

evil and adulterous generation. The red sky of evening was understood by them to be a prophecy of a fair to-morrow ; and the red and lowering sky of morning to be a forecast of foul weather. Yet with all their skill in reading the weather signs, they had no discernment for the "signs of the times." The comparison implies a profound and most weighty analogy, namely, that *God gives us in the Present a prophecy of the Future* ; and that it is our duty and privilege to watch the historic horizon, note political, moral, spiritual phenomena, and make a broad and safe induction as to the times to come ; and especially developments nigh at hand even at the doors.

Another grand truth implied in all this is that, as God has a plan in history, so it is an infinitely wise and good plan ; and that therefore grand historic epochs *wait for the fitness and fulness of times*. Accident determines nothing ; there is no blunder or mistake, no anticipation or procrastination. When everything is ready, and not before or after, with the precision of the most perfect mechanism, everything moves according to His appointment. There may be a wheel within a wheel, but there is the spirit of a living creation in the wheels, and they all move in one direction, obedient to the guiding spirit, and the rim of the wheel is full of the eyes of Omniscience before and behind.

Now observe what follows : God having a definite historic plan, and the fitness and fulness of times being the determining law, we have only to study carefully and prayerfully the events of the present day to see the plan revealed and read the forecast of the future, and especially the near future.* The current history of mankind constitutes the putting forth of the leaves of the fig-tree, which reveals the summer as just at hand. The prayerful consideration and comparison of events occurring before our eyes thus becomes to the disciple the spirit of prophecy.

How, then, are we to know that the fitness and fulness of times for the vigorous and successful prosecution of the work of missions has at length arrived ? What, in respect of missionary enterprise, are the signs of the time now appearing on the world's horizon ? This question we seek, with God's help, to answer.

There is a grand fundamental principle which underlies all discernment of the signs of the times, namely, the comparison of prophetic scriptures with providential developments. The Word of God and the work of God must agree ; and we must know the former to interpret the latter. At all great crises in history it will be found that prediction, inspired prediction, has long pointed as with uplifted finger toward that crisis ; and then there has been at that crisis a singular convergence of events showing a presiding genius in history far above man.

For example, take the Incarnation, that new birth-hour of history. How plainly had prophetic prediction foretold God's manifestation in the flesh, and with astonishing minuteness of detail. The Messiah was to be

* Compare Matthew 16 : 1-3 and 24 : 12-14, 30-31.