The FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY IN THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Considered as an Eminent Proof of the Truth of Christianity.

Extracted chiefly from Bishop Porteus's Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Of the various kinds of evidence that may be adduced in proof of the Divine origin of the Christian religion, none is more forcible and conclusive than the fulfilment of prophecy. Nor can it be disputed, that to foretell future events with plainness and precision, events which at the time appear improbable, argues an intelligence more than human. The Old Testament abounds in prophecies respecting the incarnation and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, which were in due time exactly fulfilled. Jesus Christ himself was an illustrious Prophet, and thus, as well as by miracles, gave ample proof of his Divine mission. Among the predictions of our Lord, recorded by the evangelists, none are more remarkable than those relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, which we find in the evangelists, (Mark xiii. 1—10; Luke xxi. 5—28; xix. 41—44,) and especially in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew's gospel; an event to which the whole chapter, in its primary acceptation, refers: at the same time it must be admitted, that the forms of expression, and the images made use of, are for the most part applicable also to the day of judgment; and that an allusion to that
great event, as a kind of secondary object, runs through almost every part of the prophecy. This is very common in the prophetic writings, where two subjects are frequently carried on together, a principal and a subordinate one. And thus the benefit of our Lord's predictions, instead of being confined to one occasion, or to one people, is extended to every subsequent period of time, and to the whole Christian world.

The substance of this prophecy may be arranged under three general heads:

I. The signs which were to precede the destruction of Jerusalem.

II. The circumstances of the siege.

III. The actual capture of the city by the besieging army.

I. The signs which were to precede this event
Verse 5, and following; "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

The first part of this prophecy began soon to be
in the Destruction of Jerusalem.

fulfilled; for we learn from the ancient writers, and particularly from Josephus, that not long after our Lord's ascension, several impostors appeared; some pretending to be the Messiah, and others to foretell future events. Of the first sort were Dositheus, who said that he was the Christ foretold by Moses; and Simon Magus, who said that he appeared among the jews as the Son of God. There were many false prophets, particularly an Egyptian, who led a great multitude of people to the mount of Olives; persuading them that they should see the walls of Jerusalem fall down at his command, and thus afford them a free entrance into the city; and Theudas, a magician, who induced an immense body to follow him with their effects to the river Jordan; assuring them that the river would divide itself upon his order, and permit them to pass over it. On both these occasions great numbers of their deluded followers perished by the sword of the Romans. In the reign of Nero, when Felix was procurator of Judea, such numbers of these impostors made their appearance, that many of them were put to death every day. And this spirit of delusion continued to the last, for on the day the temple was destroyed, a false prophet proclaimed that God had commanded the people to go up to the temple, where they would receive signs of deliverance; in consequence of which, 6000 persons, who followed his injunctions, perished in its ruins.

Our Lord foretels, also, wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, as signs of these times. As the limits of a tract will not admit of an enumeration of the various historical facts which confirm these predictions, we can only state a small part of them, referring to historians who have written of those times, particularly to Josephus; the preservation of whose history, while so many others have been entirely lost, seems to show the design of Providence, to give to every future age an authentic proof of the fulfilment of this astonishing prophecy.
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With regard to wars: Josephus relates a disturbance in Mesopotamia, occasioned by the indiscretion of two Jews, in which 50,000 people perished. In the year 49, during the passover, a tumult occurred, in which 20,000 Jews lost their lives. At Cesarea, in one disturbance, 20,000 Jews were killed. The disorders which prevailed over all Syria were terrible. At Alexandria, 50,000 Jews were slain; and at Damascus, the inhabitants put to death 11,000 Jews in an hour's time.

A very severe famine which prevailed over Judea, Rome, and Italy, in the reign of Claudius, is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and by various historians; who also record severe pestilences at Babylon, Rome, and other parts; as well as earthquakes, at Rome, Apamea, Laodicea, and Campanea; by one of which, three cities in Asia, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse, were overthrown.

In the 9th, and following verses, our Lord foretells the persecutions of his disciples. That every circumstance here mentioned was minutely and exactly verified, must be well known to every one who has read the Acts of the Apostles. We there see that the very name of Christian was deemed a crime; and it exposed persons to every species of insult, indignity, and cruelty. Many, terrified with these persecutions as was predicted, became apostates from their religion, and renounced their faith: of whom St. Paul mentions Phygellus, Hermogenes, and Demas. Many betrayed one another: for history informs us, "that several Christians were at first apprehended, and then, by their discoveries, a multitude of others were convicted, and cruelly put to death, with derision and insult."

In the 13th verse, our Lord engages for the preservation of his faithful disciples; and it is remarkable, that none of them were known to perish in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Another sign was, that the Christian religion was
first to be propagated over the greater part of the Roman empire, which, in Scripture, as well as by the Roman writers, is called the world. Then shall come, what is called in the 3rd verse, the end of the world; that is, of the Jewish state and government, sometimes so termed. And we learn, from the most authentic writers, that the gospel was preached, within thirty years after the death of Christ, in Idumea, Syria, and Mesopotamia; in Media, and Parthia, and many parts of Asia Minor; in Egypt, Mauritania, Ethiopia, and other regions of Africa; in Greece and Italy; as far north as Scythia, and as far westward as Spain. In the very island which we inhabit, there is some reason to believe that Christianity was planted in the days of the apostles, and before the destruction of Jerusalem.

II. The circumstances of the siege itself. Verses 15 and 16; “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.” Ver. 21; “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

The abomination of desolation denotes the Roman army which besieged Jerusalem, and which the prophet Daniel calls “the abomination which makes desolate:” because upon their standards were depicted the images of their emperor, and of their gods, whom they worshipped; the word “desolation” is added, because this mighty army brought ruin and desolation upon Jerusalem. This city, the mountain on which it stood, and a circuit of several furlongs around it, were accounted holy ground; and as the Roman standards were planted in the most conspicuous places near the fortifications of the city, they are here said to stand in the holy place, or as St. Mark expresses it, to stand “where they ought not.” The first
Roman governors, in compliance with the religious opinions of the Jews, used to come into the city with ensigns destitute of their ornaments. Pilate was the first who set up images in Jerusalem, which he did privately, his army making their entrance in the night. But as soon as the people knew it, they earnestly supplicated that they might be removed, to which Pilate consented. And not long after, a Roman army, intending to march through Judea, to invade an enemy's country, was prevailed on to change its route for this very reason. When, therefore, this idolatrous and destructive army appears before the holy city, "then," says our Lord, "let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains," &c. We learn from the best ecclesiastical historians, that when the Roman armies approached Jerusalem, all the christians left it, and fled to Pella, a mountainous country, and to other places beyond Jordan. And happy was it for them that they did so, for the miseries experienced by the Jews in that siege were without a parallel in the history of the world. Their calamities were horrible, and almost incredible; not only from the fire and sword of the enemies without, but from famine and pestilence, and continual massacres and murders from the fiend-like fury of the seditious zealots within. Indeed, Josephus himself says, speaking of Jerusalem, "Our city, of all those subjected to the Romans, was raised to the highest felicity, and was thrust down again to the lowest gulf of misery; for, if the misfortunes of all from the beginning of the world were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior upon the comparison. To such lengths were the factions carried, that in one night 8,500, and in another, 13,000 persons were slain. Famine and pestilence so much prevailed, that the inhabitants were no longer able to carry the dead bodies out of the city, but laid them in heaps in large houses, and then shut them up. The leather of bucklers and sandals, straw, and even
the old dung of cattle, collected from the common sewers, were eaten; and it is recorded, that a woman of good family killed her sucking child, and dressed it for food."* It is impossible, one would think, even for the most stubborn infidel, not to be struck with the great similarity between the prediction of our Lord, and the actual accomplishment of it, as described by the historian. They are exact counterparts of each other, and seem almost as if they had been written by the very same person. Yet Josephus was not born till after our Saviour was crucified; and he was not a christian, but a jew; and certainly never meant to give testimony to the truth of our religion.

Another part of our Lord's prediction was now fulfilled, which is recorded Luke xix. 43; "The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side." Accordingly, the Romans having surrounded Jerusalem with their forces, and having made several unsuccessful assaults, Titus, who had now the command of the army, resolved to surround the city with a wall; and by the diligence and emulation of the soldiers, this work, which was worthy of months, was, with incredible speed, completed in three days. This wall extended thirty-nine furlongs (nearly five miles) and was strengthened with thirteen forts at proper distances; so that all hopes of safety were cut off from the jews, together with all the means of escape.

These calamities were so severe, that, had they been of long continuance, the whole jewish nation must have been destroyed. For upwards of one million one hundred thousand of them were slain during the siege, and near three hundred thousand more were destroyed in other places in the course of the war. But our Lord adds, Matt. xxiv. 22, "For the

* The reader is desired to turn to a very remarkable prophecy on this subject, which he will find in Deut. xxviii. 52—57.
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... elect's sake those days shall be shortened;" that is, for the sake of those Jews who had been, or should be, converted to Christianity; and they were shortened by the besieged themselves; by their seditious and mutual slaughters; by their madness in burning their own provisions, which would have been sufficient for years; and by fatally deserting their strongest holds, which could never have been taken by force, the fortifications being deemed impregnable. Titus was so sensible of this, that he himself ascribed the success to God: "We have fought," said he to his friend, "with God on our side; and it is God who hath dragged the Jews out of their strong holds; for what could the hands of men and machines do against such towers as these?"

III. The actual capture of Jerusalem by the besieging army.

And here it is foretold, respecting the temple, that not one stone of its magnificent buildings should be left upon another. And it appears from Josephus, that there was scarcely any thing more remarkable in this celebrated temple, than the stupendous size of the stones with which it was constructed. Those employed in the foundations were forty cubits, that is, about sixty feet in length; and the superstructure was worthy of such foundations, for there were stones in it of the whitest marble, upwards of sixty-seven feet long, more than seven feet high, and nine broad. It was not, therefore, without reason, that the disciples particularly noticed the uncommon magnitude of the stones of this superb temple; which they probably flattered themselves was formed to stand the shock of ages, and to resist the utmost efforts of human power to destroy it. But this prediction, unlikely as it then seemed, was literally fulfilled; for when the Romans had taken Jerusalem, Titus ordered his soldiers to dig up the foundations both of the city and the temple. The Jewish writers also themselves
acknowledge, that the whole city was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those who dug up the foundations, that there was nothing left to make those who came thither to believe it had ever been inhabited. Terentius Rufus, who was left to command the army, ploughed up the foundations of the temple, and thereby fulfilled that prophecy of Micah, iii. 12; "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field." And in confirmation of this remarkable circumstance, Eusebius also assures us, that the temple was ploughed up by the Romans, and that he himself saw it lying in ruins.

Besides the astonishing number of Jews slain by the sword, 97,000 were taken captive: the tall and handsome young men Titus reserved for his triumph; of the rest, those above seventeen years of age were sent to labour at the works the Romans were constructing in Egypt; and great numbers were distributed throughout the Roman provinces, to be destroyed in their theatres by the sword, or by wild beasts; those under seventeen were sold for slaves; many of them suffered great hardships, and 11,000 of them perished for want. Thus were the Jews miserably tormented; and, from that time to this, have been distressed, and dispersed over all the nations of the earth.

As the Jews were to be led away captive into all nations, so Jerusalem was to be trodden down of the gentiles, until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled, Luke xxi. 24. And, accordingly, their city has remained, for the most part, in a state of ruin and desolation, from its destruction by the Romans to the present time; and has never been under the government of the Jews themselves, but oppressed and broken down by a succession of foreign masters, the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, the Mamalukes, and last by the Turks, to whom it is still subject.

It is not, therefore, only to historians that we are to look for the accomplishment of our Lord's predic-
tions; we see them verified at this moment before our eyes, in the desolate state of the once celebrated city and temple of Jerusalem, and in the present condition of the Jews, not collected together into any one country, and under one form of government, but dispersed over every region of the globe.

There was indeed one attempt made to rebuild their temple and city, and restore them to their ancient prosperity. It was made, too, for the express and avowed purpose of defeating this very prophecy; and the event was such as might be expected from the folly and presumption of the man who dared to oppose the designs of Providence, and to fight against God. This was the emperor Julian, who first espoused Christianity, then professed himself a pagan, and became a bitter enemy to the gospel. But soon after they had begun the work, dreadful balls of fire, bursting out from the foundation, rendered the place inaccessible to the workmen, who were frequently burnt with the flames; and they were forced, at length, to abandon the design. The account of this extraordinary miracle we have, not only from the Christian writers of credit who lived at the very time, but from an heathen author of great veracity, Ammianus Marcellinus, who, though he was an admirer of Julian, and fought under him in his Persian expedition in the year 363, yet acknowledges this fact.

Our Lord predicted that the destruction of Jerusalem should take place before the generation of men then existing should pass away. And it actually took place within forty years from that time. It is worthy of remark, that when Christ delivered this prophecy, there was not the slightest probability of the Romans invading Judea, much less of their besieging Jerusalem, of their surrounding it with a wall, of their taking it by storm, and of their destroying the temple so entirely as not to leave one stone upon another. The Jews were then at peace with
The Romans. The latter could have no motives of interest or policy to invade and destroy a country already subject to them, and from which they reaped many advantages. It could not, therefore, be from mere human sagacity and foresight that our Saviour foretold these events; and had he even hazarded a conjecture respecting a war with the Romans, yet he could never have imagined or invented such a variety of minute particulars as he did predict, and as actually came to pass.

The only pretence that can be set up against this prophecy is, that it was not delivered by our Saviour previous to the destruction of Jerusalem, but inserted by St. Matthew and the other evangelists, after that event. This may undoubtedly be said, and any thing may be said by those whose business it is to object and cavil; but can it be said with the smallest appearance of truth? Is there the slightest ground to support it? Most certainly not. It is mere assertion without the least shadow of proof, and an opposite assertion is a sufficient answer to it. We deny the fact, and call upon our adversaries to prove it, if they can. They have never so much as attempted it. Not even the earliest enemies of our faith, those who were much nearer the primitive ages, and much more likely to detect a fraud (if there were any) than modern infidels. But besides this, there are good grounds to believe not only that the three gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where this prophecy is related, were written and published before the destruction of Jerusalem, but that the writers were all dead before that event took place. And that which ought, with every reasonable man, to be decisive of the question, is this, that three of the evangelists out of four concur in giving us this prophecy as a part of their history of our Lord, and as actually delivered by him at the period assigned to it; which we know was nearly forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Now we have no
more reason to doubt their veracity in this point than in any other: and if, on the strength of their character, on the evident marks of integrity, simplicity, and truth, which appear in every page of their writings, we give implicit credit to what they tell us respecting the life, the death, the doctrines, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ, there is the very same reason for admitting the genuineness of this prophecy.

Hence, and for ever, from my heart,
I bid my unbelief depart;
And to those hands my soul resign,
Which bear credentials so divine.