favour of union made most glowing predictions about the marvellous things that union would bring about. Those opposed to union predicted dire calamities. Very few of the blessings and none of the calamities ever came.

In 1875 we had another and much larger union. The prophets on both sides had another good time. Who does not remember the glowing predictions about the Church that was to extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific? They were twin brothers to the Confederation speeches about the country that was to extend from—well, we needn't say where. The prophets on the union side did their work well. Those opposed to

the union put in some lively work. Not one out of fifty of the predicted blessings or calamities ever came. Perhaps some of them may come yet, but not very likely. The prophets on both sides were wrong again.

In 1870 and 1871 we had a lively time over the organ. The prophets were in clover to the eyes. The prophecies came thick and fast. Glowing predictions were made about the power of the "kist" to build up and destroy. On the one side we were told that the "kist" had marvellous power to draw; on the other that the "kist" would scatter like the Riot Act. The "kist" came, but it did not do either the one or the other. One very sanguine individual said: "We must have music to move the masses." Others declared that the moment the use of the "kist" was sanctioned the Highlanders in Glengarry, Huron and Bruce would bolt to a man. The Highlanders didn't bolt. They stood the "kist" as bravely as their countrymen stood the Russian horse at Balaklava. A Highlandman rarely leaves his Church if he is let alone. It is needless to say the music didn't move the masses to any great extent. The masses need something more powerful than a melodeon to move them.

About the same time there was a lively discussion on the use of hymns. The prophets were again to the front. As usual they were wrong. The hymns did some good but no harm.

Modern prophets, like those of the olden time, may be divided into the major and the minor. The major prophets foretell great national and great ecclesiastical events. The minor deal with small matters. Minor prophets are found in most congregations. Their forte is to predict that certain things will "split the Church." With an air of wisdom that Solomon never assumed in his palmiest days they predict that if you don't do just what they advise, dire calamities will be certain to come. The calamities rarely come.

The predictions of the minor prophet would be comparatively harmless were it not that he too often feels under obligations to try to fulfil his predictions. If he is a real good man, if he has enough of grace and is thoroughly loyal to his Church, he will try to avert the calamities he predicts. Some of the men who predicted that people would bolt on the organ question did noble service in keeping them from bolting. All honour to the man who works to prevent the fulfilment of his own predictions. He is a noble specimen of human nature. He is a *man*. But there is always a danger that if a man predicts the Church will split, he may feel bound to try his best to split it. If he predicts "the minister will fail," he may do all he can to make him fail. If he predicts the money cannot be raised, he may be tempted to hinder, so far as he can, the raising of it. In this way prophesying becomes a dangerous business, especially to the prophet.

Moral:—Never prophesy. The future is in God's hands—not ours. We know nothing about it. Prophesying never proves that a man is wise. Usually it proves exactly the reverse. Therefore—*never prophesy*.

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGIONS.

PROF. F. MAX MÜLLER'S HIBBERT LECTURES.

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At the present day mental activity is not content to move along the old lines. Everywhere the foundations of things are subjected to careful scrutiny. Even in the important matter of religion we find that not only its credentials, but also its fundamental grounds are undergoing rigid examination.

The study of comparative religion has brought to light many interesting facts. The work of such men as Müller, Birch, Sayce, Rawlinson, Stanley, Jowett, Seeley and Rhys Davids is of immense value, alike in its relation to literature, and in its bearing on the question of the origin of religion. To give a broad, fair and scientific interpretation of the vast array of facts which have been set forth during the last twenty-five years, and to determine the relation of Christianity to the great historical religions of the world are subjects worthy of the most careful study. Are we to be content with the historico-evolutionary and naturalistic explanations of the facts which, in certain circles, are very popular at the present day? If we are convinced of the insufficiency of these explanations, so far at least as Christianity is concerned, how are we to proceed to establish the peculiar claims of Christianity to be the only true religion, and, as such, containing elements that transcend the natural?

That religions existed before any part of the Bible was written, at least in its present form, is evident. That religion existed prior to some kind of revelation from God is scarcely likely, even though we hold that man from the first possessed in his nature a religious faculty. Two views are taken of the nature of the great historical religions, including Christianity, both of which place them all in the same category. Some maintain that they all contain, in greater or less degree, supernatural elements; others argue that they are all capable of natural explanations. The latter view has many advocates at the present day.

Two methods are also adopted in dealing with the whole subject of comparative religion. According to one method the contents of the various forms of religion are carefully analyzed, and the results of the analysis compared. The conclusion generally arrived at is that the various religions are found to differ in degree, but not in kind. It is proper to remark here that, in the comparison of Christianity with other religions, there is a good deal of what may be called special pleading on the part of the advocates of naturalism, inasmuch as Christianity is either inadequately described or its points of resemblance with other forms of religion are emphasized, and its features of difference minimized, by them.

The other method may be called the historical. According to this method the stream of the history of religion is followed up its various branches toward their sources. While this seems the most rational method, it has, however, very serious difficulties. In many cases the investigator soon finds himself in the hazy region of myth and fable. Some writers, observing this to be the case in many forms of religion, conclude that Christianity had its origin in the same way. It may be observed here that even a cursory examination of the historical records of the early stages of the several religions cannot fail to reveal the fact that Christianity is on a much more secure historical basis than the others. A simple comparison of Judaism with Greek mythology, and of Christianity with Buddhism will make this clear.

Professor Müller pursues mainly the historical method. But while this is stated, it is not to be forgotten that in dealing with the literature of India he also employs the analytical method. In his Hibbert Lectures, now before us, he examines the literature of India, with a view to discover what aid it affords in answering the question of the origin of religion. These lectures are seven in number. Before making some critical remarks concerning them, a brief sketch of each lecture may be given.

The first lecture takes up an important preliminary topic. It treats of "the Perception of the Infinite." He asserts that we have the idea of the infinite; otherwise religion would be impossible. In regard to the way in which we arrive at this idea, he is distinctly on the empirical ground of the Lockian School. He says: "All our knowledge begins with the senses, and out of the material supplied by the senses Reason builds up her marvellous structures." Many similar passages might be quoted. Speaking of a primitive savage, and the way he gains the idea of the infinite, he says: "I answer without any fear of contradiction that it is his senses which give him the first impression of infinite things, and force him to the admission of the infinite." In defining the nature of the infinite he, however, very quietly identifies it with the indefinite. His words are: "The indefinite and the infinite are in reality two names for the same thing, the former expressing its phenomenal and the latter its real character."

Having shown how the idea of the infinite is reached, he proceeds, after noticing several popular and philosophical definitions of religion, to give his own. This definition is twofold. Objectively, it involves, and rests in, the reality of the infinite; subjectively, it is the potential energy which enables man to apprehend the infinite. It is with the latter phase of the matter that Müller chiefly deals.

In the second lecture he deals in an exhaustive and effective way with the Comtist theory of the origin of religion, of which Positivism is the English representative. This theory finds the origin of religion in Fetishism, or the worship of simple natural objects. Here Müller gives much information in regard to the origin of the word Fetish, and concerning the nature of the form of religion denoted thereby among different nations. He shows conclusively that this is not the primitive form of religion. From the testimony of travellers, by the facts of history, and on psychological