

Prophecy Criticised.

From the *Daily Telegraph*, London :

It is a more accident of language that we cannot describe the 23rd April, 1903, by anticipation as one of the most memorable dates in the history of mankind. For the truth—if at least Rev. Mr. Baxter has got hold of the truth—is that subsequent to that date there will be no "history" to commemorate it, nor, indeed, any "mankind" in the present acceptance of the word, to preserve the memory of it. The race, if it continues to exist on earth at all, will exist only in a new and glorified form; the millennium will take the place of our present divisions of time, and there will presumably be no chronicler, reader, or events to chronicle. Such, at any rate seems to be only the legitimate corollaries of the conclusion to which Mr. Baxter has been drawn by a concatenation of Biblical evidences, that the "end of this age" will take place on the day named. It must be admitted that a singular multitude of prophetic testimonies converge upon this momentous 23rd of April. It is the end of the seven year's covenant from Passion Week 1901, which terminates Daniel's two thousand three hundred and forty five years from Passion Week A.C. 445, when Nehemiah was commanded to rebuild Jerusalem, and which also terminates "Daniel's forty-five years from the Crimean War Treaty of Peace in April, 1856, according to Daniel viii. 14, ix. 25, xii. 11, 12." Not content with this, the irrepressible April 23rd coincides with "the end of the six thousand years from the creation of man, and the two thousand five hundred and twenty years from Nebuchadnezzar, and the three hundred and sixty years from Luther's Reformation in Dan. iv. 16, and Revelation x. 6." It is too much to suppose that all these coincidences are accidental, and they leave even the most cautious of Danielic and Apocalyptic critics with hardly any alternative except to sink his savings in an annuity instead of investing them, and not acquiring any leasehold property with more than fourteen years of unexpired term. Daniel, it is true, does not mention the Crimean War or the Treaty of 1856 in so many words; but in prophetically fixing 2,300 years from A.C. 445 as the commencement of "the cleansing of the sanctuary," he referred in a manner too plain to be mistaken to the decree of the Sultan recorded in that treaty, by which Jews and Christians were placed on a political equality with Mohammedans. For the Jews, thus enfranchised, would, of course, be permitted to purchase land in Palestine, and if they could purchase land there is no reason why they should not rebuild the Temple, and if they do, that will be the beginning of the fulfilment of prophecy. With such a chain of reasoning, welded link by link with remorseless blows of the logical hammer, does the trained Apocalypticist bend his premises to his conclusions.

Thanks to this rigour of reasoning, Mr. Baxter has been able to ascertain the programme of political events for the closing years of this century and of supernatural events for the first years of its successor with a minute circumstantiality that no previous prophet, so far as we are aware, has ever approached. Next year, or the year after, France will defeat and apparently annihilate Germany, and then form, "probably not later than 1898," the "ten-kingdomed confederacy of Dan. vii. 24," in which we regret to notice that this country figures as "Britain separated from Ireland and India." Some time in 1898-9 a Napoleon may be expected to arise, as the "Little Horn, or King, in or near Macedonia," and become King of Syria and restore the Jews. One hundred and forty-four thousand living Christians will ascend to heaven without dying "about Thursday, March 12th, 1903;" and so forth. The want of particularity in the last date is a little disappointing, but it is only fair to admit that it is the sole instance of hesitation on the prophet's part with respect to any of the fixtures from 1903 onward. Every trumpet and every vial of the Apocalypse is punctually accounted for. We are told, for instance, how the fifth trumpet will bring countless demons from the bottomless pit during the whole period between October 27th, 1904, and August 23rd, 1905; and how for a year and a month from December, 1905, this host will be reinforced by "two hundred million demon horsemen"—cavalry demons—from the same infernal depot. These dates, however, are still some way off. It is, of course, the nearer catastrophes which chiefly interest us, and these, as we have seen, are to begin next year, or the year after, in a gigantic European war, which is to be followed by the rise of another Napoleon—an event prefigured, we are bidden to remark, by the "curious, unexplainable Napoleonic fever which is sweeping over France."

It is not without diffidence that we adventure ourselves in the field of Apocalyptic interpretation; but the reverend gentlemen from whom we have quoted does seem to us to have wandered unnecessarily far afield in fixing on next year as the beginning of the fulfilment of prophecy and imagining European convulsions in order to fulfil it. Surely we have had catastrophic occurrences of

earlier date and nearer home than that; and, in short, it is difficult to believe that the prophetic passages which Mr. Baxter has so eruditely and ingeniously handled refer to anything else but the late general election. Limitations of space must, of course, preclude us from working out this theory systematically and in detail, but we will venture to assure all who care to pursue the inquiry for themselves that they will find little difficulty in establishing a no less complete case for regarding the struggle between the Unionist and the Radical parties as the real Armageddon than Mr. Baxter has succeeded in making out for his own theory. By the exercise of a very moderate amount of ingenuity, the trumpets, the vials, and the horns—even down to the Little Horn itself, now no longer exalted—can with sufficient certainty be identified; and as to the periods of seven years which play so significant a part in the predictions above discussed, their reference to the Septennial Act is surely too plain to be missed. It seems extraordinary indeed that an interpreter of prophecy, writing no more than thirty-three years ago; should have entirely overlooked the astonishing political upheaval of the present year, especially as the figures of the Unionist majority, one hundred and fifty-two, would no doubt have guided him to it, or to anything else, if manipulated in the proper way. The only unsolved problem that has presented itself, so far as we have ourselves pursued the inquiry, is one which arises from a certain difficulty of deciding between the multitude of candidates for identification with the number of the beast. Were it not that we are expressly told that that number is the "number of a man," we should prefer as the least invidious course to seek an impersonal interpretation of it; and we have no doubt that with a little arithmetical dexterity it would be easy enough to prove that the figures 666 are symbolical of the Newcastle Programme.

The Suicidal Mania.

The Rev. F. L. H. Millard, Diocesan Inspector of Schools, preaching lately in St. Cuthbert's Church, Carlisle, directed the attention of his hearers to the lamentable prevalence of suicide. He remarked upon the fact that the crime of suicide had become very common, and also that there was a great feeling of sympathy among the public for the man who wilfully took his own life. Day after day, as one opened the newspapers, there was the announcement of the suicide of so-and-so. Love, hatred, jealousy, envy, loss, were sufficient justification for the deed; and they were so hardened to the crime, that they could read, with indifference if not with sympathy, the hideous news headed "The Suicidal Mania."

It was time that an effort was made to try to change public sentiment on so detestable, so cowardly a crime. The crime was so alarmingly on the increase that for trivial reasons even boys and girls would emulate the hideous example of their elders. One would think that the more civilization increased, the more education was spread abroad, the less savage self-destruction would abound. But it was just the reverse. The more advanced intellectual districts were just those where suicides were most common. They boasted the advantage of their enlightened civilization, they prided themselves on their extended education, and yet there was the army of self-murderers in the most increasing rapidity every year. Surely there must be something very rotten about it all, if that was one of the outcomes of it.

What did they think were the causes of this hideous thing? Set on one side the poor helpless lunatic, who after all formed but a small portion of the whole, and see why others took their own lives. There was the low craving for notoriety; there was weariness of life; an antipathy to living; there was the influence of bad example; there were family worries, disappointments; there was the sense of shame that followed on loss or the detection of crime; there was poverty; there was financial difficulty; there was an undue haste to be rich; there was the gambling fever; there was religious apathy and indifference, and low unworthy views of life that followed; there was the demon of drink; and in some cases those things drove reason away. The man was to be pitied; for doubtless many suicides were committed by persons laboring under some permanent or temporary form of insanity, and such cases must excite their deepest sympathy. But when this was not the case; when the act was committed by persons to all intents and purposes perfectly sane, when that verdict so often given was a mere lie—what then? When common sense told them that the jury's statement, "Suicide while of unsound mind," was but a kindly form of describing the act of a self-murderer what then? They shrank instinctively from the man who committed the sin of Cain, but were they equally repulsed by the sin of an Abitop. I or a Judas? The suicide was a murderer of the first degree. He was guilty of an act that was not, and never could be, justifiable. No matter what troubles and anxieties a man had to face, no matter what