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THE BOOK OF MALACHI.

INTRODUCTION.

§ I. SUBJECT OF THE BOOK.

THE reformation effected by Nehemiah in the earlier part of his administration had been maintained by his own personal influence and political authority; and when the strong hand of the governor was for a time removed, old abuses revived, and even some new laxities and transgressions were added. In the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes (B.C. 433-2) Nehemiah had been recalled to Babylon or Susa, either because his furlough had expired, or because he had to make further arrangements for the prolongation of his command, or simply, as was the Persian custom, to give an account of his actions, which had been unfavourably represented at court. On his return at the end of two or three years (Neh. xiii. 6), he found great cause for sorrow and anxiety. Advantage of his absence had been taken by the latitudinarian party in the commonwealth to return to those evil practices and that open disregard of the Law which he had so severely reprobated twelve years before. Ezra was probably dead, as no further mention is made of him after Nehemiah's second return from the Persian court; and, losing the support of this wise and single-hearted scribe, Nehemiah would have had to stem the torrent of laxity and profaneness alone, had not God raised up the Prophet Malachi at this crisis. As Haggai and Zechariah had animated the spirits and rebuked the faint-heartedness of the earlier pilgrims, so now Malachi comes forward to assist Nehemiah in this new reformation by boldly and unflinchingly reproofing the delinquencies of priest and people, and announcing the great day of judgment. A prophet was indeed needed at this moment. The spirit of Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, which in after-years worked such ineradicable mischief, had already begun to exhibit its evil propensities. On the one hand, the perfunctory, outward observance of ritual acts with no inward repentance or devotion, was considered to be all that religion could claim, all that was needed for acceptance; on the other, a widespread scepticism

was sapping all morality, and teaching men to live impiously and selfishly. The promises set forth by the earlier prophets had, as they reflected, not been fulfilled; they were still in a depressed and humble position; and, contrasting their present state with the splendid prospect spread before them in the restored theocracy, they murmured against God, and questioned his providence and his power. They were impatient for some display of his judgment on the Gentiles, and, not seeing this, they presumed to doubt the righteousness of his rule and ordering. In their impatience they forgot that it was their own negligence, infidelity, and manifold transgressions that withheld God's blessings from them. They might also have observed that the brilliant future predicted was not promised as immediately to succeed the return from captivity; on the contrary, many intimations were given that a long interval lay between the prophecy and its complete fulfilment. Against this evil spirit of unbelief Malachi had to contend; and how vigorously he performed his part, a review of his book will clearly show.

The book is divided into four chapters in the Authorized Version, the Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Arabic Versions; the Hebrew combines our third and fourth chapters into one. But neither arrangement exactly suits the distribution of the subject-matter, which is usually (after Ewald) divided into three parts, consisting respectively of ch. i. 2—ii. 9; ch. ii. 10—16; and ch. ii. 17 to the end. Though thus artificially distributed, the prophecy is one whole, and forms one continuous address, combined, it may be, from many utterances.

The prophet begins by showing Jehovah's love for Israel, and proving it by recalling to memory the differing destinies of Jacob and Esau, how that the descendants of the latter had suffered ruin and desolation, while the Israelites had experienced favour and protection in the past, and should be still more blessed in the future (ch. i. 1—5). Yet they had not responded to his love; yea, the very priests had been foremost in offending him, by polluting his altar and offering unworthy sacrifices; these offerings God wholly rejects, demanding such pure offering as that which shall be presented in the time of Messiah. But the priests have performed their office in a mercenary and perfunctory spirit, and have learned to despise the worship of God; therefore, unless they repent, they shall be punished with curse and rejection; and then, to demonstrate how far they have erred from the right path, the prophet sketches the portrait of the true priest, such as God would have him to be (ch. i. 6—ii. 9). The second part reproves the heathen marriages of priests and people. In defiance of the Law, and regardless that they were thus profaning the covenant, they had repudiated their own legitimate wives in order that they might marry the daughters of the idolatrous heathen. The Hebrew wives had wept and laid their cause before the Lord, and he hears them, and will vindicate his own institution (ch. ii. 10—16). The third part introduces God as the God of judgment. The people had thought to go on their way unpunished;

but the Judge shall come at a time when they look not for him, and shall punish evil-doers, executing swift judgment upon those who violate their duty to God and their neighbour, and separating from them the righteous, that the land may be purified and refined. Did the people complain that God was tardy in executing his promises? Let them see the cause in their own transgressions, their many rebellions against his authority, their neglect of tithes and offerings. If they did their duty, he would reward them with fertility and abundance. They had dared to say that it was a vain thing to serve God; they had confounded good and evil; but the Lord cared for the pious, and would bring them to glory, while he condemned the wicked as stubble to the fire. Therefore let all men observe the Law of Moses, and let them look for the coming of the great day of judgment, and the gracious appearance of the Lord's messenger Elijah the prophet (ch. ii. 17; iv. 6).

The distinctive character of the Messianic prophecies in this book consists in the announcement of the second Elijah, who should precede the advent of the Messenger of Jehovah, the Messiah himself, and in the statement of the universal and everlasting nature of Christ's sacrificial offering and mediatorial office. Combined with these two declarations is the account of the effects dependent on the advent of Messiah. That appearance shall be a day of fire, consuming the evil, purging away the dross, and making men fit to offer acceptable sacrifice; it will be also a day of light, bringing health and joy to those who fear God.

§ II. AUTHOR AND DATE.

The name *Malachi* is found nowhere else in Scripture. The LXX., in the title, calls him *Μαλαχίας*. It is probably contracted from *Malachijah*, and means, "Messenger of Jehovah." Such abbreviations are not uncommon. Thus we find *Abi* for Abijah (2 Kings xviii. 2; 2 Chron. xxix. 1); *Phalti* for Phaltiel (1 Sam. xxv. 44; 2 Sam. iii. 15). So probably *Zabdi* is the same as Zabdiel, *Uri* as Urijah. Absolutely nothing is known of his history; and as the Septuagint (ch. i. 1) reads, instead of "by the hand of Malachi," ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ, "by the hand of his messenger," many have doubted whether the name is that of a person or of an office, an appellation given to an ideal messenger of God. Origen held that the book was written by an angel; others have argued that Malachi was a pseudonym for Ezra, who was the real author of the work, though one would have thought that the style and diction of the two writers were sufficiently distinct to obviate any such supposition, and it is hardly possible that the authorship of so distinguished a man should have been forgotten when the canon was arranged. Besides, to all the prophetic books the writer's own name is prefixed. The use of a pseudonym or a symbolical name is unknown; and the authenticity of the contents of the prophecy is always testified by the naming of the author

as one known to his contemporaries and approved by God. Malachi, therefore, is certainly a real person; and though there is no description of him in his book, neither his parentage nor his birthplace being mentioned, yet the same omission occurs in the case of Obadiah and Habakkuk, of whose personality no doubt has ever arisen. That the histories of Ezra and Nehemiah contain no notice of him or his prophetic work is easily accounted for by the fact that he exercised his ministry on or just before Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, of which we have only the barest and most summary account (Neh. xiii. 7—31). From his trenchant references to the priesthood it is conjectured that he was a member of that body; but there is nothing further to support the notion. The absence of all authentic information concerning Malachi has been supplied by tradition. The Talmud states that he was a member of the great synagogue, as Haggai and Zechariah had been; and Pseudo-Dorotheus and Pseudo-Epiphanius assert that he was born in Sopha, or Supha, in the tribe of Zebulun, and died there while still young. No particulars of his life have been handed down even in mythical narrative.

The general period of Malachi's appearance as a prophet is easily determined; but the definition of the exact date has some difficulties. It is plain, from the contents of the prophecy, that it was delivered when the Captivity was well-nigh forgotten, and after the temple was rebuilt and its worship had been for some time duly established; it is also evident that, as the prophet complains of the inferior offerings brought by the people, the time of the royal grant made to Ezra (Ezra vii. 20—26) had expired, and the necessary sacrifices were supplied by the inhabitants themselves. This was done without dispute or apparent reluctance in the earlier part of Nehemiah's administration, according to the engagement introduced by him (Neh. x. 32, etc.). No mention of any infringement of the resolution then passed is made in the Book of Ezra; so it seems most probable that the abuses named crept in after Ezra's death, and during the time when Nehemiah was absent at the court of Persia (Neh. xiii. 6), which may have been an interval of two or three years. That Malachi prophesied during this interregnum, or at any rate at a period when Nehemiah was not acting as governor, has been deduced from the expression in ch. i. 8, where, rebuking the people for daring to sacrifice imperfect animals, he says, "Offer it now to thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" Nehemiah, it is contended, prided himself on never having taken anything, even his dues as viceroy, from the people; therefore the governor here mentioned must be some other person. But this is by no means a necessary conclusion. The self-denying practice referred to belongs to the early years of his administration, and may not apply to his later governorship. Further, the refusal to be burdensome to his countrymen did not extend to the non-acceptance of presents, without which no Oriental would come for a formal interview with a superior; and the prophet might well ask whether they would dare

to make such offerings to a governor, without any special reference to a particular personage. But although we cannot build any theory of date on this expression of the prophet, there is other internal evidence which is more determinate. The great point is that the abuses rebuked by him are just those against which Nehemiah had to contend. Both of them denounce the corruption of the priests in marrying alien wives (comp. ch. ii. 11 with Neh. xiii. 23); the withholding of the appointed tithes from the Levites (ch. iii. 8 and Neh. xiii. 10); the neglect of and dishonour done to the temple, and its services (ch. i. 12, 13 and Neh. xiii. 4, 5, 11); the repudiation of legitimate wives (ch. ii. 15, 16 and Neh. xiii. 23, 27, whence it may be easily concluded that these foreign marriages were accompanied with divorce and cruelty). It is true that Malachi does not expressly name the desecration of the sabbath, against which Nehemiah made such strict regulations (Neh. xiii. 15—22), but he denounces the infringement of the Law in the offering of blemished victims, and we cannot doubt that this was only one instance of the same spirit which led to the breaking of the sabbath. Thus it seems that the prophet and the civil ruler are contending against the same evils, and endeavouring in their different vocations to draw the people to amendment.

From the above considerations we may conclude that Malachi exercised his ministry during the time of Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, B.C. 430—420.

Thus Malachi is the last of the prophets, the author of the final book of the Hebrew canon, and named by Jewish authorities "the seal and end of the prophets." He exercised his ministry a hundred years later than Haggai and Zechariah. We may here note that the twelve minor prophets cover a period of four centuries—a space, as Farrar remarks, nearly equal to that from Chaucer to Wordsworth.

§ III. GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE WORK.

Some critics have characterized Malachi's style as "pedantic, forced, and barren;" but we cannot assent to their somewhat inconsiderate verdict. In contrast with some other prophetic works, Malachi's writings may be considered to be prosaic, and to hold an inferior position, but they have an excellency and originality of their own which acquit them of all such charges as those above. The great peculiarity of the style consists in the use made of interrogation and reply. A dialogue is introduced between God and the people or priests; the questions of objectors or complainants are stated, amplified, and finally answered with withering scorn by the mouth of the prophet. Thus he is rather a reasoner than a poet; he exhibits the calmness of the practised orator rather than the fire and energy of earlier seers. But there are tokens that he is still influenced by the ancient prophets, and with all his methodical and artificial forms he models himself upon his predecessors. Simple, smooth, concise, his

diction is easy to understand; if he does not rise to the grandeur and power of other prophets, he is always polished and elegant, and at times even remarkably eloquent. The sketch of the character of the ideal priest (ch. ii. 5—7) is a passage of eminent beauty; and there are a few other places of equal excellence.

§ IV. LITERATURE.

Among the most useful commentaries on Malachi may be cited those of Chyrtæus (Rostock, 1568); Kimchi and Jarchi, 'Commentarii,' Interprete S. M. De Muis (Paris, 1618); Stock (London, 1641); Sclater (London, 1650); Pocock, 'Works,' vol. i.; Venema (Leov., 1759); Bahrdt (Leipzig, 1768); Fischer, with notes on the Septuagint Version (Leipzig, 1779); Packard, 'Book of Malachi expounded' (Edinburgh); Reinke, 'Der Prophet Malachi' (Giessen, 1852, 1856); Koehler (Erlangen, 1865); Dr. Samuel Cox, in vol. iii. of 'The Bible Educator.'

§ V. ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK IN SECTIONS.

The book is most conveniently divided into three parts.

Part I. (Ch. i.—ii. 9.) Reproof of the priests for neglect of Divine service.

§ 1. (Ch. i. 1.) Heading and author.

§ 2. (Ch. i. 2—5.) The prophet declares God's special love for Israel.

§ 3. (Ch. i. 6—14.) Israel had shown no gratitude, and the priests had been the chief offenders by offering defective sacrifices and profaning the temple-worship.

§ 4. (Ch. ii. 1—4.) The priests are threatened with punishment.

§ 5. (Ch. ii. 5—9.) In contrast with these, the character of the true priest is sketched.

Part II. (Ch. ii. 10—16.) Condemnation of priests and people for alien marriages and for divorces.

Part III. (Ch. ii. 17—iv. 6.) The day of the Lord.

§ 1. (Ch. ii. 17—iii. 6.) The faithless people doubted God's providence, but the prophet announces the coming of the Lord to judgment, preceded by his messenger. He shall refine his people and exterminate sinners.

§ 2. (Ch. iii. 7—12.) God is faithful to his promises, but the people have been shamefully negligent in the matter of tithes and offerings; let them amend their practice, and they shall be blessed.

§ 3. (Ch. iii. 13—18.) The impious murmuring of the people is contrasted with the conduct of those who fear God, and the reward of the pious is set forth.

§ 4. (Ch. iv. 1—3.) The final separation of the evil and the good at the day of judgment.

§ 5. (Ch. iv. 4—6.) Concluding admonition to remember the Law, lest they should be liable to the curse, to avert which the Lord would send Elijah to promote a change of heart in the nation before his coming.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—ch. ii. 9.—Part I. REPROOF OF THE PRIESTS FOR NEGLECT OF DIVINE SERVICE.

Ver. 1.—§ 1. *Heading and author.* The burden (Zech. ix. 1; xii. 1; see note on Nah. i. 1). The word of the Lord is heavy and full of threats, but, as St. Jerome notes, it is also consolatory, because it is not "against" but to Israel. By this name the whole covenanted nation is designated, here, perhaps, with some idea of reminding the people of Jacob's faith and patience, and stimulating them to imitate their great ancestor. By *Malachi*; literally, *by the hand of Malachi* (comp. Jer. xxxvii. 2). That *Malachi* is the proper name of the prophet, and not a mere official designation, see the proof in the Introduction, § II. The LXX. renders, *ἐν χειρὶ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ*, "by the hand of his angel," or "messenger," and some curious theories have been founded on this translation; e.g. that an angel was the real author of the book, or came and explained it to the people. A similar legend once obtained concerning Haggai, called "The Lord's Messenger" (Hag. i. 13). At the end of the verse the LXX. adds, "fix it in your hearts," which Jerome supposes to have been imported hither from Hag. ii. 15.

Vers. 2—5.—§ 2. *The prophet declares God's special love for Israel.*

Ver. 2.—*I have loved you.* The prophet, desiring to bring home to the people their ingratitude, lays down his thesis; then, in his characteristic manner, repeats the objection of the sceptics in an interrogatory form, and refutes it by plain argument. God had shown his love for Israel by electing them to be his people, and by his treatment of them during the whole course

of their history. *Wherein hast thou loved us?* This was the inward feeling of the people at this time. They doubted God's love and faithfulness. Events had not turned out as they expected. They had, indeed, returned from captivity, and the temple was rebuilt; but none of the splendid things announced by the prophets had come to pass. They were not great and victorious; Messiah had not appeared. Therefore they repined and murmured; they were ungrateful for past favours, and questioned God's power and providence. Was not Esau Jacob's brother? God refutes their unjust charge by referring them to a palpable fact, viz. the different fate of the descendants of the twin-brothers, Esau and Jacob. How miserable the destiny of the Edomites! how comparatively fortunate the condition of the Israelites! Yet I loved Jacob.

Ver. 3.—*And I hated Esau.* St. Paul quotes these words (Rom. ix. 13) in order to illustrate his position, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Even before his birth Jacob was the chosen one, and Esau, the elder, was to serve the younger. This mystery of Divine election has seemed to some to be stated so harshly that they have thought that the words of the text need to be softened, or to be modified by their explanation. Thus they give the glosses, "I have preferred Jacob to Esau;" "I have loved Esau less than Jacob;" or they have limited the terms "love" and "hatred" to the bestowing or withholding of temporal blessings; or they have affirmed that Esau was hated because God foresaw his unworthiness, and Jacob was beloved owing to his foreseen piety and faithfulness. The whole question is discussed by Augustine, 'De Div. Quest. ad Simplic.', i. 18 (xi. 433). He ends by saying, "Deus odit impietatem: in aliis etiam punit

per damnationem, in aliis admit per justificationem." But Malachi is not speaking of the predestination of the one brother and the reprobation of the other; he is contrasting the histories of the two peoples represented by them; as Jerome puts it, "In Jacob vos dilexi, in Esau Idumæos odio habui." Both nations sinned; both are punished; but Israel by God's free mercy was forgiven and restored, while Edom was left in the misery which it had brought upon itself by its own iniquity. This is proved God's love for the Israelites (Knabenbauer). That it is of the two nations that the prophet speaks, rather than of the two brothers, is seen by what follows. Laid his mountains . . . waste. While the Israelites were repeopleing and cultivating their land, and their cities were rising from their ruins, and the temple and the capital were rebuilt, Edom, which had suffered at the hand of the same enemies, had never recovered from the blow, and still lay a scene of desolation and ruin. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar attacked and conquered Edom some few years after he had taken Jerusalem. This event happened during one of his expeditions against Egypt, one of which took place in the thirty-seventh year of his reign, as we learn from a record lately deciphered (see 'Transact. of Soc. of Bibl. Archaeology,' vii. 210, etc.). (For Edom and its history, see the Introduction to Obadiah.) **Dragons; rather, jackals** (Micah i. 8); Septuagint, *ἐν δόματι ἐρήμου*, "for habitations of the desert;" Vulgate, *dracones deserti*, whence the Authorized Version.

Ver. 4.—Whereas; rather, if, or although; Vulgate, *quod si*. If Edom were to attempt to repair its desolation, the Lord would not permit it—a striking contrast to the national restoration of Israel. **We are impoverished;** or, as the Revised Version, *we are beaten*; Septuagint, *ἡ Ἰδουμαία κατέστραπται*, "Idumea has been overthrown;" Vulgate, *destructi sumus*. **The desolate places;** Vulgate, *quæ destructa sunt*, places once inhabited and now deserted. Compare the boast of the Ephraimites (Isa. ix. 9, 10). **I will throw down.** Edom never recovered its power; it became the prey of the Persians, the Nabatheans, the Jews under the Maccabees, the Macedonians, the Romans; and finally the Mohammedan conquest effected its utter ruin. **They (men) shall call them, The border of wickedness.** Edom shall be called, "The territory of iniquity," its miserable condition attesting the wickedness of the inhabitants thus punished by Divine justice. **Hath indignation;** Septuagint, *παρετίκται*, "hath been set in battle array;" St. Jerome, "My anger is proved by their enduring desolation; and in contrast to the evils experienced by your

brother, ye shall experience the goodness of God towards you."

Ver. 5.—**Your eyes shall see.** Jacob is addressed. When you see these proofs of God's love for you, you shall leave off murmuring and be ready to praise God for his goodness and power. **The Lord will be magnified;** better, *the Lord is great*; Septuagint, *Ἐμεγαλυνῶν Κύριος*, "The Lord was magnified." God makes his greatness known. **From (over) the border of Israel.** This means either beyond the limits of Israel, i.e. in all the world, or upon Israel, i.e. by the protection which he vouchsafes to Israel.

Vers. 6-14.—§ 3. *Israel had shown no gratitude for all these proofs of God's love, and the very priests had been the chief offenders by offering defective sacrifices, and profaning the temple-worship.*

Ver. 6.—**A son honoureth his father.** The prophet commences with a general principle which every one allows, and argues from that what was the attitude which they ought to assume towards God. **A father.** God was the Father of Israel, by creation, election, preservation, watchful guardianship (see Exod. iv. 22; Deut. xxxii. 6; Isa. lxiii. 16; lxiv. 8, etc.). **My fear.** The fear, respect, reverence, due to me. **O priests.** He addresses his reproof to the priests, as the representatives of the people, and bound to lead them to obedience and holiness, and to be a pattern to the flock. **Wherein have we despised thy Name?** The priests have grown so callous, and have so obscured true religion by Pharisaical externalism, that they profess to be utterly unconscious how they have shown contempt of God. **The Name of God** is God himself and all that has to do with him.

Ver. 7.—**Ye offer polluted bread (food) upon mine altar.** The prophet answers the priests simply by detailing some of their practices. The "bread" (*lechem*) is not the shewbread, which was not offered on the altar, but the flesh of the offered victims (see Lev. iii. 11, 16; xxi. 6; xxii. 25). This was "polluted" in that it was not offered in due accordance with the ceremonial Law, as is further explained in the next verse. **Wherein have we polluted thee?** They did not acknowledge the truth that (as St. Jerome says) "when the sacraments are violated, he himself, whose sacraments they are, is violated" (comp. Ezek. xiii. 19; xx. 9; xxxix. 7). **The table of the Lord is contemptible.** This was the thought of their heart, if they did not give open expression to it in words. The "table of the Lord" (ver. 12) is the altar, on which were laid the sacrifices,

regarded as the food of God, and to be eaten by the fire (Ezek. xli. 22; xlii. 16). They showed that they despised the altar by fancying that anything was good enough for offering thereon, as the next verse explains.

Ver. 8.—If ye offer the blind. The Law ordered that the victims should be perfect and without blemish (see Lev. xxii. 19—25). Is it not evil? It is more forcible to read this without the interrogation, "It is no evil!" and to regard it as the priests' thought or word, here introduced by the prophet in bitter irony. Their conscience had grown so dull, and they had become so familiarized with constant dereliction of duty, that they saw no wrong in these violations of the Law, and never recalled the people to their duty in these matters. Offer it now unto thy governor. The word for "governor" is *pechah*, as in Hag. i. 1 (where see note). It denotes a ruler set over a province by a Persian king. As Nehemiah had refused to be burdensome to the people (Neh. v. 14—18), it is thought that Malachi must have written this when some other person was acting as governor. But Nehemiah's generosity was exhibited in his earlier administration, and he may have thought it right to take the dues under a more prosperous state of affairs. The prophet may be putting the case generally—Would you dare offer such things to your governor? At any rate, the question is not about provisions and dues supplied to the governor and liable to be exacted by him in his official capacity, but about voluntary offerings and presents, without which no inferior would presume to appear before his prince (see Introduction, § II.). To offer to such a one what was mean and defective would be nothing less than an insult; and yet they thought this was good enough for God. Accept thy person. Regard thee with favour (Gen. xix. 21; Job xiii. 10; xlii. 8).

Ver. 9.—Beseech God; literally, *the face of God*. This is not a serious call to repentance, but an ironical appeal. Come now and ask the favour of God with your polluted sacrifices; intercede, as is your duty, for the people; will he accept you? will he be gracious to the people for your sakes? This hath been by your means. These words form a parenthesis, implying that it was from the priests that the evil custom of offering blemished animals proceeded, and they were answerable for the consequences; that their intercessions were vain was the result of their transgressions in these matters. Others interpret, "The thing depends on you," i.e. whether God shows favour or not. Will he regard your persons? Will he show favour to any one because ye intercede for him? So it might

be translated, *Will he accept any because of you?*

Ver. 10.—The prophet continues his severe reprobation of the priests. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught, etc.? Thus rendered, the passage rebukes the mercenary spirit of the priests, who would not even shut the temple door nor kindle the altar fire unless they were paid for it; or else it means that, though all the officers of the temple were remunerated for their most trivial services, yet they were remiss in attending to their duties, and neglected the law of sacrifices. The Latin Version omits the negative in the last clause, *Quis est in vobis qui claudat ostia, et incendat altare meum gratuito?* The LXX., with some little variation in the reading, renders, *Διδότι καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν συγκατέβησονται θύραι, καὶ οὐκ ἀνέψεται τὸ θυσιαστήριον μου δωρεάν*, "Wherefore also among you the doors shall be shut, and my altar shall not be kindled for nothing," i.e. God threatens that the temple services shall wholly cease. But it is best to consider the passage as continuing the sarcastic strain of the preceding verse, and saying in effect that it would be better to have no pretence of worship at all than to have it thus profaned. Translate as in the Revised Version, *Oh that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain!* The doors are those of the inner court of the temple, where the great altar stood; and the polluted sacrifice is offered "in vain," because it offends God rather than propitiates him. An offering (*minchah*). Here not sacrifice in general, as many commentators suppose, because it would be unnatural to take the word in one sense in this verse, and in a different sense in the following, where it is confessedly used in its restricted signification. The term is applied technically to the offering of fine flour combined with oil and frankincense, burnt on the altar (Lev. ii. 1, etc.); though it is also occasionally used even of bloody sacrifices; e.g. of Abel's (Gen. iv. 4; comp. 1 Sam. ii. 17). As liturgically employed, it denotes the unbloody offering. So in this verse we may note a kind of climax. God would not accept the victims sacrificed, no, nor even the meat offerings, which was naturally pure and unpolluted.

Ver. 11.—My Name shall be great. The course of thought is this: God does not need the worship of the Jews and their impious priests; he needs not their maimed sacrifices; his majesty shall be recognized throughout the wide world, and pure worship shall be offered to him from every nation under heaven. How, then, shall he not punish those who, being his elect, ought to have been an example of holiness, and

prepared the way for his universal reception? The LXX. treats this circumstance as already occurring at this time, *Tò θνoud μὸν δεδῶσται*, "My Name hath been and is glorified." This could only be said if it was allowed that the heathen in some sense, however blindly and imperfectly, did worship the true God. But the notion cannot be upheld for a moment; and there is a general consensus of commentators in referring the time to the Messianic future, when God's power is acknowledged and worship offered to him, not in Jerusalem alone, but in every place. The participles in this verse may be rendered by presents or futures, but there can be little doubt that a prophecy is intended, and not a statement of a fact—which, indeed, could not be truthfully maintained. When such a future is in store, is this a time for Jewish priests to dishonour Jehovah? Incense shall be offered unto my Name, and a pure offering (*minchah*). The universal worship is expressed in the terms of the Jewish ritual (see note on Zeph. iii. 10). The Hebrew is more forcibly rendered, *In every place incense is burned, oblation made unto my Name, and indeed a pure oblation*. Incense is to our minds a type of prayer (Rev. v. 8; viii. 3, etc.); the pure oblation is the symbol of the Christian sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; and the prophet, rising superior to Jewish prejudices, announces that this prayer and sacrifice shall no longer be confined to one place or one specially favoured country, but be universal, world-wide. The Fathers and mediæval writers, and many modern commentators, see in this verse a prophecy of the Holy Eucharist, the "pure offering" commemorative of Christ's sacrifice, which is found in every nation under heaven where the Name of Christ is adored.

Ver. 12.—*But ye have profaned it; ye profane God's Name.* The prophet contrasts the negligence and profanity of the priests with the piety of the Gentile nations, which he foresees. *The table of the Lord* (see note on ver. 7). *The fruit thereof, even his meat.* The food and meat of the altar are the victims offered thereon. By their conduct the priests made both altar and offerings contemptible. Septuagint, *Τὰ ἐπιτίθεμενα ἐξουδένωται βρώματα αὐτοῦ*, "Its meats that are laid thereon are set at naught;" Vulgate, *Quod superponitur contemptibile est, cum igne qui illud devorat*. This is either a free paraphrase, or for "meat" Jerome must have read a participle, "eating," and taken "that

which eats" the offering to be the fire which consumes it, as "lick up" (1 Kings xviii. 38). Others explain the Vulgate to mean that the priests complain of the scantiness and inferiority of the victims, the flesh of which formed their support. But as this was owing to their own neglect, they were not likely to make it a subject of complaint.

Ver. 13.—*What a weariness is it!* The reference is to the table of the Lord. Despising the altar, and performing their duties without heart or faith, the priests found the services an intolerable burden. Vulgate, *ecce de labore*, which seems to be an excuse of the people, urging that they offer such things as their toil and poverty allow. Septuagint, *ταῦτα ἐκ κακοπαθείας ἐστὶ*, which has much the same meaning. The present Hebrew text is represented by the Authorized Version. *Ye have snuffed at it; i.e. at the altar.* The phrase expresses contempt. "It" has been supposed to be a "scribes' correction" for "me." The Septuagint and Syriac give, "I snorted at them." That which was torn; rather, *that which was taken by violence*—that which was stolen or unjustly taken. Septuagint, *ἀπράγματα*: Ecclus. xxxiv. 18 (xxxi. 21), "He that sacrificeth of a thing wrongfully gotten, his offering is ridiculous (*μεμωκμήν*)."*Lame . . . sick* (see Lev. xiii. 19—25). *Thus ye brought an (bring the) offering (minchah).* Subject to analogous defects is even your meat offering, the accessory to other sacrifices, and therefore it is unacceptable.

Ver. 14.—*But (and) cursed be the deceiver.* The curse is fulminated against all who are guilty of these violations of the Law. The prophet mentions two instances out of many. The first is of one who offers a female victim, on pretence that he has no male in his flock. This will be clearer if we translate, with Keil, "And cursed is he who deceives, whereas there is in his flock a male animal." Septuagint, "Cursed is he who was able and had in his flock a male." And voweth . . . a corrupt (*blemished*) thing. The second case is of one who in some emergency vows an offering, and then pays it by presenting a blemished animal (Lev. iii. 1, 6). With a slightly altered punctuation, some editors give, "a faulty female." For I am a great King. This is the reason that they are cursed who dishonour him. Dreadful. Held in awe and reverence. Septuagint, *ἐμφανές*, "notable." He whom the Gentiles honour will not permit his own people to profane his Name.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Malachi and his burden.* I. MALACHI, THE LAST OF THE PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. He may be compared to: 1. A late evening closing a long day of light and blessing, and which is itself: 2. A midsummer twilight in some northern latitude, bearing on its bosom the new and still brighter day of the gospel. 3. A finger-post pointing across an untrodden waste of time in the direction in which the ages should move onwards towards the advent of their expected King. 4. A faithful minister, the last of a noble succession, resigning his trust (the prophetic gift), but bidding his flock expect to “see greater things than these,” and expiring with the gospel on his lips (ch. iv. 2—6).

II. THE PROPHET'S BURDEN. Any word of the Lord is: 1. A burden of responsibility to the bearer (1 Cor. ix. 16, 17). Especially so are messages of judgment with which Malachi was charged. So Jeremiah felt (Jer. xv. 10—21; xx. 8—10), and Paul (Phil. iii. 18), and our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke xix. 41—44). It is thus a test of fidelity (Prov. xxx. 6; Ezek. iii. 17—21) and of courage (Micah iii. 8). 2. Messages of judgment should be felt to be burdens by the sinner because they proceed from a God to whom judgment is “a strange work,” yet who hates sin more than suffering, and whose holiness is seconded by his omnipotence. Only by repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ can the burden be changed into a beatitude, the curse into a blessing.

Vers. 2—5.—*The sovereign love of God.* Remembering that the scriptural sense of “hate” in this and corresponding passages is to love less in comparison, or to reject when there is a competition of claims, we nevertheless learn from this passage—

I. THAT GOD'S LOVE TO INDIVIDUALS AND TO NATIONS IS A SOVEREIGN LOVE. By this we mean that it is a love which bestows special favours, for reasons which cannot be discovered in those that enjoy them, but in the gracious purpose of God. 1. In the case of the two brothers personally we note the following facts: Esau was the elder, yet not the heir of the promise. He suffered at the hands of a brother in some respects less noble than himself. He thus lost his father's chief blessing and had to take the remnants, and to be satisfied with a poorer inheritance, while Jacob received “the glory of all lands.” 2. The two nations, Israel and Edom, were separated like two rivers issuing from the same fountain, the one destined to be a highway of commerce and a source of fertility, the other to be lost in the sands of the desert. Israel, blessed with a priesthood, a succession of prophets, and a covenant “ordered in all things and sure,” in spite of many apostasies; Edom, allowed to drift into idolatry and crime till it became known as “the border of wickedness,” etc. (ver. 4). Such gifts and calling of God cannot be annulled any more than his sentences of judgment can be reversed (ver. 4). In those judgments and in those mercies men shall see the finger of God, and shall stand in awe of the glory of God (ver. 5). These truths applicable to God's dealings with nations now. 3. The salvation of individuals is no less the result of sovereign love, inasmuch as the very beginnings of spiritual life are of God, and are “according to his own purpose and grace,” etc. (2 Tim. i. 9). Election is not “an order of merit,” but a cord of love. The experience of all Christians confirms the doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation, though it cannot answer the many questions suggested by God's varied dealings with individuals, or explain the reasons of his eternal purposes. Note St. Paul's “conclusion of the matter” (Rom. xi. 33—36).

II. THAT THIS UNMERITED LOVE OF GOD MAY BE IGNORED BY THE RECEIVERS. “Wherein hast thou loved us?” This may arise from: 1. Forgetting past mercies under the presence of present trials, like Israel (Ps. cvi. 12—14). 2. Forgetting our present blessings as contrasted with the lot of others. 3. Having an imperfect sense of our absolute dependence on the unmerited mercy of God (Deut. vii. 7, 8). 4. And therefore taking even our spiritual blessings very much as a matter of course, and indulging in self-complacency rather than cultivating grateful humility in view of “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (cf. 1 Cor. iv. 7, 8).

Ver. 6.—*The reverence due to God.* Earthly analogies to Divine relationships are

instructive though imperfect. Neither the most absolute master nor the most affectionate father can adequately represent God. Yet God reminds us of the reverence due to himself from the fear and honour expected by them. The appeal should be most powerful to those who, like the priests here appealed to, are in any positions of authority. It should be a most tender plea to all parents. It falls in tones of deepest pathos on those who have received the adoption and the spirit of sons through Jesus Christ. But the appeal binds all to whom in any sense God stands in the sacred relations of "the Father of spirits" (Exod. iv. 22; Deut. xxxii. 6; Isa. lxviii. 16; lxiv. 8). We assume the case of a father who combines that wise authority and tender love which makes him a type of the heavenly Father. A son honoureth such a father—

I. BY OBEDIENCE. This is the first lesson a child must learn. After the early conflicts with self-will, it becomes part of the child-nature. It may rise to self-denial or even heroic self-sacrifice. Illust.: Henry Havelock, as a boy, waiting for hours in a crowded street of London, in obedience to his father, who had forgotten him; or Casa Bianca's son blown up in the French flag-ship at the Battle of the Nile. God is greatly honoured when our obedience is habitual and cheerful, when we "worship" the "sweet will of God," and can say, "I delight," etc. (Ps. xl. 8; cxix. 128).

II. BY LOVE. The instinctive love of an infant makes way for the intelligent affection, founded on esteem, which the youth feels towards a father who has trained him in habits of obedience. Disobedience begets dislike; submission strengthens love. The pruning and training of wise discipline is rewarded by the copious fruits of love. We most honour God when our love is not merely the love of gratitude even for redemption, but of complacent delight in the character of our Father. In that character there are no flaws such as a partial son may nevertheless see in his earthly father (Jas. i. 17). Let him not have to say John v. 42.

III. BY REGARD TO HIS REPUTATION. A boy's eye flashes with indignation if a stranger assails his father's reputation. How do we regard the dishonour done to God by profanity, by reckless criticisms on his character and government, and on the work of Christ ("The Father wounded through the Son")? Can we say, with Christ, "The reproaches," etc. (Ps. lxix. 9)? Let us beware, however, of the zeal of a Jehu (2 Kings x. 16—31) or of the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii. 15). Let our lives be answers to our prayers, "Hallowed be thy Name."

IV. BY UPHOLDING HIS AUTHORITY. 1. When it has to be exercised in discipline on ourselves (Heb. xii. 5—11). 2. When it is resisted by others. There is a rebellion in the great family of God which requires every true child to take an active part on the side of God. While grieved (Ps. cxix. 158) and indignant (Ps. cxxxix. 21), we shall yet be labourers together with God, that in the spirit of the sinless Son we may seek by all means to save some (1 Pet. iv. 10, 11).

Vers. 7, 8.—*Irreverence—its causes and signs.* Notice how in many places Malachi puts the thoughts of sinners into bold and bald words. He interprets their conduct in speech, that they may see the offensiveness of their thoughts and acts. Sins of the heart may sometimes be best exposed by translating them into unsubmissive or even impious prayers. They cannot endure the light when they are paraded in speech under the scrutiny of our fellow-men. Still less can they tolerate the brightness that proceeds from the throne of grace, where God seeth in secret, that he may answer him "that setteth up his idols in his heart" "according to the multitude of his idols" (Ezek. xiv. 3, 4). In this section the irreverence of the priests and people is exposed by the prophet calling things by their right names. Note—

I. SOME OF THE CAUSES OF IRREVERENCE. 1. Inadequate views of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men. We forget the names and titles of the God with whom we have to do—"Jehovah," "Lord of hosts," "Master," "Father," "a great King," "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," etc. We forget our own utter sinfulness and unworthiness as "dust and ashes," "the imagination of whose heart is evil from our youth," to have any intercourse with the Thrice-holy One (cf. Job xl. 3—5). If it is hard to appreciate this, we may be helped by the contrast between what we see in the characters of Christ and of ourselves. Illust.: Peter (Luke v. 8). 2. Familiarity with sacred things. It may "breed contempt." The altar and its offerings were regarded as commonplace or even despicable objects. The

worship of God, the table of the Lord, the most sacred acts and objects may be observed and resorted to without the slightest expectation of gaining good. They might be means of grace, but familiarity makes them contemptible. 3. The indolence which shrinks from the effort needed to stir up ourselves to take hold of God (Isa. lxiv. 7). Worship must be a spiritual service; it may be a "conflict" an *ἀγών* (Col. ii. 1). Indolence may beget irreverence, and will, in its turn, be a sign of it.

II. SOME OF THE SIGNS OF IRREVERENCE. We may copy the evil example of the Jews in bringing blind, lame, sick, or polluted offerings. 1. Formal and half-hearted services. "Blind is the sacrifice of the soul which is not illumined by the light of Christ. Lame is his sacrifice of prayer who comes with a double mind to entreat the Lord" (Jerome; Matt. xv. 8). 2. Superstitious services; e.g. blind obedience to a man claiming to be a priest, which may save the trouble of searching for God with all the heart. Unintelligent worship, perhaps in an unknown tongue, as though a lesson learned by rote would suffice for the Divine Teacher. 3. Offering to God what we should not dare to offer to an earthly superior (ver. 8). As though we would say, "God is not very particular." Yet he requires the very best service we can render. Such conduct is virtual dishonesty, for the intention to sacrifice to God at all implies the sacrificing of our best. Illust.: David (2 Sam. xxiv. 24; cf. Matt. xxii. 37). Note how the revelation of God in Christ shows still more impressively his claims on our highest services. "The Lamb that was slain" is worthy to receive *everything* and *the best of everything* we can offer to him (Rev. v. 12). 4. Still grosser forms of irreverence are seen in the Corinthians feasting at the Eucharist, and thus despising the Church of the living God (1 Cor. xi. 22), and making the table of the Lord contemptible; or in men celebrating a sacred rite as a passport to some secular office; or in getting rid of a base coin at a collection, like "the deceiver" in ver. 14.

Learn: 1. The many subtle forms of a deep-seated sin of the heart (Jer. xvii. 9). 2. The need of radical remedies such as Divine power alone can employ (Luke vi. 43—45; Ps. xix. 12—14).

Ver. 11.—*God's honour secured in spite of his people's sins.* The heartlessness and negligence of the priest leads God to say that the fires of the altar might as well be extinguished, and the temple shut up as it had been in the days of Ahaz; for no offerings would any longer be accepted at their hands, and "Ichabod!" "No glory!" was written on the altar. The godly remnant of the Jews naturally begin to say, "What a dishonour that would be to the God of Israel!" and to ask, like Joshua (vii. 9), "What wilt thou do unto thy great Name?" And even the formalists, who had not entirely cast off God, but wished to keep on speaking terms with him, would shrink from such a public slight being offered to the God of their nation. To all such fears God gives an answer in the declaration and prediction of ver. 11, "My Name shall be magnified; my honour shall be secured, in spite of my people's sins:" (1) *among new and more numerous worshippers*; (2) *by purer and more spiritual sacrifices.*

I. AMONG NEW AND MORE NUMEROUS WORSHIPPERS. It was an inveterate superstition of the Jews that the honour of God was in some way bound up with sacred places or persons. He had taught them in the past that his glory was not attached to the ark, as they thought when they took it into battle (1 Sam. iv.), or to one line of priests (1 Sam. ii. 27—36), or to the tabernacle at Shiloh (Ps. lxxviii. 59—64), or to the temple (Jer. vii. 1—16). He now teaches them that his glory is independent both of the revived priesthood, the restored temple, and the nation brought back from captivity. The temple may be again destroyed; the priesthood may be abolished; the people disinherited. God has a larger temple than the sanctuary on Mount Moriah, or even than the land of promise itself. His temple extends "as far as the east is from the west." His worshippers shall be as numerous as the tribes and the tongues of the heathen world; No longer shall it be especially true that "In Judah is God known; his Name is great in Israel;" "For from the rising of the sun," etc. Comparing this prediction of the kingdom of Christ on earth with others, we are reminded of a few truths respecting the way in which God's honour would be secured among the nations of the earth. His judgments would arouse them (Isa. lix. 18, 19). His free love would seek those who knew him not (Isa. lxv. 1). The atoning sacrifice on the cross would attract their sin-burdened consciences (John xii. 32), and the beneficence

of the reign of Christ would allure all classes to accept his dominion (Ps. lxxii. 8—14, especially ver. 12, "For," etc.). Thus the Name of God would be glorified in his Son. Apply this truth: 1. To those who refuse to give to God the glory due unto his Name. So did the Jews in the days of Christ. But God's honour could be secured in other ways (cf. Matt. xxi. 41—43; Luke xix. 37—40). Note in the former and latter parts of Ps. xxii. the contrast between vers. 6—8 and vers. 27—31. "His own received him not," but "the Gentiles glorified the word of the Lord" (Acts xiii. 48; cf. Isa. xlix. 8—9; Matt. viii. 11, 12). 2. To those who are tempted to shrink from honouring God because of the risk to themselves or the sacrifice required at their hands. Illust.: Esth. iv. 10—14. The loss will be only our own (Matt. x. 39). God will find other servants in our place to render the honour he asks at our hands, and to receive that which he bestows in return (1 Sam. ii. 30). 3. To God's faithful servants who are needlessly anxious about his glory in "a day of trouble and of rebuke and of blasphemy;" e.g. Moses (Numb. xiv. 11—21), Joshua (vii. 9). But God is more jealous for his own honour than we can be (Deut. xxxii. 26, 27), and is wiser than we can be in answering the prayer he has taught us, "Hallowed be thy Name."

II. BY PURER AND MORE SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES. 1. By the revelation of God in Christ as "the Saviour of all men," God's Name was truly magnified (Ps. xcvi. and xcviij.). That revelation included a sacrifice, the sacrifice of a sinless soul to suffering in order to do the will of God (Heb. x. 7—10), and thus to offer a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Thus the prayer was answered (John xii. 28) and the prediction fulfilled (Rom. xv. 8, 9). 2. By the spiritual sacrifices the acceptable services, like fragrant incense, presented by Gentile hearts, e.g. the penitence of the woman of Samaria; the pertinacious prayers of the Syro-phœnician; the marvellous faith of the centurion; the alms and prayers of Cornelius; the unrecorded acts of faith and service of unknown worshippers in the heathen world;—these are accepted by God, while the tainted sacrifices of the Jewish priests are refused. This a warning to all formalists. 3. By pure offerings from all hearts that "in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (cf. John iv. 21—24). Our hearts were once impure, but have been cleansed by the blood and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And now we are eager, impatient to express our sense of the greatness and goodness of God by acceptable sacrifices, our "bodies" (Rom. xii. 1), our gifts (Phil. iv. 18), our praises, our good deeds, and any means by which we can "communicate" to others, and thus glorify our Saviour-God (Heb. xiii. 15, 16).

Notice, in conclusion, what an encouragement this truth may be to those who long to give unto God the glory due unto his Name, but are dissatisfied with their own efforts. God's honour will be secured in spite of our failures. These may stimulate us to seek that greater purity by which our offerings may themselves become purer. It will not provoke us to envy, but rejoice our hearts that others are able to render to God more useful service than we do. And if, in the midst of our efforts to offer such pure offerings and fragrant incense as our poor hearts can present, we are called away from this service, we may rejoice to know that God's honour will not suffer because our services are withdrawn. Illust.: In one Roman Catholic convent there is a chapel of "perpetual adoration," where, every hour, night and day, some service is being offered at the altar. So will be the true worship of God throughout the world—universal and perpetual.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Burdensome prophecies.* "The burden of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." Much of the work of the Old Testament prophets involved a serious strain on feeling, and may appropriately be figured as a "burden" which they were called to bear. A very large proportion of it consists of denunciations, declarations of swiftly coming and overwhelming Divine judgments. Those prophets were, in fact, raised up to meet a condition of society and national life of which God disapproved, and by which God was dishonoured. It should never be forgotten that the prophets belong to the Israelite monarchy, and that was not God's ideal of government for his people. It brought conditions and perils the significance of which the prophets were to declare. Malachi's

is the last prophet-voice of the Old Testament times. After him a great prophetic silence fell on the land. No direct utterance came from God for some three hundred years, until John the Baptist appeared. Nothing is certainly known concerning this Prophet Malachi. He is, indeed, only a name, and our interest lies entirely in his message. His name means, "The Messenger of Jehovah," and it calls us to attend to the message rather than to the speaker. We do know something of the times in which he lived, and we can understand what would be the burden of a Jehovah-prophet at such a time. After Nehemiah had been working for some twelve years at the moral reformation of the people of Jerusalem and Judæa, he was recalled to Persia; and immediately on his departure the old evils which he had stoutly resisted came back like a flood. In spite of the presence of Ezra in Jerusalem, it was seen that a reformation enforced by the civil power, rather than as the fruit of individual conviction, had no permanent vitality. When Nehemiah's back was turned, "the tithes due to the temple, the Levites, and the priests were not delivered, and the greatest distress was thus caused to all those who depended on them for maintenance. The choristers, the guards of the gates, and the ordinary Levites alike, were compelled to go back to their homes, and cultivate their fields for a living. Public worship was thus interrupted, and the temple, forsaken by its ministers, was neglected by the people. Nor was the refusal to pay tithes the only sign of an altered spirit. The sabbath was profaned, both in town and country, wine-presses were busy in its sacred hours, and the roads and fields were dotted with the workers taking sheaves to the barn on their heavily laden asses. Jerusalem itself was disturbed by a sabbath fair, to which loads of wine, grapes, figs, and much else were carried in during sacred hours. After all the professed zeal to put an end to mixed marriages, things were rapidly drifting to almost a worse condition than of old. The very priests had rapidly lost their high tone. Their irreverence, indifference, and worldliness shocked the thoughtful. Everything that Ezra and Nehemiah had effected was well-nigh undone." The Prophet Malachi had the "burden" laid upon him of recalling both priests and people to their duties. And this he did partly by vigorous denunciations of surrounding evils, and partly by anticipations of the times of Messiah. The "Coming One" would surely prove to be a stern Rebuker of national sin.

I. THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE WAS A BURDEN TO HIMSELF. Denunciations of wrongdoing and wrong-doers lose their true force when those who utter them *enjoy* their work. Then they put into them a bitter tone, which makes them ungod-like messages. Stern things have still to be spoken for God, but they must be spoken with pathos in the tone, and tears ready to start. No man can deliver a message of judgment aright, unless he feels it to be a burden.

II. THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE SHOULD BE A BURDEN TO THOSE ADDRESSED. A burden of holy concern. It should set them upon grave self-searching. It should burden them with anxiety about their sins, and with earnest efforts to put sin away. If it was not taken as a burden in that sense, it would become a burden as bringing upon them full, unrelieved, Divine judgments.

III. THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE MAY BE THOUGHT OF AS A BURDEN TO GOD. "Judgment is his strange work;" "In all their affliction he was afflicted;" "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked?" We are permitted to think that it troubles God to punish his people. He is burdened by the messages which our sin compels him to send.—R. T.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The Lord's love for his people.* The Lord had chosen Israel as his peculiar people, out of pure love and kindness, without any antecedent merit on their side. This love is strikingly exhibited by contrasting the Divine dealings with the two nations, Edom and Israel. Both came into Divine judgment for sin, and love triumphed in the restoration of Israel; but because of Edom's treatment of Israel, it was left to its desolations. The word "hate" is employed, but South properly explains that "hating" is sometimes used comparatively for a less degree of love (Gen. xxix. 31; Luke xiv. 26). The English word "hate" has somewhat changed its meaning. Now it means, "have a personal aversion to," "regard with ill will." But when our Bible was translated, it had a simpler and kinder meaning, "love less," "show less favour to." It is important to note that the reference is not to God's personal feelings

to individuals, but to his providential dealings with nations. Still, it stands out prominently that God's ways with Israel had been the indication of selecting love for her.

I. GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL WAS A DISTINGUISHING LOVE. Of Israel, as of Christ's apostles, it could be said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." The race of Abraham is a selected race. It was separated in order to preserve, and to witness for, the great primary religious truths which are essential to the world's well-being, but are imperilled by the free moral experiment of humanity. It was a sign of Divine love that Israel received such a trust.

II. GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL WAS A PATIENT LOVE. And the patience was very severely tried by the wilfulness and waywardness of the loved ones. This can be illustrated from every stage of the history. The patience is seen in this, that God kept on endeavouring to correct by chastisement. Under no provocation did he give them up in despair, and let judgment prove finally overwhelming. Compare the case of Edom, which, as a nation, is lost beyond recovery. That patience of the Divine love is the holiest joy to us still.

III. GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL WAS A TRIUMPHANT LOVE. This is what seems chiefly in Malachi's mind. He wants the people to feel how the love had triumphed in their recovery from captivity, and their restoration as a nation. And these proofs of the Lord's love should have acted as persuasions to the Lord's service.—R. T.

Vers. 4, 5.—*Divine judgments by disappointments.* The Lord's dealings with Edom are here introduced as contrasting with the Lord's dealings with Israel. And one chief point of contrast is this—Israel's expectations will be realized; but Edom's expectations will be disappointed. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts. They shall build, but I will throw down." There was an exceedingly bitter feeling between Israel and Edom, dating from the time when Edom insultingly refused to allow the passage of Israel through her territory, and so compelled God's people to take the weary and perilous way up the Arabah. Again and again we have hints of the unfriendly feeling between the kindred and neighbour nations; and that it was continued up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is indicated by the exclamation of the poet, in Ps. cxxxvii. 7, "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof." That Jehovah, as God and King of Israel, took its part against Edom is clearly intimated in the prophecy of Obadiah. The point of the passage before us is that on the efforts of Edom to recover itself as a nation no permanency would rest; whereas if Israel would but be faithful to its obligations, it as a kingdom should be established for ever.

I. FAILURE IN LIFE'S ENTERPRISES IS A SIGN OF DIVINE DEALING WITH US. However we may say that such failure attends (1) particular dispositions; or (2) imperfect training and culture, it remains true that a deeper explanation is possible. The promise to the good is, "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The judgment on the evil may be, "Whatsoever he doeth shall fail." There is no experience of life more trying than the disappointment of failing again and again. There is no misery like the hopelessness of feeling as if we *could* not succeed, and it is no use to try any more. The man is lost who feels that.

II. FAILURE IN LIFE'S ENTERPRISES MAY BE DIVINE DISCIPLINE, BUT IT MAY BE DIVINE JUDGMENT. Chastisement, to convince that we have done the thing wrongly. Judgment, as in the case of Edom, of some sin committed in early life, the spirit of which we have kept up through the long years. If we fail in life, we should searchingly inquire why God lets us fail.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Human claims impressing Divine claims.* The figure of fatherhood is used in Scripture to suggest God's peculiar relation to Israel; and we are therefore invited to use the family sentiments and responsibilities in the endeavour to realize our obligations to God. Our Lord, in his teachings, made a similar appeal to family feelings: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues in a similar way, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" It is true

that arguments based on human relationships must take due account of human infirmities; but there is an ideal human relationship in every case, which men in their hearts recognize, and the obligations connected with it may always be safely applied to our relations with God. But there is a special point in Malachi's pleading with the priests of his day. In common with Jehovah's people, they came under the children's claims and responsibilities; but, *as priests*, they were children honoured with special trusts. They were favoured children, and were bound to be *model* children. The obligation of the servant to the master is similar to that of the son to the father, but in the case of the child there is the help of personal affection. The two figures may be used to illustrate the point of this passage.

I. A MASTER'S CLAIM ILLUSTRATES THE DIVINE CLAIM. "If I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord." This is taking the lowest ground. There is no necessary *affection* in this relationship. There is simply obligation and duty. A servant is bound to serve. Apply to the priests, who were precisely the servants of Jehovah's house, or temple. He had a right to claim service that would honour him, that would show a cherished sense of reverence and fear, and would make others think highly of him. But just *that* service the priests of the day were failing to render. Still, if no higher relation be realized, God claims our service as his servants.

II. A FATHER'S CLAIM ILLUSTRATES THE DIVINE CLAIM. This is higher ground to take, because it is a relation involving personal affection, and the refusal of the claim is therefore the more unworthy. Work out that if the father-figure as presented in the Old Testament was a great persuasion of the Divine claims, much more must the Father-figure be as revealed in the teaching and Sonship of Jesus Christ.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Polluted bread; or, priestly sins.* What was consumed upon the altar was regarded as God's portion, and may, in a figure, be called "the bread of God." "The offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy" (Lev. xxi. 6). By "polluted bread" we are to understand maimed and blemished sacrifices. The Divine reproach is that the priests show how little value they have for the worship of God, since they do not care in how slight and contemptuous a manner it is performed. The Prophet Malachi deals very largely with the unfaithfulness, the unpriestliness, of the priests of his day. It was at once a sign of a sad condition of morals and religion when the priests failed of their duty; and the way to recover the nation to righteousness, when the priests were recalled to the sense of their obligations.

I. SOCIETY REVEALED IN THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF THE PRIESTS. These may be taken as representing the clergy of the Christian generations. It has always been true that society is reflected in the moral standard of the clergy. This is embodied in the saying, "Like priest, like people;" and it is a wider and more searching truth than is usually apprehended. The clergy are the moral barometers by which the atmosphere of an age is discovered. The priests of Malachi's time declare the moral and religious degeneracy of the people. "The saddest sign of all was the degeneracy of the priesthood which Malachi, though perhaps himself a priest, was specially commissioned to denounce. The lack of all real faith and moral soundness in the very order which ought to have kept alive among the people the essential elements of the spiritual life, was eating like a cancer into the heart of the national sincerity" (Farrar). It may be shown that priestly indifference and unfaithfulness are products and results of neglected personal religious life. So long as priestly duties are instinct with spiritual feeling they will be worthily performed. When personal godliness fails, they become perfunctory, and then if in seeming they are kept up, in reality they deteriorate. It is in maintaining the personal religious life that priests lead the nations.

II. SOCIETY IS RECOVERED BY THE RECOVERY OF THE PRIESTS. Therefore Malachi appeals to them. It may be that the priests are the last to yield to the society evils; but they must always be the first recovered. They must become forces on the side of God in the restoration of moral health to a nation. Revivals are always hopeless things unless their first effect is the spiritual reviva. of the clergy.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*The law of acceptable sacrifice.* It must be such as would be acceptable if offered to any earthly official. This, indeed, is but taking low ground, but that the

prophet should take this position, and use this argument, is in itself a revelation of the sad condition into which the priesthood of the day had fallen. He could not take high grounds, and make his appeal directly to the holiness of the claims of the infinitely Holy One. "It argues a great contempt of Almighty God when men are less careful in maintaining the decencies of his worship than they are in giving proper respects to their superiors." It should be borne in mind that the Levitical system very rigorously demanded that only sound and clean animals should be presented in sacrifice. It is always necessary to check the meanness of men, which tempts them to put God off with that which they themselves do not greatly value (see Lev. xxii. 22, etc.). The sin of offering the imperfect to God can be tested in two very simple ways.

I. OFFER AN IMPERFECT GIFT TO YOUR FRIEND. For a birthday-time find something you have done with; something you do not care for; something out of taste in your own house, which you are glad to get rid of; something damaged, or soiled, or broken. You send it, saying in your heart, "It is good enough for him." That gift dishonours the friend, and morally degrades you as the giver. If that friend has any spirit, he despises such gifts, and sends the coldest of acknowledgments of their receipt. Is God in Christ our Friend? What shall be the love-gifts which alone can be acceptable to him?

II. OFFER AN IMPERFECT GIFT TO YOUR GOVERNOR. If a man wants to show his respect, or to indicate his gratitude for some favour received, he is always most particular in the selection of his present. He takes care that there is no flaw in it; he selects the best possible; he is most anxious about its being conveyed without injury. If the governor has any spirit, he will not look at or receive anything but the very best. Is God our supreme Governor? Then how can we fail to offer the very best possible to him?

III. OFFER AN IMPERFECT GIFT TO YOUR GOD. Has he not more claim than either friend or governor to the perfect offering? How should we respond to (1) his authority; (2) his holiness; (3) his redemption? Though out of our sight, he searchingly tests all our gifts, offerings, and sacrifices. Open out how we may be offering the imperfect in (1) our acts of worship; (2) our acts of benevolence; (3) our acts of ministry and service.—R. T.

Ver. 9.—Regarding the person. "Will he regard your persons?" The idea of the verse is somewhat difficult to trace; but it appears to be this: "You are expecting that God will accept you just because you are priests, on account of your official standing alone. You think that it does not matter to him what you are morally, so long as you go through the routine of his service according to the standards." It is intimated plainly enough that their intercessions on behalf of the people must be in vain so long as they are acting unworthily.

I. THE SENSE IN WHICH GOD DOES REGARD THE PERSON. 1. He deals with each individual, never loses the one in the many; each person stands out distinctly before him as if there were no other. This truth needs to be dwelt on, because men readily hide themselves from their own view, and think to hide themselves from God's view, in the class to which they belong. The sins of the priests may not deeply humble any particular priest. 2. He deals with a man's moral condition. That belongs exclusively to the man. It is his personality. It is the matter of supreme concern to God.

II. THE SENSE IN WHICH GOD DOES NOT REGARD THE PERSON. He is no "Respecter of persons." This enlarges the idea, and we may see: 1. That God takes no account of bodily peculiarities. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." 2. God takes no account of social rank. He pays no deference to the high-born and rich; he shows no indifference to the low-born and poor. His supreme interest is in men, not in the accidents of men. This is not meant to imply any failure in our estimating the value of social status and influence; it only emphasizes that these are not the matters of Divine consideration. They do not belong to the essence of manhood. 3. God takes no account of official position. No man stands in the special favour of God because he is a king, and no man has any special ground for pleading with God in the fact that he is a priest or clergyman. A man's power of intercession with God is dependent on his personal relations with God, but it is assumed that every priest and every minister is what he ought to be—in accepted personal

relations with God. No matter what our office may be, if there is not at the heart of it a right state of mind and heart, the acceptance of the ministry of that office cannot be assured.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Self-serving religion.* "One of the works on which Nehemiah looked back with most satisfaction was that he had secured to the Levites the payment of a sufficient remuneration for their work. It was a right thing in itself. It asserted what we have learnt to call the principle of an 'established' Church, and of a fair division of its income. But that spirit might easily pass, and had actually passed, into the temper which is always clamorous for rights and privileges, which will work only when those rights and privileges are secured. The spirit of the hireling takes the place of that of the worshipper. And so, amongst the foremost sins which the prophet is called on to condemn we find this, noted with special reference to the functions of those Levites over whose interests Nehemiah had been so watchful. 'Who is there even among you,' he asks, 'that would shut the doors for naught?' And the hireling spirit, once fostered, showed itself, as it always does, in neglect, evasion, dishonesty" (Plumptre).

I. THE WORKMAN IS WORTHY OF HIS HIRE. This sentence embodies a good working principle, which has its proper application in religious as well as in secular spheres. They who minister in spiritual things may reasonably claim to be ministered unto in carnal things. Clergymen share all common bodily and family wants; and we have no sympathy with those who talk as if some wrong were done when spiritual men are concerned for their material interests. Priests and Levites deserved their pay.

II. THE WORKMAN IS WORTHY ONLY WHEN HE DOES NOT WORK FOR HIS HIRE. This is only true in a *higher sense* of the Levite; it is really true of every workman. A man is on a low plane when he works just for his wage. He is but a time-server, a self-server. The best work never is done by such men; and their work is never the best blessing to them. A man must work for the love of his work if he is to do it nobly. A religious man must work for God if his work is to be acceptable. To work for gain is to work for self. The "sons of Eli," and Simon Magus, illustrate the moral degradation when the servants of God make money-conditions.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*The universal worship that is to be.* These words are usually taken as a prophetic announcement of the future rejection of Israel and calling of the Gentiles; but it is difficult to trace the connection of thought, if this be regarded as the prophet's meaning. The LXX. rightly uses the present, not the future, tense throughout this verse. "My Name is great," etc. This gives an actual *present* comparison of the fear of God's Name among Gentiles and among Jews, to the manifest disadvantage of the Jew. God found a devoutness, earnestness, and sincerity outside his own people, which wholly put to shame their indifference, formality, and time-serving. This suggestion is in the line of Malachi's teaching, whereas a description of future religious conditions seems to introduce a new subject. Dean Plumptre says, "It was given to the last of the prophets to proclaim, with an entirely new distinctness, not only as Isaiah had done, the accession of Gentile proselytes to the worship and faith of Israel, but the acceptance of their worship wherever it might be offered." The Gentile religion in the mind of the prophet was probably that of Zoroaster, the purest form that Gentile religion has ever taken.

I. THE BASIS OF THE UNIVERSAL WORSHIP. The prophet must not be regarded as giving a complete account of the universal worship. He deals with it only in view of his immediate object, and to point his appeal to the unfaithful and time-serving priests. He brings out three points. 1. One characteristic of the universal worship is *reverence for the Divine Name*. "My Name is great among the Gentiles." No religion can ever fit to the needs of men which does not at least *seem* to honour the Divine Name. This is our first test of every religion. 2. Another is the *demand for prayer*. "Incense is offered." Every true religion provides communion with God, and gives man hope in prayer. "When we have learned by experience the unutterable value of prayer, then shall theism become a religion fit for humanity." 3. Another is sincerity shown in purity of offerings. Our Lord expressed the universal worship in a sentence, when he said, "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

II. THE REPROACH OF THE UNIVERSAL WORSHIP. It reproaches all who fail to meet these primal conditions, whatever their historical standing might be. It reproached the Jewish priests of Malachi's time, for they were dishonouring the Name, putting routine for prayer, and making unworthy and impure offerings which revealed their insincerity.—R. T.

Ver. 13.—*Religion a weariness.* "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!" It is clearly a bad sign when the people find the worship of God to be a weariness; but it is a much worse sign when the ministers of religion both feel the worship to be a weariness, and show that they feel it to be such.

I. IN THE NATURE OF THINGS RELIGIOUS WORSHIP SHOULD NOT BE A WEARINESS. 1. Take it as the proper and fitting expression of the creature's dependence on his Creator. It ought to be full of the joy of thankfulness. 2. Take it as the natural impulse of the sinner's love to his Saviour. Man fallen should feel a joy in worship even beyond that of man unfallen. The song of the redeemed is an altogether nobler song than the innocent can ever sing. And religious worship, kept within the lines of Divine claims, never need be a weariness. It is religion with the multiplied added demands of men that is in danger of proving a weariness. No reasonable man could say that Mosaism was a weariness, so far as it was a Divine institution. But every man could say that Rabbinism was a weariness; for it laded men with burdens too grievous to be borne. Spiritual religion is always simplifying worship. As spirituality fails, exacting demands are increased, and religion tends to become a weariness.

II. THROUGH THE MOODS OF MEN RELIGIOUS WORSHIP BECOMES A WEARINESS. What the priests of earlier times had done gladly and joyfully, the priests of Malachi's time dragged through. The joy of Levites in their work is expressed in the Korahite psalms (xlii., lxxxiv., etc.), which are full of longings for restoration to the temple service. There was no difference in the worship. The difference was in the moods of the men. Their spiritual life was low. They had no personal joy in God, so they could have no joy in the routine of God's worship. The sadness of the restored Judaism of the exiles was that, to so large an extent, it was the restoration of the Jewish formalities, without the restoration of that spiritual life which would have vitalized the formalities. And still the weariness men feel at the length of Christian services, etc., is the revelation of their wrong mood; of their lost personal joy in God their Saviour.—R. T.

Ver. 14.—*The great and dreadful Name.* The idea in the word "dreadful" would be better conveyed by "awe-ful," if that were a word in familiar use. "Dreadful" we reserve for something that is unusually calamitous and destructive. Awe of God; reverence of his august majesty; fear which leads to the symbolic removal of the shoes;—these things are essential to right and acceptable worship, and these things are absolutely befitting to man the creature, and much more to man the sinner. A man may be tested by the measure of his reverent awe of the Divine Name (comp. Josh. vii. 9). "With a startling reiteration, after every specific denunciation of the sins of priests and people, they are represented as asking, as if in utter unconsciousness of their sin, 'Wherein have we polluted thee? Wherein have we despised thy Name?' They have fallen into the last stage of selfish formalism when conscience ceases to do its work as an accusing witness, into the hypocrisy which does not even know itself to be hypocritical; the hypocrisy, in other words, of the scribes and Pharisees."

I. REVERENCE FOR THE DIVINE NAME IS A SIGN OF SPIRITUAL LIFE. It was necessary that God should demand reverence for his Divine Name in one of his ten great commandments, "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his Name in vain." But that law is never needed by any man who has and cherishes right thoughts of God; he simply *cannot* take his Name in vain. All worship is truly reverent according to the spiritual life that is at the heart of it. Therefore we train children in reverence for the Divine Name, because it is the basis of spiritual religion.

II. FAILING REVERENCE FOR THE DIVINE NAME IS A SIGN OF FAILING SPIRITUAL LIFE. It is one of the first, and one of the surest, signs. 'A light tone of speech, in reference to the infinitely Holy One, at once tells of lost spiritual health. Looseth the

sense of awe, and innumerable evils can creep in. Reverence for the great Name keeps the gate of the soul safe shut against intruders; and it is our continual inspiration to pure and holy living.—R. T.

Vers. 1—5.—*The sovereignty of God in relation to man's secular condition of life.* "The burden of the word of the Lord," etc. Malachi—which means "Messenger"—the last of the Hebrew prophets, is a man whose personal history is wrapped in utter obscurity. He is supposed to have lived after Haggai and Zechariah, and to be contemporary with Nehemiah. It is likely that he occupied a relationship to Nehemiah somewhat analogous to that which Haggai and Zechariah sustained to Zerubbabel. The general opinion is that he prophesied about the year B.C. 430. This was that brilliant period in Greece in which flourished some of its greatest men—Cimon, son of Miltiades, distinguished as a commander; Pericles, the greatest of Athenian statesmen, under whom Athens attained a splendour that made her the wonder and admiration of all Greece; Phidias, the celebrated sculptor, and a host of distinguished artists; Simonides and Pindar, eminent lyric poets; Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, distinguished dramatists; and Herodotus, who has received a title really due to Moses, "the Father of History." From this passage the following truths may be legitimately deduced.

I. THAT SOME MEN ON THIS EARTH SEEM TO BE MORE FAVOURED BY PROVIDENCE THAN OTHERS, AND YET THEY ARE OFTEN UNCONSCIOUS OF IT. This is the communication or "burden" of the Divine message which Malachi had to deliver to Israel: "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Israel here stands for all the tribes, all the descendants of Jacob. The Israelitish nation was more favoured than any nation on the face of the earth. In relation to their privileges Paul says of the Israelites, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises: whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came" (Rom. ix. 4, 5). As *individuals*, some men are more favoured than others. As Jacob was more favoured than Esau, so some men in all generations are more blessed than others—blessed with more vigorous frames, more intellectual resources, more emotional wealth, etc. There is amongst men immense variety in the degree of natural endowments. Read the parable of the talents. But it is *man nationally* that is here referred to. "I have loved you," that is, "I have regarded you more than other nations." Is not our England more favoured than most if not all of the other nations of the earth? She is, in some respects, as far exalted above all existing states, as Israel of old was above all the heathen nations that surrounded it. But individually, as was said above, all men are not treated alike. Some are born of healthier parents than others, live in more salubrious climes than others, are endowed with higher faculties than others, brought up under more wholesome laws and higher educational influences than others. The existence of these distinctions is too obvious to require either argument or illustration. But whilst this is such a patent fact, the favoured ones are too often *unconscious of the distinction*. "Wherein hast thou loved us?" Israel did not realize its exalted privileges. How often is this the case! The men most favoured of Providence are often most unconscious of the favours, and they say, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" As a rule, perhaps the most favoured of Providence are the greatest complainers. What *ingratitude* is here!

II. THAT THIS DIFFERENCE IN THE PRIVILEGES OF MEN IS TO BE ASCRIBED TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." Some read it, "I favoured Jacob, but rejected Esau." Why was Jacob more favoured than Esau? Not because he had a nobler moral character. In some respects he appears more despicable than Esau. It was simply because God chose to distinguish him. The reason of distinction was in the mind of God, and nowhere else. "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his will." His sovereignty does not imply either of two things. 1. *Partiality on his part*. The fact that the Jewish people, the descendants of Jacob, in their history endured, perhaps, calamities as great as those that befell the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, proved that it was no partiality on God's part. He is no Respector of persons. Nor does it imply: 2. *Irresponsibility on man's part*. "They who have least," says Godwin, "and bear most, may become better and happier than

they who have most and suffer least." The permanent value of all things depends on the use which is made of them: the first often becoming last, and the last first. But no argument can be drawn from differences in men's condition as to which will be the most morally advantageous or disadvantageous according to their conduct. Whilst the differences of one kind depend solely on the Divine will, the differences of the other kind are not irrespective of human choice.

III. THOSE WHOM THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD DOES NOT FAVOUR ARE LEFT IN A SECULARLY UNENVIABLE CONDITION. 1. The words teach us that they will *have possessions destroyed*. "I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons [jackals] of the wilderness." These men, the men of Edom, struggled hard to build up their kingdom and to give it wealth and power, but the product of all their labours was utterly destroyed. Their great things, their "mountains," their wealthy things, their "heritage," the scenes of their power, gave place to the "dragons of the wilderness." Where is Edom now? If Heaven has determined that the fortune you have built up after years of earnest and indefatigable labour shall be swept away, it will depart as a vision of the night. 2. *That their efforts were frustrated*. "If Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever." They struggle to restore their position, labour hard to build the desolate places, but in every effort they are thwarted. It is in vain to strive against destiny. Mark that all that is here said concerns only the *secular* prosperity of men. Divine sovereignty is always in favour of *spiritual* prosperity, progress in intelligence, purity, and happiness. In all these matters men cannot labour in vain. 3. *Their enemies prosper*. "And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel." Edom hated Israel from the beginning, fought hard against it for centuries, struggled continually to destroy it, but all in vain. The time came when it found itself in ruins and its enemy in prosperity. "The argument of these verses is this," says Dr. Dods, "if you would see the difference between hatred and love, look at the different condition and prospects of Edom and Israel. The desolation with which their territory is visited is irremediable: they have no glorious future beyond: whereas the wretched condition of which you complain is but the bleakness of seed-time that precedes the richest harvest."

CONCLUSION. Are we not here in this England of ours among the peoples whom Heaven has specially favoured? Are not the words specially applicable to us, "I have loved you, saith the Lord"? But what is our practical response? Does not our daily life speak out the ingratitude and unbelief of Israel, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" We do not see it; we do not feel it; "Wherein?" What ought we to think of our civilization, our liberties, our fruitful land and salubrious air? above all, what of our Christ? "Herein is love."—D. T.

Vers. 6—9.—*The profession and the practice of religion*. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my Name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy Name?" etc. The subject of these words is the profession and the practice of religion; and they suggest two thoughts.

I. THE PROFESSION AND THE PRACTICE SHOULD ALWAYS BE IN ACCORD. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master." This is stated as a fact. The son here, of course, must be supposed to be worthy of the name *son*. There are some children who are destitute of natural affection. What Aristotle of old said will be endorsed by all thoughtful men. "A son must always be his father's debtor, because he can never repay him for those greatest of all benefits, birth and upbringing, and in these the fathers resemble God." This being so, and you Israel being "my son, my firstborn," a relationship which you profess, "where is mine honour?" If the language is, as some suppose, specially addressed to the priests, the appeal gets new emphasis. The idea is—You profess to regard me as your Father and your Master, and you should, therefore, in your life treat me with honour, reverential fear, and loyal devotion. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" Any discrepancy

between our profession and our practice is morally unnatural. Our conduct should accord with our creed, our deeds with our doctrines.

II. THE PROFESSION AND THE PRACTICE ARE OFTENTIMES AT VARIANCE. The priests to whom these words were addressed practically contradicted their profession. They called him Father and Master, and yet see how they treated him in their sacrifices in the temple. Look at them in their offerings. They showed: 1. *A lawless spirit*. "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar." This is directly contrary to the Law as given in Deuteronomy: "If there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God." "The sin with which the priests are charged is that of polluting God's altar by offering beasts not ceremonially clean, unfit for sacrifice. Any beast was passed as good enough for sacrifice, the lame or blind, that had become useless for work, sick or torn, the beast that was dying on its feet, and could not be used for meat, or that which had been stolen, and so marked that it would not sell—anything, in short, that could serve no other purpose, was good enough for God. His courts had the appearance of a knacker's yard." 2. *A niggardly spirit*. Not only were they polluted, which is contrary to ceremonial law, but they were worthless: blind, lame, wretched skeletons were the beasts offered, worth nothing in the field or the market, mere refuse. "A cheap religion," says one, "costing little, is rejected by God, worth nothing: it costs more than it is worth, for it is worth nothing, and so proves really dear." God despiseth not the widow's mite, but he disdains the miser's gold. 3. *A captious spirit*. They say, "Wherein have we despised thy Name?" "Wherein have we polluted thee?" So blind and so insensible were they to moral propriety that they insulted the Almighty even in their formal efforts to serve him. 4. *A thoughtless spirit*. "Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts? And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the Lord of hosts." This sentence is ironical: Ye dare not go before your governor with such presents; but come now, I pray you, enter God's presence, and use your stock phrase of supplication (Numb. vi. 25), that he "would be gracious unto us." Will he regard your persons? How many who profess God to be their Father and their Master act out, even in their religious services, this lawless, niggardly, captious, thoughtless spirit! Herein there is the discrepancy between profession and practice. But, alas! how common is it!

With lip we call him Master,
In life oppose his Word,
We ev'ry day deny him,
And yet we call him Lord

No more is our religion
Like his in soul or deed
Than painted grain on canvas
Is like the living seed.

In the balance we are weigh'd,
And wanting we are found,
In all that's true and Christly
The universe around.

CONCLUSION. A fact narrated to me by the late Rev. Dr. Leifchild some years ago affords a striking illustration of the discrepancy between profession and practice in religion. He told me that there was an old lady in his Church, very wealthy, and very loud in her professions, and apparently very enthusiastic in her devotions, but whose contributions for religious purposes were of the most niggardly kind. One Sunday, in singing a hymn with which they closed the service of the Lord's Supper, she being near to the table, he observed her as the deacons were going round, according to their custom, collecting subscriptions for the poor. It so happened that the verse they were singing at the time the deacon came to her with the plate was—

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my heart, my life, my all."

No one in the whole congregation seemed more hearty in shouting out those words with his voice than she. Meanwhile the deacon held the plate right under her eye, but she let it pass without enriching it by even a copper.—D. T.

Vers. 10—14.—*Wrong worship.* “Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught?” etc. The subject of these words is wrong worship, and they suggest the following remarks.

I. THAT WRONG WORSHIP IS WORSE THAN NO WORSHIP AT ALL. “Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for naught. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.” Keil gives a version more in accordance with the original, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors; that ye might not light mine altar to no purpose! I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, and sacrificial offering does not please me from your hand.” “As if,” says Dr. Dods, “God were to say it were far better that the temple were shut than that such profane and fruitless worship were carried on in it (Isa. i. 12). Better that you and your offensive beasts be together shut out of the temple, and that no smoke ascend from the altar, since all such offerings as you present are offered in vain. The Hebrew word translated ‘for naught,’ is the etymological equivalent of ‘gratis;’ but the meaning here is not ‘without reward,’ but the closely allied, secondary meaning ‘without result;’ it is not the mercenary but the fruitless character of the services which is pointed at.” There is a deal of wrong worship in the world, not only in heathen regions but in Christendom, not only in Popery but in Protestantism, not only in the Church but in Dissent. Some of the hymns used are not only gross but blasphemous, and some prayers, too, are repugnant alike to reason and conscience. No worship is a thousand times better than wrong worship. Wrong worship insults the Infinite Father, and degrades the human soul.

II. THAT WRONG WORSHIP WILL ONE DAY BE PRACTICALLY REPUDIATED. “From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my Name shall be great among the Gentiles.” A modern expositor expresses the idea thus: “Since ye Jewish priests and people ‘despise my Name,’ I shall find others who will magnify it (Matt. viii. 11). Do not think I shall have no worshippers because I have not you, for from the east to the west my Name shall be great among the Gentiles (Isa. lix. 19; lxi. 19, 20), those very peoples whom ye look down on as abominable. ‘And a pure offering,’ not the blind, the lame, and the sick, such as ye offer.” “In every place” implies the catholicity of the Christian Church (John iv. 21—23; 1 Tim. ii. 8). The incense is figurative of prayer (Ps. cxli. 2; Rev. viii. 3). Sacrifice is used metaphorically of the offering of a “broken and contrite heart.” 1. *This period, though far in the future, is certain to dawn on the world.* God hath promised it, and it is “impossible for him to lie.” “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. . . . Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted into thee” (Isa. lx. 3—5). 2. *This period will exclude all false worship.* It will be in “every place.” No room for the knee in the temple of the false worshipper. Neither in this mountain nor in that mountain shall ye worship the Father. “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” 3. *In this period all human souls will be blended in love and devotion.* No more divisions. “Thy Name shall be great among the heathen.” He will be the great centre around which all souls will revolve, from which all will draw their heat, their light, their harmony.

III. THAT WRONG WORSHIP IS SOMETIMES RENDERED EVEN BY THE RELIGIOUS TEACHERS OF MANKIND. “But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, the Table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.” From these words we learn that these priests made worship appear: 1. *Contemptible.* Perhaps these priests did not literally say the Lord’s table was contemptible, but in their acts they declared it. Is the word “contemptible” here intended to express the feeling of the priests themselves? Some have considered it as referring to the revenue which the priests drew from their services at the altar. The beasts which were brought for offering were so lean, diseased, and wretched, that the flesh which fell to their share for food was so poor that they could not eat it, it filled them with disgust, it was contemptible.

As if they had said, "The reward which we have for our services at the altar is truly contemptible." But this view can scarcely be adopted, inasmuch as they themselves accepted those worthless animals for sacrifice. It rather means that they had made worship appear contemptible to others, that their services had brought worship into contempt. How often do the religious leaders of mankind, by the crudity of their thoughts, the narrowness of their creeds, the worldliness of their spirits, bring religion into popular contempt! 2. *Burdensome.* "Behold, what a weariness is it!" etc. This is not, alas! an uncommon occurrence. Religious leaders, perhaps the majority of them, have in all ages, by their hoary platitudes, their vain repetitions, their long, dull prayers, their monotonous tones, their prosy twaddlings, made their hearers often exclaim, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" In truth, religious service is a weariness to all who have not their hearts in it. Dr. Pusey well remarks, "The service of God is its own reward. If not, it becomes a greater toil, with less reward from this earth than the things of this earth. Our only choice is between love and weariness."

IV. THAT WRONG WORSHIP EVERMORE INCURS THE JUST DISPLEASURE OF HEAVEN. "But cursed be the deceiver," etc. He is here called the deceiver, who has the means of presenting a valuable sacrifice, and yet presents a worthless one. He "hath in his flock a male," something that is valuable. It is not the man who openly denies God, and who makes no pretence of serving him, that is here cursed, but the man who professes to serve him, and yet is destitute of the true spirit of devotion. He who offers to him the mere dregs of his time, his strength, his means, virtually presents that "polluted bread" upon the altar which is abhorrent to the Almighty.

CONCLUSION. Let all eschew vain worship, a worship that may be either the worship of a *wrong* god, some idol, or the worship of the *right* God in a *wrong* way. Let those of us who presume to be the religious leaders of our race take care that we do not bring public worship into contempt; and by our lack of spiritual vivacity and the exciting inspiration of true devotion, cause the people to exclaim, "Behold, what a weariness is it!"—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1-4.—§ 4. *For these derelictions of duty the priests are threatened with punishment.*

Ver. 1.—*This commandment.* The threat or announcement is called a commandment, because God ordains it and imposes its execution on certain instruments. (For the expression, comp. Lev. xxv. 21.) The threat is contained in vers. 2, 3.

Ver. 2.—*I will even send a curse; Revised Version, then will I send the curse.* St. Jerome, regarding the temporal effect of the curse, translates, *equestatem*, "scarcity" (comp. Deut. xxvii. 15-26; xxviii. 15, etc.). *I will curse your blessings.* The blessings which as priests they had to pronounce upon the people (Lev. ix. 22, 23; Numb. vi. 23-27). These God would not ratify, but would turn them into curses, and thus punish the people who connived at and imitated the iniquities of the priests. Or the expression may refer to the material benefits promised by God to the Israelites on their obedience. But as the announcement is made specially to the priests, this explanation seems less probable. *I have cursed*

them already. The curse has already begun to work. Dr. S. Cox ('Bible Educator,' iii. 67, etc.) points out here an allusion to Neh. xiii. 1, 2, wherein it is recorded that they read from the Book of Moses how that the Moabites "hired Balaam against them that he should curse them; howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing." Malachi, who, as he thinks, was present on this occasion, may have been deeply impressed by these words; and it is probable that we hear an echo of them in the threat of ver. 2. "That of old God had turned a curse into a blessing, may have suggested the menace that he would now turn a blessing into a curse."

Ver. 3.—*I will corrupt your seed.* Henderson, "I will rebuke the seed to your hurt." God would mar the promise of their crops; but, as the priests did not concern themselves with agriculture, such a threat would have had no particular application to them. It is best, therefore, to take the pointing of some of the versions, and to translate, *I will rebuke your arm*; i.e. I will take from you the power of performing, or, I will neutralize your official duties, the arm being the instrument of labour, offering, and blessing. Others consider the threat

to be that they should be deprived of their allotted portion of the sacrifice—the breast and shoulder (Lev. vii. 31, 32), or the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw (Deut. xviii. 3). Septuagint, Ἀφορῶν ὑμῶν τὸν ἔμον, “I take from you the shoulder;” Vulgate, *Ego projiciam vobis brachium*. Orrelli takes “seed” in the sense of posterity, seeing here a reversal of such promises as Jer. xxxiii. 18, 22. Spread dung upon your faces. God will deliver them over to shameful treatment, which shall cover them with contempt. The idea is derived from the filth left in the courts by the victims (see the following clause). Your solemn feasts (*chagim*); i.e. the animals slain at the sacrificial feasts. God calls them “your,” not “my,” because they were not celebrated really in his honour, but after their own self-will and pleasure. The dung of the sacrificial animals was by the Law carried forth and burned without the camp (Exod. xxix. 14; Lev. iv. 12; xvi. 27). One shall take you away with it. They shall be treated as filth, and cast away in some foul spot (comp. 1 Kings xiv. 10).

Ver. 4.—Ye shall know. My threats are not vain; this ye shall experience and be forced to acknowledge. This commandment is the purpose and threat, as in ver. 1 (where see note). That my covenant might be with Levi; i.e. that my covenant with Levi might remain firm. The covenant with Levi was the election of that tribe to be the ministers of the sanctuary. There is here a special allusion to the blessing pronounced on Phinehas for his conduct in the matter of Zimri (Numb. xxv. 12, 13). This election is called “a covenant,” because, while conferring certain privileges, it involved certain duties. The difficulty in this interpretation is that the verb used here (*hayah*) does not mean “to remain,” “to continue,” but only “to be,” “to exist.” Hence many critics take “the commandment” as the subject, translating, “That it (my purpose) may be my covenant with Levi;” i.e. that as God observed the covenant made with the tribe of Levi in old time, so for the future this commandment and threat will be as vigorously observed and take the place of the old covenant. This explanation is too involved and refined to be acceptable. It is easiest to translate, with Henderson and Reuke, “Because my covenant was with Levi,” and to understand God as implying that he warned and punished the priests, because he willed that the covenant with Levi should hold good, and he thus desired to have a body of priests who would keep their vows and maintain the true priestly character. What that character is he proceeds to unfold.

Vers. 5—9.—§ 5. In contrast with these evil ministers, the character of the true priest is sketched, and thus the faults of the former are shown in darker colours.

Ver. 5.—My covenant was with him of life and peace; rather, with him was life and peace. This is one side of the covenant, that which God gave—the blessing of life, abundance, prosperity, and secure and undisturbed enjoyment of these, in the everlasting priesthood, in agreement with the promise to Phinehas (Numb. xxv. 12; comp. Deut. xxxiii. 8—11). I gave them to him for the fear, etc. I gave him life and peace. The pronominal suffix “them” is not expressed in the Greek and Latin Versions, and is absent from many Hebrew manuscripts, which read, “I gave him fear.” So the Vulgate, *Dedi eis timorem et timuit me*; Septuagint, ἔδωκα αὐτῷ ἐν φόβῳ φοβεῖσθαι με, “I gave him the fear of me.” This expresses man’s part in the covenant: God gave him certain blessings on condition that he feared, revered, worshipped, and obeyed the Lord. The last part of the verse as now read is more simply explained, “and (my covenant with him was, or, I gave him) fear, and he did fear me.” God’s gifts were life and peace. Levi’s part was fear of God: this he performed. The ideal priest observed all the duties of piety and reverence, and therefore in his case the covenant stood firm and was duly carried out.

Ver. 6.—The law (teaching) of truth was in his mouth. All his teaching rested on those truths which were enshrined in the Divine Law (Deut. xxxi. 10—13; xxxiii. 10). Iniquity; unfair decision. Neither false doctrine nor perverse judgment was found in him (Deut. xvii. 8—10; xix. 17). Walked with me. Not only his teaching was true, but his life was pure and good; he was the friend of God, living as always in his presence, in peace and uprightness. So Enoch and Noah are said to have “walked with God” (Gen. v. 24; vi. 9). Did turn many away from iniquity. The faithful discharge of duties and the holy life and teaching of the good priest led many sinners to repentance and amendment.

Ver. 7.—For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge. It was the priest’s duty to study the Law and to teach it faithfully, as it is said of Aaron, in Eccclus. xlv. 17, “He gave unto him his commandments, and authority in the statutes of judgments, that he should teach Jacob the testimonies, and inform Israel in his laws.” The law, here and vers. 6, 8, means system of teaching, or the *torah*. At his mouth. The priest was the appointed interpreter of the Law (see Lev. x. 11; Deut. xvii. 9—11; xxxiii. 10;

and the note on Hag. ii. 11). He is the messenger of the Lord. He announces God's will to men, explaining the Law to meet the varied circumstances which occur in daily life; he intervenes between God and man, offering man's worship to the Lord. So Haggai (i. 13) is called "the Lord's messenger," or angel. Some see here an allusion to Malachi's own name or office (see Introduction, § II.; comp. Deut. xxi. 5; 2 Chron. xvii. 9).

Ver. 8.—But ye are departed out of the way. The priests of this time had far declined from the high ideal set forth in vers. 6, 7, the "way" in which God would have had them to walk. Ye have caused many to stumble at (in) the law. By their example and teaching they had made the Law a stumbling-block, causing many to err, while they fancied they were not infringing God's commandments. Septuagint, *ἠσθενήσατε πολλοὺς ἐν νόμῳ*, "Ye made many weak [equivalent to *ἠσθενώσατε*] in the Law." Ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi (see ver. 5). They broke their part of the covenant, therefore Jehovah held himself no longer bound by it. They did not pay him due reverence and obedience; he withdrew the blessings promised to Levi, as threatened (ver. 2).

Ver. 9.—Contemptible. The glory of the priesthood and the honour that belonged to it (Ecclus. xlv. 7, etc.) were now turned into disgrace and contempt, when men compared the actual with the ideal. "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). Have been partial in the law; Revised Version, *have had respect of persons in the law*; or, *in your teaching*, as vers. 6, 8. The prophet names one special sin of the priests, and that the most flagrant—perversion of judgment, partiality in the administration of the Law. The same complaint is found in Micah iii. 11 (comp. 2 Chron. xix. 7).

Vers. 10—16.—Part II. CONDEMNATION OF PRIESTS AND PEOPLE FOR ALIEN MARRIAGES AND FOR DIVORCES.

Ver. 10.—Have we not all one Father! In proceeding to his new subject, the violations of the law of marriage, the prophet pursues his habitual method. He starts with a general principle, here assuming an interrogative form, and on it builds his rebuke. The priests were guilty, if not of profane marriages, at any rate of sinful neglect in not warning the people against them. Many take the "one father" to be Abraham (Isa. li. 2), and it is no objection to this view that he was also the progenitor of Ishmaelites, Edomites, etc., because there

was at this time no question about marriage with these nations, but with Canaanites, Moabites, Egyptians, and so on. But the parallelism with the following clause shows that by the Father is meant Almighty God (comp. ch. i. 6; Deut. xxxii. 6; Isa. lxiii. 16). Hath not one God created us? Hath not God taken us as his peculiar people, so as to call us his sons and his firstborn (comp. Exod. iv. 22, 23; Deut. xxxii. 18; Isa. i. 2; Jer. iii. 19)? Of course, God created all men; but the Jews alone recognized him as Creator. The prophet's proposition is that all Israelites were spiritual brothers and sisters, equally loved and chosen by God. From this he argues that in sinning against one another, they offended their common Father, and broke the family compact. Deal treacherously. Act faithlessly against one another. He does not yet say in what this treachery consists, but adds, by profaning the covenant of our fathers. He unites himself with them, because he suffered in their sin. They violated the covenant by which God chose them to be his peculiar people and placed himself in mysterious relation to them, on condition that they should keep themselves aloof from the evil nations around them, and avoid all connection with them and their practices. By intermarriages with the heathen, they profaned this covenant. This evil was one which Ezra had done his best to eradicate, using most stringent measures for its suppression (Ezra ix., x.); Nehemiah, too, contended against those who had contracted these marriages, when he found on his return to Jerusalem many such transgressors (Neh. xiii. 23—28); and now the prophet lifts up his voice in the cause of purity and obedience. The warning against these mixed unions is found in Exod. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3; Josh. xxiii. 12, 13.

Ver. 11.—Judah, the whole nation, is guilty of this crime, has broken her promised faith. The special sin, mixed marriages, is named at the end of the verse. In Israel and in Jerusalem. The mention of Israel, the sacred covenant name, is meant to make the contrast between profession and practice more marked. But some critics would here cancel the word "Israel," as being a clerical error (see note, Zech. i. 19). Jerusalem is named as the centre of the theocracy, which gave its tone to the people. For Judah hath profaned the holiness (*sanctuary*) of the Lord which he loved (*lovet*); Septuagint, *Ἐβεβήλωσεν Ἰούδας τὰ ἅγια Κυρίου, ἐν οἷς ἠγάπησεν*, "Judah profaned the holy things of the Lord in which he delighted." Many consider that by the "sanctuary" is meant the temple, into which these heathen wives had penetrated,

either led by curiosity or introduced by their profane husbands. But we have no knowledge that this was the case. It is better to take "the sanctuary," or that which is holy unto the Lord, to be the chosen nation itself, the community beloved by God, which was holy by election and profession, even as Christians are commonly called saints in the Epistles. (For the term as applied to the Israelites, see Exod. xix. 6; xxii. 31; Lev. xi. 44; xix. 2; comp. Ezra ix. 2; Neh. xiii. 29.) The daughter of a strange god. A woman who is an idolatress, who adhered to a foreign deity (Jer. ii. 27), as the Israelites are called "sons of Jehovah," as joined to him in communion (Deut. xiv. 1; Prov. xiv. 26). The LXX. omits the point of the charge, rendering, *καὶ ἐπερῆδυνεν εἰς θεοὺς ἄλλοτρίους*, "and followed after strange gods."

Ver. 12.—Will cut off. The Hebrew is an imprecation, "May the Lord cut off" (Deut. vii. 2, 3). It implies that the transgressor shall be deprived of his position as one of the covenant people, and shall leave no one to maintain his name and family. The man. Others render, "unto the man," making the following words the direct object of the verb. The master and the scholar; so the Vulgate, *magistrum et discipulum*; literally, the *watcher* and the *answerer*, i.e. the watchman and the inhabitants of the city; the LXX., reading somewhat differently, *ἕως καὶ ταπεινωθῇ ἐκ σκηνομάτων* Ἰακώβ, "until he be brought low from the tents of Jacob," meaning, until he repent and return humbly to obedience. In this case the term "cut off" must be taken in some milder sense than "exterminate." The present text, however, seems to be a kind of alliterative proverbial saying to express totality, everybody; though whence it arose, and what is its exact signification, are matters of great uncertainty. Some take the phrase to mean, "every waking and speaking person," i.e. every living soul. The English and Latin Versions proceed on the assumption (which Pusey denies) that the first verb can be taken actively, "he that awakeneth," the teacher being so called as stimulating the scholar, who is named "the answerer." The Targum and Syriac explain it by "son and son's son." Of the various suggestions offered, the most probable is that it is a military phrase derived from the challenge of the sentinels and the answer thereto, which in time came to denote the whole inhabitants of a camp or city. The tabernacles. The dwellings. Or the word, as Dr. Cox supposes, may belong to the original saying, and have come down from the remote period when the Israelites lived in tents. And him that offereth an offering (*minchah*) unto the Lord of hosts.

The same punishment shall fall on one who offers even an oblation of meal for men who are guilty of this sin. This sin would appertain specially to the priests. Or we may take the clause in a general sense. God will cut off every such transgressor, even if he try to propitiate the Lord by making an offering before him (Ecclus. xxxv. [xxxii.] 12), "Do not think to corrupt with gifts; for such he will not receive: and trust not to unrighteous sacrifices; for the Lord is Judge, and with him is no respect of persons."

Ver. 13.—Not only did they marry heathen females, but they divorced their own legitimate wives to facilitate such unholy alliances. This have ye done again; this again ye do. Here is another and a further offence. Others take "again" in the sense of "a second time," referring to the fact that Ezra had effected a reform in this matter, but the people had relapsed into the same sin. But the first explanation is preferable. Septuagint, *καὶ ταῦτα, & ἐλθόντων, ἐποίησεν*, "and this which I hated ye did." Covering (ye cover) the altar of the Lord with tears. The prophet, as before (ver. 10), does not at once declare what this fresh outrage is, but intimates its nature. The picture he exhibits is that of a multitude of repudiated wives coming to the temple with weeping and lamentation, and laying their cause before the Lord. Inasmuch that he regardeth not the offering any more. This cruel and wicked conduct raised a barrier between them and God, so that he regarded with favour no offering of theirs.

Ver. 14.—Yet ye say, Wherefore? Here is the usual sceptical objection, as in ch. i. 6, 7. The people will not acknowledge their guiltiness, and ask, "Why is God displeased with us? why are our offerings not acceptable?" The prophet replies, Because the Lord hath been witness, etc. The sin is now disclosed. Their marriages had been made before God; he who first instituted matrimony (Gen. ii. 24) was a witness of the contract and gave it his sanction (comp. Gen. xxxi. 50). The wife of thy youth. Whom thou didst marry when thine affections were pure and fresh, and for whom thy love was strong and simple (Prov. v. 18). Against whom thou hast dealt treacherously; Septuagint, "whom thou hast deserted." This wife of thine thou hast betrayed, breaking faith with her by repudiating her. The wife of thy covenant. With whom thou didst make a solemn vow and covenant, to violate which is a monstrous crime. We have very little information respecting the religious ceremonies connected with a Jewish wedding. The previous espousal was a formal proceeding, conducted by friends

and parents, and confirmed by oaths. The actual marriage seems to have been accompanied by certain solemn promises and blessings (see Prov. ii. 17; Ezek. xvi. 8; Gen. xxiv. 60; Ruth iv. 11, 12; Tobit vii. 13; Smith, 'Dict. of Bible').

Ver. 15.—**And did not he make one? Yot had he the residue of the spirit.** The passage has always been a *cruz*, and has received many interpretations. The Anglican rendering (which, however, is probably not correct) is thus explained: God made at first one man and one woman, to show the oneness of marriage, and God gave man the breath of life and the residue to the woman; he made them both equally living souls; therefore divorce was never contemplated in the first institution of marriage. Others take "one" to mean Abraham, and explain: Abraham did not do so, *i.e.* did not repudiate his legitimate wife, though barren; and he had a share of the spirit of right, or he had excellence of spirit. But these are very forced interpretations, and do not occur naturally from a consideration of the words. The Hebrew may be translated more satisfactorily, "Not any one has done so who has a remnant of the spirit (*ruach*)."
No one acts as you have done who has in him any of that Divine life which God at first breathed into man; in other words, no man of conscience and virtue has ever thus divorced his wife. The reading of the Septuagint varies here, the Vatican manuscript giving, *Οὐ καλὸν ἐποίησε*; "Did he not well?" and the Alexandrian, *οὐκ ἄλλος ἐποίησε*: but both seem to imply an interpretation such as we have just given.
And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Why did one act in this way? was it that he might have godly children? Surely not. No one would divorce his lawful Hebrew wife, and marry an idolatress, who wished to leave a holy posterity behind him. Many commentators, thinking that Abraham is here meant, and that the prophet is meeting an objection which might be founded upon his action with regard to Hagar, translate, "And what did the one? He was seeking a godly seed." Abraham at Sarah's request took Hagar to wife, in order to have the promised seed; he dismissed her in order to carry out the purpose of God in confining the promise to Isaac. Therefore his conduct is no support for those who repudiate their own wives and marry strange women, not to raise up children for God, but to satisfy their carnal lusts. It is difficult, however, to see how the prophet's hearers could have understood the allusion without further explanation. As Ribera pithily observes (quoted by Knabenbauer), "*Neque ita clare ex re collata designatur (Abraham), ut non potius divi-*

natione quam explicatione opus sit ad eum eruendum." It may also be remarked that the reference to the patriarch would not have been altogether successful, if the auditors remembered the Keturahites, who, though sprung from Abraham, were not "a godly seed." The LXX. has, *Καὶ ἐποίησε, τί ἄλλο ἢ σπέρμα ζητεῖ δ Θεός*; "And ye said, What else than seed doth God seek?" as if the increase of population, from whatever source, was the only object required. This may have been one thought of the people, but it can hardly be got out of the present Hebrew text. **Take heed to your spirit.** Beware lest ye lose the spirit which God has given you. By acting thus contrary to conscience and the light vouchsafed to them, they ran the risk of being deprived altogether of this heavenly guide, and losing all distinction between right and wrong.

Ver. 16.—**He hateth putting away.** This is another reason against divorce: God hates it. It is contrary to his original institution, and was only allowed for the hardness of men's hearts (see Deut. xxiv. 1, etc.; Matt. xix. 3—9). Septuagint, "If thou hate her and dismisst her," etc.; Vulgate, "If thou hate her, put her away," which seems to encourage divorce, whereas in the context divorce is strongly condemned. Hence Jerome considers these words to be spoken by the Jews, quoting in their defence Moses' precept. Others think that they are ironical—Put her away, if you please; but you must bear the consequences. **For one covereth violence with his garment.** He who thus divorces his wife shows himself openly to all beholders as an iniquitous man. So the clause is better rendered, *And one (who does so) covereth his garment with violence, or, violence covereth his garment.* Iniquity attaches itself to him plainly, encircling and enfolding him; the clothing of iniquity is the mark of the foul soul within. The notion of "garment" being here used figuratively for wife (as Hitzig supposes) is without proof. Such a metaphor is certainly unknown to Hebrew literature, though there is something like it in Arabic, "Wives are your attire, and ye are theirs" (Koran). Bishop Wordsworth considers that the phrase in the text refers to the custom of the bridegroom in espousals casting the skirt of his garment over her who was betrothed to him (see Ruth iii. 9). So the idea would be, "Ye cast your skirt over iniquity, and betroth violence to yourselves for a bride." But this seems somewhat forced. **Take heed . . . treacherously.** A repetition of the warning in ver. 15.

Ver. 17—ch. iv. 6.—Part III. THE DAY OF THE LORD.

Ver. 17—ch. iii. 6.—§ 1. *The faithless*

people, disheartened by present circumstances, doubted God's providence, and disbelieved his promises; but the prophet announces the coming of the Lord to judgment, preceded by his messenger. He shall refine his people and exterminate sinners.

Ver. 17.—Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. This is the introduction to the new section. The prophet makes his charge. The faithless multitude have, as it were, worn out God's patience by their murmuring and discontent. Because their expectations of prosperity and glory were not at once fulfilled, they called in question God's justice and holiness, and even the future judgment. The LXX. connects this verse with the preceding, *καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπητε*

οἱ παροξύναντες τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ὑμῶν, "And forsake them not, ye who provoked God with your words." But it is best to take this as the beginning of a new subject. Yet ye say. This is the usual sceptical objection. Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord. They complain that, though they are God's peculiar people, they are left in low estate, while the heathen, men that "do evil," are happy and prosperous (comp. Ps. xxxvii., lxxiii.) He delighteth in them. They choose to consider that the worldly prosperity of the heathen is a sign of God's special favour, or else that he acts unjustly. Where is the God of judgment? (Isa. xxx. 18). Why does not God perform his promises to Israel, and execute vengeance on the enemy?

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Our blessings cursed.* The cursing of blessings is a "strange work" to the blessed God, "the Father of mercies," who rather delights to turn curses into blessings. We may note—

I. THE CAUSES OF THIS CURSE. It may be traced to two things. 1. A disregard of the great end of life, "to glorify God." The motto of every creature, and especially of every redeemed sinner, should be that of Ignatius Loyola in its best sense, "Ad majorem gloriam Dei." No grander object can be sought. To fail in the endeavour to "give unto the Lord the glory due unto his Name" is to begin to lose "the promise" which godliness gives of both worlds. It empties our "blessings" of their true blessedness, and begins to corrupt them with a curse like—

"The little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

2. Neglect of God's appeals and warnings. He remonstrates, as he did again and again with the Jews, by his prophets. But if we neither hear nor heed, and will not lay these warnings to heart, the corrupting process goes on, the curse is ripening, "the rod hath blossomed; pride hath budded" (cf. Jer. vi. 16—20; Zech. i. 3—6; vii. 11—14). The remedies being cast aside, the disease holds on its course till "the whole head is sick," etc. (Isa. i. 5, 6). It is natural to God to sweeten the bitter waters of life and to neutralize its poisons (2 Kings ii. 19—22; iv. 38—41). But sin reverses these miracles of mercy, and constrains God to turn our water into blood, our food into poison, to curse our blessings.

II. THE SIGNS OF THIS CURSE. It may manifest itself in various ways; e.g.: 1. Withholding the gifts which God delights to bestow (Amos iv. 6—9; Hag. i. 9; ch. iii. 10, scarcity implied). 2. Withholding the power to enjoy the gifts which God does bestow. It may be the food of a wealthy invalid (Eccles. vi. 1, 2) or the money of a miser haunted by fear of the workhouse (Job xx. 22). The loss may be in the spiritual sphere—the power of receiving impressions of truth and duty may have been "taken away" (Matt. xiii. 12—15), because sinned away. The talents of an ungodly minister may be rather a curse than a blessing to him and to his flock, just as the blessings pronounced in words by these ungodly priests (Numb. vi. 22—26) may have become practically curses to the people. 3. Blessings themselves may be turned into curses. Illust.: The high wages of the working classes in recent years, and the general prosperity of the country, leading to a great increase of extravagance, self-indulgence, and intemperance. The blessing of enjoying free-will and the power of self-guidance and control may become a most terrible curse when we "lean on our own understanding" and pursue "a way which seemeth right" in our eyes, but the end whereof is death (Prov. xiv. 12; Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12). Our highest privileges may

thus become curses to us, as were the Christian profession of Ananias and the apostleship of Judas. Even Christ may become "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" (1 Pet. ii. 6-8; John ix. 40), and his ministers "a savour from death unto death" (2 Cor. ii. 16). As John Howe says, "When the gospel becomes deadly to a man, that is a most terrible sort of death; to die by a gospel plague is a most terrible way of dying."

Vers. 6, 7.—*The qualifications and objects of Christian ministers.* Aaron and the original priests of the house of Levi are here held up as a pattern to their degenerate descendants. Reference is made to the higher departments of the priest's work, for teaching is a nobler work than sacrificing, even according to a divinely appointed and typical ritual. Allusions to this work of teaching by priests or Levites may be found in Lev. x. 11; Deut. xxxiii. 10; 2 Chron. xv. 3; xvii. 8, 9; Neh. viii. 9; Micah iii. 11, etc. This work, being common to Jewish priests and Christian ministers, makes the application we have given to the words quite legitimate. We are reminded of the following qualifications and aims essential for a minister of Christ.

I. A MESSAGE FROM GOD. "He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." We are sent to the world by our Divine Master with definite instructions. There is a "glorious gospel of the blessed God committed to our trust." That gospel embodies the doctrines of "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints." If we have no definite gospel to preach, for which we are willing to contend, to suffer, and if needs be to die, we had better hold our peace, for we are not "messengers of the Lord of hosts." "Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing thou hast no tidings ready?" (2 Sam. xviii. 22); "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer. xxiii. 21). A self-styled ambassador, with no instructions from his monarch, would be an object hardly less pitiable and contemptible than a speaker arrogating the position of Christ's minister, but quite uncertain as to what to speak in Christ's Name. The burden of our message is not, "Thus I think;" but, "Thus saith the Lord;" "Hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches." Christ bids us to teach men "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." When men gather around us they should be able to say, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." We are thus reminded of the need of: 1. Careful study of the Law of God, like Ezra (vii. 6, 10), Daniel (ix. 2), Timothy (1 Tim. iv. 13). We must be scribes "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," lest we should misread and misunderstand our message. 2. Of close communion with God; for errors that arise from sources that are spiritual may be more dangerous than those that are merely intellectual (see John iii. 20; v. 44; vii. 17; viii. 43; xii. 42, 43; Heb. iii. 12).

II. FIDELITY IN DELIVERING IT. We learn this from: 1. The unalterable claims of truth (ver. 6). All truth has the authority of a law. We must be prepared to teach others and to learn for ourselves that rather than deny God by a lie in business or any sphere of life, it would be better to be burned alive. A martyr's spirit is essential to a minister's character. If this is true of us, we may urge the same on our hearers, for there are no two standards of morality, one for the clergy the other for the laity. All are required to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and therefore never to "hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18). The urgent duty of fidelity on the part of Christ's ministers is seen further because of: 2. Our responsibility as "stewards of the mysteries of God." So far as those "mysteries," first revealed to the world by inspired apostles, are understood by us, we are stewards of them. And "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2). We are to "keep knowledge" for those who at any time may "seek the law" at our mouths. If others teach "another gospel" which may be more popular and acceptable, we are to decline popularity, "not as pleasing men, but God which trieth the heart." "For if I pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ" (see Jer. xxiii. 28, 29; 2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 1, 2; Gal. i. 10; 1 Thess. ii. 4). 3. Our relation to the souls of our hearers. Their object should be to seek God's law from our lips that they may do it, and ours to turn them from iniquity. Our one object should be to declare the whole counsel of God so clearly, faithfully, and affectionately, that, whether men will hear or forbear, we shall be free from the blood of all. Elihu's words are an excellent motto for a preacher

(Job xxxiii. 3). The words, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue," suggest solemn thoughts as to fidelity on the part of preachers. What need of care, both in public and private, in dealing with "seeking" souls, to point them direct to Christ, and not to any ceremonies or sacraments (Acts xx. 20, 21; 1 Cor. ii. 1—5), lest at some critical point in their spiritual history our lips should fail to impart the "knowledge," "the law," the message from the Lord of hosts which they need, and they should be directed along a wrong track rather than in "the way everlasting." The sin of unfaithfulness is exposed in vers. 8, 9. Ministers may be "partial in the Law," e.g. winking at follies and sins fashionable among the rich, while severely condemning the sins of the poor, etc. But fidelity needs to be combined with discrimination (Mark iv. 33, 34; John xvi. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2; 2 Tim. ii. 15; Heb. v. 11, 12). "For as all men cannot dive and fetch precious stones from the deep, but he that is cunning and hath the art of it; so not all, but the wise can either teach or conceive the deep mysteries. First, children must be taught letters, then syllables, after words, then construction, and after all the matter."

III. A LIFE IN HARMONY WITH IT. "He walked with me in peace and equity." These words remind us of the essential elements of a truly consistent Christian life. There must be righteousness with God, bringing after it peace with God. This righteousness is twofold. 1. A justification, which makes us "accepted in the Beloved," and gives peace with God (Rom. v. 1; Eph. i. 6). 2. A right state of heart, a conscious integrity of purpose, which ensures our being "accepted of him," well pleasing to him, and which brings with it a still deeper and purer peace (Isa. xlvi. 18; Rom. xiv. 17, 18). God desires that we should live in his perfect peace and favour in order that we "might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life." Such peace and equity toward God will ensure the same blessings in relation to our fellow-men. This consistency of conduct is especially needed in the ministers of Christ. They must maintain this character in their homes (1 Tim. iii. 2—5), in the Church (1 Pet. v. 3), and in the world (1 Tim. iii. 7). The guilt and shame of inconsistent lives is exposed in vers. 8, 9, and is illustrated by the history of Eli's sons; 1 Sam. ii. 30 being fulfilled in them, and in these priests ("I have made you contemptible." They had said in their hearts, "The table of the Lord is contemptible;" so God would requite them "measure for measure"), and in all unfaithful ministers; who will be despised by the people they seek to conciliate and please.

IV. ZEAL FOR THE RECEPTION OF IT. By faithfully discharging the duties of his calling, Levi, i.e. the priesthood, "did turn many away from iniquity." In doing so he did nothing more than what the standing and vocation of the priest required. The knowledge communicated to the mind was to be imparted by the lips. Without zeal for the reception of the message, and love that seeks the salvation of souls by means of it, the knowledge and "the tongues" of preachers profit nothing. The charge given to Paul (Acts xxvi. 18) and to Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 5) applies to every "good minister of Jesus Christ." We are appointed as witnesses for God; as labourers together with God; as ambassadors to promote reconciliation with God. We are ministers of the good tidings of Christ; soldiers of Christ (to overcome men's "evil" by Christ's "good"). We are lights ("the lamp that burneth and shineth," John v. 35) to light men to Jesus Christ. We are fishers of men, that we may secure them for Christ; under-shepherds of souls, that we may keep them; watchmen, that we may warn them. Medately we may be said to be saviours of souls (Jas. v. 19, 20). So earnest should we be to secure this end, that our hearers should be able to say of us, as a plain woman did of Robert McCheyne of Dundee, "He seemed as though he were almost dyin' to have you converted." Such a ministry will secure its object (1 Tim. iv. 12—16). A painful contrast is suggested between this ideal of the ministry and our attainments in attempting to reach it. We should learn humility and be melted into penitence. For God holds us responsible for what we might have been and might have done after all that he has done for us—a truth we are reminded of by God's appeal in Isa. v. 4. But the lofty standard held out before us may also stimulate us to "forget the things that are behind," etc., and to make the aims of the Christ-like Apostle Paul our own (1 Cor. ix. 16—22; Col. i. 28, 29).

Vers. 10—16.—*The sin of conjugal unfaithfulness.* We here use the term

"unfaithfulness" in its widest sense, extending far beyond the sin of unchastity. We note—

I. UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD IS THE ROOT-SIN OF ALL OTHER FORMS OF INFIDELITY. The sins denounced in the earlier verses of this book are quite sufficient to account for the criminality here exposed. Those who profane the "covenant" and the "holiness" of God in their hearts, and who do not seek "to give glory" to his Name (ver. 2), are easily betrayed into glaring acts of wrong against the nearest and dearest on earth. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways," and those ways are all downward ways. The first sin of Adam and Eve led to mutual recrimination. Disobedience towards the heavenly Father paves the way for discord in the earthly home. "Therefore take heed to *your spirit*" (ver. 16).

II. THIS INFIDELITY SHOWED ITSELF IN TWO FORMS. 1. *In unlawful marriages.* (Ver. 11.) This was a proof of unfaithfulness both to the national covenant (Ezra ix. 10—12) and to God's purpose in marriage. Similar unfaithfulness shows itself under the Christian covenant when such precepts as 1 Cor. vii. 39 ("only in the Lord") and 2 Cor. vi. 14—18 are set at naught. For a Christian to marry an enemy of Christ, "a covetous person who is an idolater," or a slave of "the god of this world," is a breach of the sanctity of marriage. It tends to degrade it into a carnal union; it certainly grossly neglects its object as a spiritual bond, in which all material considerations are to be held as subordinate to that "great mystery," typical of the Divine union of Christ and his Church. By such sin a professed disciple of Christ virtually cuts himself off from the commonwealth of the saints, that he may join the congregation of the aliens. He thus exposes himself to the judgment of God, who will be impartial in his treatment of all classes, of those that lead into sin and those that are led (ver. 12; Job xii. 16), and who will accept no "offering," no outward service, that might be regarded as a blind to the eyes of the Judge, presented by a man who sought thus to compound for his sin (Prov. xxi. 27; xxviii. 9; Isa. i. 13—17; Amos v. 21—24). 2. *In ill treatment of their lawful wives.* This is the second form of unfaithfulness, and reminds us that "the way of sin is downhill, and one violation of the covenant is an inlet to another" (M. Henry). Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow in any form (unkindness or neglect, as well as adultery or divorce) is here condemned by the following considerations. (1) Religious services are marred by moral delinquencies (ver. 13). It is a terrible thing to send any soul weeping in its prayer to God, and really, if not intentionally, appealing to him for avengement. How much worse if that soul should be the partner of thy life! God seeks songs, not groans, in our services. He desires unity in the home, "that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. iii. 7). How, then, must he regard the prayers of a wife deprecating the unkindness of her husband! (2) God was a witness of every word and vow at the marriage ceremony. Through the following years he notes how those promises are kept. He is still a witness of every act of wrong on the part of either husband or wife. And he is "the avenger of all such" (1 Thess. iv. 6). (3) The tender relations cruelly violated. Aggravations of this sin are suggested by each of the terms, "companion," "wife of thy youth," "wife of thy covenant." (4) God's design in marriage (ver. 15). Polygamy is fatal to godly family life and training, and discord most perilous to it. (5) The infectious influence of sins. If we deal treacherously against our "brother" (ver. 10), we tempt him to act in a similar way. This is applicable to the influence of an unfaithful husband on his wife, or on other husbands or on the unmarried whom by his example he may debauch and destroy. The master and the scholar, the blind leader of the blind,—all shall fall into the ditch. (6) The Divine hatred which such sins incur (ver. 16). There are several things which we are expressly told in Scripture God hates (cf. Deut. xii. 31; xvi. 22; Prov. vi. 16—19; viii. 13; Isa. lxi. 8; Jer. xlv. 4). Among these things divorce and every other form of conjugal treachery and unfaithfulness are included. Men may make light of many of these sins, may patronize the criminals, and deride their censors. But see Luke xvi. 14, 15, and the lesson it suggests. What God hates may we dread, and seek never to be unjust in the least, lest we be unjust also in much!

Ver. 10.—*The brotherhood of men.* "Liberty, equality, fraternity," are Divine ideas, though men have sometimes striven to embody them in crude or even repulsive and brutal forms. Men are equals, inasmuch as they are all the creatures of the one

God who created them. The revelation of that Creator as "the Father of spirits" constitutes those created spirits into a brotherhood. From this fraternal relation the claim to liberty and more than liberty follows.

I. SOUND ETHICS MUST BE BASED ON A TRUE THEOLOGY. Our relations to men depend on our relation to God. Our treatment of them will vary with our conceptions of those relations. False views of God are fatal to consistent conduct towards our brethren. And though our ethics may be partially true, they will be practically powerless unless supported by "the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." Hence the practical impotence of heathen ethics, whether those of Socrates or of Confucius. We must recognize such truths as these: that we are creatures of the one God, "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways;" that we are pensioners on his bounty; that we are sinners dependent on his mercy; and that, nevertheless, we are children entitled to claim our place in his family. We shall then recognize that we are bound to treat all our fellow-creatures as members of the same family, sharing with us in the same bounty and mercy of the Father of all, "who willeth that all men should be saved." Jesus Christ, in whom that will is revealed, is the bond of unity, for "the Head of every man is Christ."

II. THERE IS A "COVENANT OF OUR FATHERS" MORE EXTENSIVE THAN THAT WHICH GOD MADE WITH THE JEWS. We can trace it back beyond Moses or Abraham to "our first father;" "for God hath made of one blood all nations of men;" "for we are also his offspring." The terms of this covenant are found in "the law written in our hearts." Hence moral law and Divine retribution are found beyond the limits of an inspired revelation. We see in the Bible illustrations of God's judgments denounced on: 1. The sins of the Hebrews against their own brethren; e.g. the re-enslavement of the freedmen (Jer. xxxiv.). 2. The crimes of Hebrews towards strangers, though they were heathens; e.g. Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites (2 Sam. xxi.), Zedekiah's perjury against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13). 3. The outrages of heathens upon their brother heathens, as when the King of Moab "burned the bones of the King of Edom into lime" (Amos ii. 1).

III. A SIN AGAINST A BROTHER IS A SIN AGAINST GOD, WHO MADE HIM A BROTHER. The warning of 1 Cor. viii. 12 is applicable beyond the limits of the Christian Church. It was a fearful prediction that "the brother shall betray the brother to death." Give to the term "brother" its Divine significance, and every act of treachery or unfaithfulness is seen to be odious to the Father of all. Hence the claims of truth towards our "neighbour, for we are members one of another;" of "all good fidelity" on the part of servants towards masters, "that they may adorn the doctrine of God;" of standing to our word, though it may be to our own hurt, that we may stand in the holy place of the Lord; of loving our enemies, that we may be children of our Father who is in heaven.

IV. THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD IS ONE GREAT MOTIVE FOR THE RIGHT TREATMENT OF HIS CHILDREN. Cruelty, tyranny, slavery, and every form of social wrong would then be banished from the family of God, the brotherhood of men. War would be as intolerable as fighting in the family circle. Punishment of offending brothers would only be inflicted under a grave sense of our responsibility towards their Father and ours. Practical benevolence would be inspired by God's love to us (1 John iii. 17). And as Abraham interceded for the preservation of the heathen Sodomites, so should we, by prayers and labours, seek the salvation of the whole nature ("spirit and soul and body," 1 Thess. v. 23) of those children of God who are still lost to the Father's home.

Notice, in conclusion, how the fuller revelation of the Fatherhood of God in Jesus Christ, and our adoption in him, gives power and pathos to all the truths we have mentioned and the motives to brotherly kindness we have enforced (1 John iv. 9—11). The knowledge of such a Father should inspire our hearts with the most tender compassion towards our brethren who know him not.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*The cursing of our blessings.* The direct address of this verse is to the priestly class, whose irreverence and indifference were so clearly shown in their offering

the people's unworthy sacrifices, without attempting to reprove them, or endeavouring to awaken them to worthier and more spiritual views of sacrifice. When the ministry has become a fountain and a support of religious negligence and formality, the nation is placed in extreme peril, and severe providential dealings for the national and the priestly humiliation may be expected. The Divine threatening here is, "I will curse your blessings." This may mean either of three things; it may, quite possibly, include all three. It may mean, "I will turn the gifts of the people into curses." Or, "I will make the harvest of your work in the fields a failure and a curse instead of a blessing." Or, "I will make the blessing which you priests pronounce upon the people prove a curse to them." It should, however, be noticed that we now use the term "curse" with a connotation which is much more severe than that of Malachi. Our word "denunciation" would better fit the prophet's meaning.

I. **TURNING THE PEOPLE'S GIFTS INTO CURSES.** The priests received tithes, portions of the sacrifices, and offerings. God's judgment on the irreverent priests would come in limitation of tithes, disease from eating of the sick beasts offered as sacrifices, and the worthlessness of the offerings; for he who could give a mean thing to God would be sure to give mean things to his servants. Let God withdraw his added blessing, and our very "good things" fail to do us good. The psalmist recognizes this by praying that God would curse the blessings of his enemies (see Ps. lxxix. 22). This is the permanent truth for all the ages, "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." Illustrate by the "little book" of Revelation, which was sweet to the taste, but bitter to the soul.

II. **TURNING THE HARVEST OF TOIL INTO A CURSE.** (Ver. 3.) What a blessing the harvest of the fields is, let the Harvest Home testify. These priests and Levites were compelled to go to their homes, and try and gain a living by the tillage of their land. But the judgment of God on irreverence and indifference would follow them thero, and make their harvest a "heap." They would find that, whatever they touched, there was no Divine blessing on their work.

III. **TURNING THE PRIESTLY BLESSING OF THE PEOPLE INTO A CURSE.** The words of the priestly blessing are given in Numb. vi. 23—27. It is the deepest view of this Divine threatening to see it to mean this—The blessings which you, negligent and irreverent priests, pronounce in your formal way shall break in curses upon the heads of the people.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Judgments recalling covenant obligations.* Ver. 3 gives the great feature of God's judgment, first as a fact, and then by a figure. The Levites might shirk their temple duties, and go off to their fields; but God's hand would be upon them there; he would "corrupt" the seed they sowed, so that their harvest would be a failure. And so they would stand before the people impoverished, disgraced, and contemptible; with the stamp of failure on everything they touched. A recent account of the ceremony connected with the recovery of a Brahmin who had broken his caste explains the Eastern custom indicated in this verse. One part of the ceremony was the plastering of his entire body, except his eyes, with filth; he was then plunged into the river, and when the filth was washed away, the man was restored. The idea of ver. 4 is that this Divine judgment on unfaithful Levi must take the place of the covenant of life and peace which God had made with Levi, and would gladly have kept with his descendants. "I gave to Levi (that is, to you, the priestly tribe) a pledge of favour; but you have forfeited it, and it is now therefore turned into a threat of reprobation for your sins. No longer a covenant of peace, but of woe."

I. **JUDGMENT IS GOD'S STRANGE WORK.** It has not been sufficiently noticed, that God never threatens without indication of deep feeling of regret that he should be compelled to threaten. This may be illustrated from every part of Scripture, and especially in Divine dealings with the antediluvians, the Sodomites, the Israelites, and the Ninevites. The key-note is given in this exclamation, "Have I any pleasure at all in the death of the wicked?" God is most unworthily misrepresented when he is thought of as punishing in a spirit of coldness and indifference. To judge and afflict is holiest pain to him.

II. **JUDGMENT IS GOD'S NECESSARY WORK.** Punishment belongs to moral discipline.

It is an essential feature of it. It is part of all paternity. It is involved in the trust of childhood. God could not be his own Divine self if he did not punish. To let sin go would be unworthy of God. Father or King, he must be severe on wrong-doers.

III. THREATENING OF JUDGMENT IS GOD'S HUMBLING WORK. God always threatens before punishing. Threatening recalls obligations. Recalling obligations sets conduct in contrast with duty, and humbles us in the dust. Nothing bows us into penitence like seeing before us what we pledged ourselves to be, and being forced to place beside it what we are.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The double feature of a Jehovah-covenant.* The covenant was made with the tribe of Levi; and the precise terms here referred to occur in the renewal of covenant with Phinehas, "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (Numb. xxv. 12, 13). A covenant is a mutual engagement entered into by two parties. Each party takes pledges; and each is exonerated from keeping his pledge if the other party breaks his. Too often the Divine covenant is treated as if it only involved God's putting himself under pledge of service to us. The truth needs to be emphasized that the covenant includes our pledge of faithful service to him. And this is true of the new covenant, sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ.

I. JEHOVAH'S PLEDGE TO LEVI. "My covenant was with him of life and peace." There is some reason for thinking that, before the Sinaitic revelation was made, the tribe of Levi provided the moral and religious teachers of the Israelites. They were designated for the special work of the priesthood, but the Divine covenant took a special shape in consequence of the loyalty and zeal of the Levites in the matter of the golden calf; and of Phinehas in vindicating the Divine claim to moral purity. God pledged two things: (1) "life," or permanence; and (2) "peace," or prosperity. Security that the honour and usefulness of the position should be quietly maintained. There is a Divine side to every covenant. God condescends to pledge himself to men. He promises his providings, preservings, guidings, redeemings, sanctifyings. In the new covenant, in the hands of the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, all the old terms of covenant are renewed, and the special pledge of salvation from sin is added. He who has begun a good work in us is pledged to perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ.

II. LEVI'S PLEDGE TO JEHOVAH. This side of covenant seldom receives sufficient attention. The Levites gave themselves to Jehovah's service; they pledged themselves to devote their lives to the services of his sanctuary, the teaching of his truth, and the upholding of his honour. So far as the early Levites were typified in Phinehas, they kept their pledge. Their personal characters honoured the covenant (ver. 6). Their steadfastness in duty, their cherished sense of right, and their active ministry against all iniquity, maintained the pledge of the covenant. Then how striking is the contrast suggested between the Levites of the early times and the Levites of Malachi's days! Their broken pledge meant that God was relieved of all obligation to keep his pledge to them.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*The active influence of the steadfast man.* Levi is taken as the type of such a man. The man who walks with God in peace and equity cannot fail to exert a strong personal influence. He will "turn many from iniquity." The point of this sentence is that active influence for good is exerted by passive goodness. Men are powers by being established characters. Steadfastness is ministry. If it be so, then there are more workers for God than come into usual calculation. Priests and clergy have their power in what they *are*—in cultured, sanctified character—quite as truly as in Divine endowments and in trained efficiencies.

I. THE STEADFAST MAN EXERTS ACTIVE POWER OF REPROACH. He need utter no word; his steadfast goodness speaks loudly enough. There is no reproach comes to the evil liver like the simple presence of the good liver. Nothing shamed into silence the foulness of old prison scenes like the simple presence of the saintly Mrs. Fry. And in sublimer ways the truth is illustrated in the case of our Lord. The devils that possessed men felt the reproach of his simple presence, and cried out in their alarm. Every one of us who stands firm to righteousness and equity is actively reproving the unsteadiness and evil that are daily around us.

II. THE STEADFAST MAN EXERTS THE ACTIVE POWER OF EXAMPLE. The imitative faculty of man is more influential than we are wont to think. Everybody is disposed to make models. And all persons are materially helped by having high models of virtue in their spheres. Every individual has a sphere of influence. Within that sphere his example is an active power. We are all *ideals* to some one. Then "what manner of persons ought we to be?"

III. THE STEADFAST MAN EXERTS A POSITIVE POWER ON MEN'S WILLS. To see a man who can stand fast to righteousness actually strengthens the decision and resolve of others. In it is the mastery of the tempter's lie that we cannot hope to be good. Our wills are weakened by the fear that goodness is unattainable, and it is of no use to try to be good. Every steadfast man proves that man can will the good and do it, and that God stands by such a man in his resolve.

IV. THE STEADFAST MAN EXERTS A POSITIVE SAVING INFLUENCE. He "turns men from iniquity." He cannot leave wrong-doers alone. If the priests of Malachi's time had been steadfast men, they would soon have turned the worshippers from the iniquity of bringing the lame and sick for sacrifice.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*Reasonable expectations of God's ministers.* "The priest's lips should keep knowledge." The ideal priest is here characterized, not by ceremonial exactitude, but by moral integrity. Sacrificing is not so essential as religious knowledge, sound learning, and wholesome teaching. The proper expectation of God's ministers is that they will tell God's will to the people, not only because they *know* it, but even more because they *keep* it. In our religious teachers we look for adequacy of knowledge, and adequacy of experience.

I. ADEQUACY OF KNOWLEDGE. In some countries, and in some ages, the sacred ministry has been the chief source of secular knowledge for the people. That is not the case now, and in civilized countries. But still God's ministers need to be abreast, and to keep abreast, of all that is thought and known in their day, because to them is entrusted the work of conserving the Divine element in all knowledge, and the Divine relation to everything discovered. Unless ministers have adequate knowledge, they occupy a lower plane than the secular teachers, and fail to influence the higher range of students with Divine claims, truths, and principles. To put it in another way—The ministry must be on the level of the people if it is to sympathize with them; but the ministry must be in intelligence and knowledge above the people, if it is to lift the people to higher things. Two points may be illustrated. 1. The ministers should gain knowledge *as men can gain it*. 2. The ministers should gain knowledge *as spiritual men only can gain it*. It is that spiritually acquired knowledge that is the minister's true efficiency; and more especially that spiritual knowledge as it relates to the mysteries of the sacred Word.

II. ADEQUACY OF EXPERIENCE. There is book-knowledge, and there is experimental knowledge. It may be argued that for the common, everyday relations and duties of life, experience is a more valuable and practical teacher than books can be. It is certainly true that, for the ministry, experience is the essential thing. A man can only speak with power when "he has tasted and handled and felt the good word of life." The people have confidence in the teacher who has been taught of God in the discipline of life. What needs to be pointed out is that these two adequacies are not antagonistic. In their harmonious culture lies the true power.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Unfaithfulness to God involves injury to our brethren.* This verse begins a new subject, and it might have headed a new chapter. Answering to the indifference shown in regard to Divine worship was an indifference in regard to moral and family relations. Loose worship and loose social morality usually go together. Let men become careless about God's claims, and they will be found careless about marriage relations, and will lightly do wrong by the wives of their youth, in the mastery of their self-indulgence. Ezra and Nehemiah had to deal very sternly with the social evils arising from the ready divorce of Jewish wives for the sake of heathen wives. Malachi begins his expostulations on this matter by putting the people in mind that they owned one God and Father, in opposition to the idols of the heathen, and therefore should deal with one another as brethren. By the marriages with strangers they

were dealing falsely and injuriously with their brethren and countrymen, by ill treating their daughters whom they had taken in marriage.

I. **BREAKING GOD'S COVENANT BREAKS IT FOR OTHERS.** Illustrate by the case of the golden calf. Those who took no part in the sin had to take part in the penalty. It is the bitterness of all wrong-doing that we can never keep its consequences to ourselves. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

II. **UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD MAKES INJURY TO OUR BROTHER BY BEING A BAD EXAMPLE.** Every man is bound to help his brother to be good. It is often shown that every man is bound to aid his brother in distress. It is not so often shown that every man has a claim on his brother, that he should help him to goodness. If a man does wrong, is unfaithful to God, he actually injures his brother by depriving him of his rights in his good example. Constantly we find wrong-doing excused by examples of wrong-doing. Sinners defraud their neighbours of their rights.

III. **UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD MAY LEAD TO POSITIVE ACTS OF INJURY TO OUR BRETHREN.** The man who is strong enough to oppose God is usually masterful enough to injure his fellow. He who does not regard God is not likely to regard man. The love of God carries the love of man; the revolt against God is sure to involve the loosening of humanities.—R. T.

Ver. 11.—*Worship spoiled by the tears of the injured.* The divorced and abandoned wives went to the courts of the temple "with tears, with weeping, and with crying." "Their wail of lamentation mingled with the prayers and hymns of the sacrificing priests. How could the Lord 'regard the offering any more, or accept it at their hands,' when attended by such accompaniments?" The point forced on attention is this: Here were men bringing their sacrifices, and offering their prayers for God's blessing. And at the same time, here were the injured women praying against their prayers, and pleading that their worship should not be accepted. The tears were spoiling the worship. There is scarcely a thought more solemn and searching than the thought that few, if any, of our prayers go up to God unqualified and unchecked. We pray for, something prays against, and God withholds the blessing because the balance is in favour of the "against."

I. **WE MAY PRAY AGAINST OUR OWN PRAYERS.** It is said of St. Augustine that for some time he prayed, "Lord, convert me, but not yet." That was himself praying against himself. When duty prays one way and heart another; when we are not quite sure whether we want what we ask for; and when we are careless about receiving the answer,—we really pray against our own prayers. God may see our real prayer to be something quite other than our words.

II. **OTHERS MAY BE PRAYING AGAINST OUR PRAYERS.** This may be done unreasonably, and then God makes the prayer against strengthen the prayer for. Or it may be done reasonably, as when the cry of the widow, the fatherless, the divorced wife, the sweated workman, or the neglected sufferer, goes up to God against us. It would be well sometimes to ask ourselves whether there can be anything praying against our prayers.—R. T.

Ver. 15.—*God served by our meeting family obligations.* This verse is difficult to paraphrase. 'Speaker's Commentary' renders thus: "And hath no one acted thus (in putting away his wife) who yet had a remnant of sense in him?" The prophet makes the people say this in excuse of their conduct, and in allusion to the Patriarch Abraham, who put away his wife Hagar. Wordsworth puts the sentence interrogatively, "And did not one (Abraham) do it (i.e. put away his wife Hagar), and yet he had a remnant of the spirit?" The answer to the question is that Abraham was justified because he acted upon the special direction of God in seeking a seed within the covenant. But the people of Malachi's days were acting on pure self-willedness, and with no possible excuse of having received Divine directions. They were not serving God. God is served by the fulfilling of family obligations. He cannot be served by the shirking of ordinary obligations at the instance of unbridled passion.

I. **FAMILY OBLIGATIONS SHOULD BE ENTERED UPON SERIOUSLY.** And seriously means with (1) due self-control; (2) quietly; (3) thoughtfully; (4) prayerfully.

Early marriages are natural, and may be prudent; but when they are the result of impulse, of wrong-doing, or of lightness and inconsiderateness, they are a most fruitful source of trouble. No marriage should be consummated unless upon it the Divine blessing can be honestly, sincerely, heartily, and hopefully asked.

II. FAMILY OBLIGATIONS SHOULD BE MAINTAINED WITH PATIENT PERSISTENCY. Much occurs in married life to knit hearts together; but much must necessarily occur which, if permitted, would drive hearts asunder. Bearing and forbearing have to be resolute work until they become easy work. And every triumph over self makes every new triumph easier. If each lives for the other, all goes well. If either lives for self, all goes ill. "Let none deal unfaithfully by the wife of his youth."

III. FAMILY RELATIONS SHOULD BE BROKEN ONLY WITH EXTREME PAIN. Cases do occur. But every one who is anxious for the moral well-being of the nation looks with extreme anxiety on the increasing readiness with which divorces are sought and granted.—R. T.

Ver. 17.—*The sin of confusing moral distinctions.* "Ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." Isaiah pleads in a similar way, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. v. 20). It seems that some, in the days of Malachi, answered his pleadings with insolent defiance, even daring to deny moral obligations altogether.

I. CALLING EVIL GOOD IS THE WAY TO EXCUSE OUR SINS. Daring men who are determined to "follow the devices and desires of their own hearts," will bravely say, "Evil, be thou my good." But the process of deterioration is usually slower and more subtle. We want to do wrong, and we begin to wish that it were not wrong. Then comes the doubt whether it is wrong. Then we begin to imagine that it is wrong only under particular circumstances. Then we find that our case does not come into the bad list. And the way is open to do the wrong under the shadow of our self-delusion that it really is good. There are family delusions that lead us to call evil good; society delusions; sectarian delusions; and personal delusions. These last are the most serious. A man can easily persuade himself that the pleasant is the right; and he may only mean the pleasant to the body. The pleasant to the soul, the pleasant because of God's benediction, helps to truer judgments.

II. CALLING GOOD EVIL IS THE WAY TO RUIN OUR SOULS. There is no hope for a man when he loses his sensitiveness to good, for with it goes his sensitiveness to God. A man is never lost while he can believe in goodness. There is anchorage in that. He is indeed driven with the wind and tossed hopelessly on the sea of life, if he ever comes to say, "All is evil;" "All is vanity and vexation of spirit;" "All men are liars;" "There is no good: there is neither good nor God." There is good, for there is God. He is God, and much that his creatures do bears the stamp of his goodness. Evil and good are contraries. Hope for humanity lies in their never getting confused.—R. T.

Vers. 1-3.—*Spiritual reformation.* "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you," etc. The grand subject we gather from these words is *spiritual reformation*. "Now, O ye priests." The priests are specially addressed and reproved, for they, whose mission it was to raise the people to true worship and to holiness, led them into sin. Notice—

I. THE NATURE OF THE SPIRITUAL REFORMATION REQUIRED. "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my Name, saith the Lord of hosts." From this language it would appear that true spiritual reformation involves two things. 1. *A practical application of the Word of God.* There should be right attention to it. That Word is not only to be heard, earnestly listened to, but to be laid to heart, which means practical attention. It is to be applied to correct the wrong that is in us, and to generate and develop the true. 2. *An entire dedication to the glory of God.* "To give glory unto my Name." All genuine spiritual reformation is implied in this—right attention to the Divine Word, right application of the Divine Word, and an entire dedication to the glory of God. This is a reformation not of

perchment but of principle, not of systems but of souls. It is in truth the only reformation worth having.

II. **THE URGENCY OF THE SPIRITUAL REFORMATION REQUIRED.** The neglect thereof incurs: 1. *A curse.* "I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings." "'I will curse your benedictions.' Not the personal advantages and perquisites enjoyed by the priests, but the blessings they pronounced upon the people. The service had been merely formal without any sort of reverence in it; the blessings they uttered should retributively be evacuated of all efficacy and should be a mere formula" (Dr. Dodds). What an awful thing to have blessings turned into curses! and yet if we are unregenerate and unrenewed this takes place by the very laws of our moral constitution. As hemlock turns even the sunbeam into poison, corrupt souls turn God's blessings into maledictions. 2. *A rebuke.* According to Keil, Ewald, and others, the expression, "Behold, I will corrupt your seed," should be, "Behold, I will rebuke your arms." Perhaps the idea is—I will wither your power, I will check the growth of your posterity. There is no true prosperity without spiritual reformation. 3. *Contempt.* "I will spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts." "The dung in the maw of the victims sacrificed on the feast-days. The maw was the perquisite of the priests (Deut. xviii. 3), which gives peculiar point to the threat here. You shall get the dung of the maw as your perquisite instead of the maw. And one shall take you away with it, i.e. you shall be taken away with it, it shall cleave to you wherever you go" (Moore). "Dung shall be thrown in your faces, and ye shall be taken away, i.e. removed out of the way, as dung would be, dung-begrimed as ye shall be (1 Kings xiv. 10; Jer. xvi. 4; xxii. 19)" (Fausset).

CONCLUSION. Are we the subjects of this spiritual reformation? Have we been renewed in the spirit of our minds? "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."—D. T.

Vers. 4—9.—*The minister of Divine truth.* "My covenant was with him of life and peace," etc. We have here the minister of Divine truth as he always should be, and as he often is—

I. **THE MINISTER OF DIVINE TRUTH AS HE ALWAYS SHOULD BE.** We learn: 1. *That he should be a man divinely called.* "Ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts." What was the Divine commission to the priesthood? Here it is: "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him" (Numb. xxv. 11—13). The Aaronic priests were called of God to be the ministers of life and peace to the people. Two of the greatest blessings of being. What is existence without life—intellectual and spiritual life? and what is life without peace—peace with self, the universe, and with God? 2. *That he should be a man of profound reverence.* "I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my Name." The priest was not only to be entirely free from a volatile and frivolous spirit, but to be profoundly reverential, pervaded by a holy awe. He was to be impressed with the solemnity of the commission with which he was entrusted. 3. *That he should be a man of moral truthfulness.* "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips." The moral laws which he has to inculcate and administer are to be regal forces in his own soul, and embodied in his life. He is to be free from the control of all shams and theories, a man of stern, moral realities. 4. *That he should be a man of practical devotion.* "He walked with me in peace and equity." His life should be a walk; there should be progress in it; he should walk with God, and walk with God in "peace and equity." 5. *That he should be a man of the highest usefulness.* "And did turn many away from iniquity." Iniquity is man's curse and ruin; to turn him from that is to save him, and that is the work of the true minister. The commission given to Paul was to "turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxvi. 18). 6. *That he should be a man of the highest intelligence.* "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." Being a "messenger of the Lord of hosts," he is to understand

and appreciate the wonderful message, and give it from his own mouth to the people. Such is what Levi, as an ideal priest was and did, and every minister of Divine truth must be and do the same. What a high standard to aim at! How its light condemns and abashes most of us!

II. THE MINISTER OF DIVINE TRUTH AS HE OFTEN IS. The false minister is here represented: 1. *As swerving from the right.* "But ye are departed out of the way." Ye are very different in your conduct from the ideal priest and even from your actual predecessors in office; your careless teaching, your superficial dealing, your contentment with formulas and external rites, and your personal laxity, have given men a prejudice against religion altogether. Instead of helping men to accept the truth and live godly lives, you have caused even those who wished to do so to take offence and turn away. A sceptical age is necessarily the result of externality and heartlessness in the religious teachers of previous generations. 2. *As leading the people astray.* "Ye have caused many to stumble at the Law." Not only by their speech, but by their conduct, do many who profess to be ministers of God's Word lead the people to stumble. Their inconsistent life, their theological jargon, their exclusive spirit, lead the people to "stumble" at Divine things. 3. *As perverting the truth.* "Ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi." How many there are who tamper with the Word of God, who employ it to support some favourite prejudice, or to buttress their little sect! How far, for example, is our conventional theology from being like the theology of Christ! 4. *As becoming contemptible.* "Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people." Ministers who hunt after honour, popularity, gain, become contemptible in the estimation of intelligent and unsophisticated souls. The pulpit of England is certainly sinking into contempt with the English people. This is a sad calamity. The decrease in the number of those who attend churches, compared with the increase of population; the growth of a literature in thorough antagonism to the spirit and aims of Christianity; and the fact that the great bulk of the reading and thinking men of England stand aloof from all Churches, plainly show that the pulpit of England is sinking into popular contempt. Primates and prelates and preachers are treated with ridicule in nearly all popular literature and scientific discussion. A more terrible sign of the times I know not than this. The "salt" of the pulpit has lost its "savour," and it is being trodden underfoot with disdain and contempt. Trodden underfoot by our authors, scientists, artisans, tradesmen, and merchants. Gracious Heaven, raise up men for our pulpits, so high in culture, so gifted in faculty, so Christly in love, so invincible in duty, so independent in action, that they shall not only counteract the downward tendency to ruin, but shall attract to it with reverence the intellect of the age!—D. T.

Vers. 10—12.—"One Father." "Have we not all one Father," etc.? "This section," says Keil, "does not stand in any close connection with the preceding one. It does not furnish an example of the stumbling upon the Law mentioned in ver. 8; nor of the violation of the covenant of the fathers (ver. 10); or of the marriage covenant (ver. 14), appended to the neutralizing of the covenant of Levi on the part of the priests (vers. 8 and 4). For there is no indication in vers. 10—16 that the priests gave any impulse through their bad teaching to the breaches of the Law which are here condemned; and the violation of the covenant of the fathers and of the marriage covenant forms no more a thought by which the whole is ruled, than the violation of the covenant with Levi, in the previous section. The prophet rather passes over with ver. 10 to a perfectly new subject, viz. the condemnation of marriages with heathen women." From this passage the three following truths are deducible.

I. THAT THE GREAT GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR BUT THE COMMON FATHER OF MANKIND. "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" It is clear that the one Father does not mean either Adam the progenitor of the race, or Abraham the Father of the Israelitish nation, but Jehovah himself. He is the Creator of all things, but not the Father of all things. We could not regard him as the Father of the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the oceans, the stars, though he is the Creator of all these. All things are created by him; but he is the Father of human souls. "We are all his offspring." This relationship implies two things. 1. *A resemblance in nature.* Children resemble their parents in nature and attributes. All intelligent

moral beings bear a resemblance to the Infinite. They are spiritual in essence, moral in sentiment, free in action; they are formed in his image. 2. *The existence of parental sympathy.* While a human father has the ordinary sensibilities of a man, he has the peculiar affections of a parent, a tender interest in his offspring, which he feels for no other object in the world. So God is a Father. Whilst he has an interest in all the works of his hands, he has a special interest in a human soul. 3. *The obligation of filial devotion.* Filial love and loyalty raise and bind the souls of children to their parents. Such is the feeling that human spirits should cherish and develop in relation to God. Man is the only creature on this round earth that has the capacity, and consequently the obligation, to feel, entertain, or develop this filial affection. He then who is the Creator of all things in the world is the Father of man; all are his creatures, but men are his children. Sublime distinction this!

II. THAT THE FACT OF THIS UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP IS A MIGHTY ARGUMENT WHY MAN SHOULD DO NO WRONG AGAINST EITHER HIS FELLOW-CREATURE OR HIS GOD. "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" Two remarks are suggested concerning the wrong with which the Israelites are here charged. 1. *It was a wrong committed against mankind.* The special wrong referred to is the contraction of marriage with a heathen woman, and the putting away the Israelitish wife. This is the treachery and the "abomination" referred to. The repudiation of Jewish wives and the adoption of heathen. 2. *This wrong against mankind was a wrong against God himself.* "Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god." God's law with the Jewish people was that they were to be a separate people, separate from all the other people of the earth, and they were to sustain their distinction by not intermarrying with other peoples. But now, at the period when the prophet wrote, they were doing so, and that to a great extent (see Neh. xiii. 23—29; Ezra ix. 1—4). It is a universal truth that a wrong against man is a wrong against God; to sin against our fellow-creatures is to sin against God himself; and this is an outrage against the relationship which we all sustain to him, not only as our common Creator, but our common Father. We are all children of the same Father, and therefore we should be fair in our dealings one with another. We should love one another, and co-operate with one another for our mutual advantage in all that is virtuous and noble. "Have we not all one Father?" Wherefore, then, should we cheat, hate, deceive, oppress, murder one another? How monstrous!

III. THAT THE PERPETRATION OF WRONG EXPOSES THE DOER TO THE MOST LAMENTABLE RESULTS. "The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the Lord of hosts. And this have ye done," etc. This, perhaps, means utter extermination. "The master and the scholar," some translate, "him that watcheth and him that answereth." In "master" the special reference is to the priest who ought to have taught the people piety, but who led them into evil; in "scholar," to the people themselves, who were the pupils of the priests. The idea is that both the priests and the people will suffer on account of the wrong they were committing. Great distress had come upon them already. "This have ye done" (see Ezra x.; Neh. xiii. 10—13). Again, this is only a shadowy picture of the evils that ever flow from wrong. "Sin brought death into our world, and all our woe." It is sin that kindles and feeds the flames of retribution.

CONCLUSION. Haste the time when men shall realize the fact that they are all children of one Father, so that all wrongs against one another shall cease, and the spirit of universal brotherhood prevail!

"A happy bit hame this auld world would be,
If men when they're here could make shift to agree,
An' ilk said to his neighbour, in cottage an' ha',
'Come, gi'e me your hand—we are brethren a'."

"I ken na why ane wi' anither should fight,
When to 'gree would make a' body cosie an' right;
When man meets wi' man, 'tis the best way ava,
To say, 'Gi'e me your hand—we are brethren a'."

"My coat is a coarse one an' yours may be fine,
And I maun drink water while you maun drink wine;
But we both ha'e a leal heart, unspotted to shaw,
'Sae gi'e me your hand—we're brethren a'."

"Ye would scorn to do fausely by woman or man;
I haud by the right, aye, as well as I can.
We are aye in our joys, our affectionous an a',
'Come, gi'e me your hand—we are brethren a'."

(R. Nicol.)

D. T.

Vers. 14—16.—*The Divine institution of marriage.* "Yet ye say, Wherefore?" etc. The subject of these verses is *the Divine institution of marriage*. In relation to this institution we observe—

I. THAT IT IMPLIES A LOVING UNION OF TWO, AND ONLY TWO, SOULS UNTIL DEATH. "Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one?" "Wife of thy youth." The Jews had ever been accustomed to marry very young, the husband often being not more than thirteen years of age, and the wife younger. "Thy companion;" not a slave, nor an inferior, but an equal and a friend. Love-companionship is the highest ideal of matrimony. "Wife of thy covenant." A relationship established by mutual agreement. Marriage (Prov. ii. 17) is called the covenant of God; it is so because he has ordained it. "Did not he make one?" Thine exclusively. "Yet had he the residue of the spirit," etc. Maurier and Hengstenberg explain this verse thus: "The Jews had defended their conduct by the precedent of Abraham, who had taken Hagar to the injury of Sarah his lawful wife. To this Malachi says, 'Now no one [ever] did so in whom there was a residue of intelligence [discriminating between good and evil], and what did the one [Abraham, to whom you appeal for support] do, seeking a godly seed? His object [viz. not to gratify passion, but to obtain the seed promised by God] makes the case wholly inapplicable to defend your position.' It is asked, 'And wherefore one?' Wherefore only Eve for Adam, Sarah for Abraham?" "Instead," says Dr. Henderson, "of forming two into one, the Creator might have given to Adam many wives. There was no lack of spiritual existence from which to furnish them with intelligent souls. When he gave to Eve such an existence he did not exhaust the universal fountain of being. There remained all with which the human race had been furnished throughout its generations. What, then, the prophet asks, was the design of the restriction? To this he replies—The securing of a pious offspring. Divorces and polygamy have ever been unfavourable to the education of children. It is only by the harmonious and loving attention bestowed by parents upon their children that they can be expected to be brought up in the fear of God. The reply bore hard upon the priests who had married idolatrous wives."

II. THAT IT HAS BEEN SADLY OUTRAGED IN ALL AGES. The Jews outraged it. The command here, "Take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth," implies this. They dealt "treacherously" against the wife of their youth by marrying others. "Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives" (Ezra x. 10). They do so also by putting them away—by divorce. "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts." This has been done in all ages. 1. Polygamy is an outrage on it. 2. Cruelty is an outrage on it. 3. Mutual unfaithfulness is an outrage on it. The Divine idea of marriage is that the two souls shall be one, so united in love, sympathy, aim, that the two would think, feel, and act as one. But how few amongst the million matrimonial alliances reach this ideal!

III. THAT OUTRAGE OF THIS INSTITUTION IS FRAUGHT WITH CALAMITOUS RESULTS. 1. *It is abhorrent to God.* "The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away." A separation of man and wife, a divorce, is abhorrent to the Almighty, although by the Law of Moses it was allowed because of the hardness of their hearts. 2. *It involves violence.* "For one covereth violence with his garment." Some suppose the garment here means the wife, and that the idea is that violence was done to her.

Others suppose it means the pretext they employed for doing so by the permission of Moses (Deut. xxiv. 1). Others suppose the garment means man's reputation, and that he would damage his influence by it. Whatever the particular meaning of the passage is, it is certain that the outrage of the institution of marriage is fraught with great evils.

CONCLUSION. An extract from my Marriage Service in the 'Biblical Liturgy' may not be out of place here. "Marriage is an institution of God: it accords with the dictates of nature and the laws of inspiration. It is coeval with human society; it was an essential ingredient in the happiness of Eden. It heightened, it perfected, the pure, fresh, and serene joys of that garden, the scene of every beauty and the temple of God. In mercy it has been perpetuated to the present hour as a social blessing to soothe and sustain our nature amidst the depressing circumstances of our fallen state. Jesus threw around this relationship a peculiar grandeur. He clothed it with sublimity: to his holy eye it was a holy thing; he ratified its contract, he guarded its obligations, he expounded its laws, he graced its celebration with his presence; the first miracle his sacred hands performed was at a bridal feast. The apostles caught the idea of their Master, and invested it with a mystic solemnity by representing it as a type of the substantial, invisible, and everlasting union existing between Christ and his Church. It involves the most tender, close, and lasting ties that can unite human beings together in this life. 'Therefore shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and they both shall become one flesh.' It combines the earthly interest, fortunes, and happiness of two; it may influence the destinies of many. The interests of the parties united, the triumphs of truth, and the upward progress of humanity are all dependent on the nuptial bond."—D. T.

Ver. 17.—*The words of scepticism.* "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" These words are directed against the spirit of scepticism and discontent which prevailed amongst the Israelites in the time of the prophets, and they lead us to offer two remarks on the words of scepticism.

I. **THEY ARE WORDS OF COMPLAINT AGAINST GOD.** "Ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord." This is what they said; this was perhaps their current talk. A very old topic of complaint was theirs. It means this: "Wherefore doth the wicked prosper?" Wherefore are the righteous afflicted? This was the chief problem of the Book of Job; this was the burden of Ps. lxxiii. Since vice is here triumphant and virtue oppressed, "Where is the God of judgment?" If there is a God who governs the world, his righteousness is not seen; on the contrary, he shows more favour to the evil than to the good. "Where is the God of judgment?" We want him to put an end to this state of things.

II. **THEY ARE WORDS UNGRATEFUL TO THE EAR OF GOD.** "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words." Observe: 1. *God hears the words of men.* Every syllable enters his ears; he understands our thoughts afar off. 2. *Sceptical words are offensive to him.* "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words." Wearied him with their ignorance, their falseness, their impiety. The creating and the supporting of a universe does not weary God, for he "fainteth not, neither is weary." But the endless chatterings of sceptical and discontented souls weary him. 3. *The authors of sceptical words are indifferent to this terrible fact.* "Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him?" They go on talking against God in their families, their clubs, in their public halls, in their workshops and their warehouses, and are utterly indifferent to the fact that their words are offensive to the ears of the All-hearing One.

CONCLUSION. "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Every idle word. Not merely the profane and impious language of the scoffer and blasphemous, but every idle word—words that have little or no meaning, the most airy words of wit and humour spoken in jest, not to delude or pain, but simply to please.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—Behold, I will send (*I send*) my messenger. God answers that he is coming to show himself the God of judgment and justice. Are they ready to meet him and to bear his sentence? Who this “messenger” is is disputed. That no angel or heavenly visitant is meant is clear from historical considerations, as no such event took place immediately before the Lord came to his temple. Nor can Malachi himself be intended, as his message was delivered nearly four hundred years before Messiah came. The announcement is doubtless founded upon Isa. xl. 3, and refers to the same person as the older prophet mentions, who is generally allowed to be John the Baptist, the herald of Christ’s advent (Matt. xi. 10; John i. 6). Prepare the way before me. The expression is borrowed from Isaiah, *loc. cit.* (comp. also lvi. 14; lxii. 10). He prepares the way by preaching repentance, and thus removing the obstacle of sin which stood between God and his people. Whom ye seek. When ye ask, “Where is the God of judgment?” Shall suddenly come to his temple. The Lord (*ha-Adon*) is Jehovah, as in Exod. xxiii. 17; Isa. i. 24; iii. 1, etc. There is a change of persons here, as frequently. Jehovah shall unexpectedly come to his temple (*τὸν ναὸν αὐτοῦ*) as King and God of Israel (comp. Ezek. xliii. 7). There was a literal fulfilment of this prophecy when Christ was presented in the temple as an infant (Luke ii. 22, etc.). Even the messenger of the covenant. He is identified with the Lord; and he is the covenant angel who guided the Israelites to the promised land, and who is seen in the various theophanies of the Old Testament. The Divinity of Messiah is thus unequivocally asserted. In him are fulfilled all the promises made under the old covenant, and he is called (Heb. ix. 15) “the Mediator of the new covenant.” Some render, “and the Messenger,” etc., thus distinguishing the Angel of the covenant from the forerunner who prepares the way. But this is already done by the expressions, “My Messenger,” and “the Lord.” Whom ye delight in. Whose advent ye expect with eager desire.

Ver. 2.—Who may abide the day of his coming? They had expected him to come and judge the heathen; the prophet warns them that they themselves shall be first judged (comp. Amos v. 18). “Malachi, like John the Baptist, sees the future Judge in the present Saviour” (Wordsworth); Joel ii. 11. Who shall stand? Who can stand up under the burden of this judgment?

The Vulgate Version, *Quis stabit ad videndum eum?* points to the brightness of his presence, which eye of man cannot endure. Like a refiner’s fire, which separates the precious metal from the refuse. So the Lord at his coming shall sever the good among men from the evil (Isa. i. 25; Jer. vi. 29; Zech. xiii. 9). Like fullers’ soap; Septuagint, *ὡς ποῖα πλυνόντων*, “as the grass of washers;” Vulgate, *quasi herba fullonum*. What is to be understood exactly by the “soap” (*borith*), washing-herb, is not known. Probably the ashes of some plant yielding a lye, like carbonate of soda, are meant. Such plants are met with on the shores of the Mediterranean and Dead Seas, and at this day large quantities of alkalis are extracted from them and exported in different directions (see Tristram, ‘Nat. Hist. of the Bible,’ p. 480, etc.; comp. Isa. iv. 4; Jer. ii. 22). The Lord shall wash away all that is filthy (comp. Matt. iii. 10, 12).

Ver. 3.—He shall sit. As a judge. The prophet confines himself to the first of the two images presented in the preceding verse. The sons of Levi. Especially the priests, who ought to set an example, and teach holiness and obedience. Thus judgment should begin at the house of God (Ezek. ix. 6; 1 Pet. iv. 17). The purifying consists not only in exterminating the evil, but also in correcting and improving all who are not wholly incorrigible. We may call to mind Christ’s purging of the temple, and his denunciations of the teaching body among the Jews, and see herein his way of trying his ministers in all ages, that they may shine like lights in the world, and adorn the doctrine of God in all things. That they may offer (*and they shall be offering*) unto the Lord an offering (*minchah*) in righteousness. The pure sacrifice shall then be offered with a pure heart. As firstfruits of this improved condition, we read in Acts vi. 7, “A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Ver. 4.—The offering of Judah and Jerusalem. When the purification has taken place, and the priests offer pure worship, then the sacrifices of the whole nation will be acceptable. Judah and Jerusalem represent the kingdom of the Messiah; for salvation is of the Jews, and the gospel was first preached at Jerusalem. As in former (ancient) years. As in the days of Moses, David, and Solomon, or still earlier in the case of Abel, Noah, Abraham, and the patriarchs. (See the account of the ideal priesthood, ch. ii. 5, etc.) The prophet does not necessarily expect that the Mosaic ritual is to last for ever and to be maintained

throughout the world, but he employs the terms with which the Jewish people were conversant to express the worship of the new covenant (comp. ch. i. 11, and note there).

Vers. 5.—I will come near to you to judgment. They had asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" (ch. ii. 17). He tells them that his judgment shall extend beyond the Levites even unto all the people; they will then see whether, as they supposed, the evil went unpunished. The announcement applies especially to the circumstances of Malachi's time, though, of course, it has an extended reference. **Swift witness.** God's judgments fall swiftly and unexpectedly; and when they fall the sinner is at once convicted, and no concealment, excuse, or subterfuge is possible. "How terrible is that judgment," says St. Jerome, "where God is at once Witness and Judge!" **Sorcerers;** τὰς φαρμακούς (Septuagint); *maleficio* (Vulgate); see Exod. vii. 11; xxii. 18; Deut. xviii. 10. The Jews had grown familiar with magical arts during the Captivity; that they practised them later we learn from Acts viii. 9; xiii. 6. **Adulterers.** They who were ready to marry heathen wives would not be likely to be restrained by any law from gratifying their passions. **False swearers;** Septuagint, "those who swear falsely by my name," which is from Zech. v. 4 (comp. Lev. xix. 12; and see note on Zech. v. 3). **Oppress the hireling.** Defraud him of his just wages (see Deut. xxiv. 14, 15; Jas. v. 4). **The widow, and the fatherless** (Exod. xxii. 22; Deut. xxiv. 17). **Turn aside (bow down) the stranger;** Septuagint, "pervert the judgment of the stranger;" Vulgate, *opprimunt peregrinum* (Exod. xxii. 21; Deut. xxvii. 19; Amos v. 12). **And fear not me.** This was the root of all the evil.

Vers. 6.—For I am the Lord, I change not; or, *Jehovah, I change not.* This is to show that God performs his promises, and effectually disposes of the allegation in ch. ii. 17, that he put no difference between the evil and the good. The great principles of right and wrong never alter; they are as everlasting as he who gave them. God here speaks of himself by his covenant name, which expresses his eternal, independent being, "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. i. 17). **Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.** Because God's eternal purpose stands good, and his "gifts and calling are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29), therefore the Israelites are indeed chastised and corrected, but not wholly consumed; they have a place and a nation, and the great promises made to their forefathers will all be fulfilled in due time (Jer. xxx. 11; Micah vii. 20). He calls them

"sons of Jacob," to remind them of the covenant made with their great ancestor, which was the portion of all true Israelites (comp. Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21). Orrelli would read, "Ye have not made an end," i.e. of your sins; so virtually the Septuagint, which joins this clause to the following verse. But the present text is most probably correct.

Vers. 7—12.—§ 2. God indeed is faithful to his promises, but the people's own conduct has occasioned the withholding of favours: they have been shamefully negligent in the matter of tithes and offerings; let them amend their practice, and they shall be blessed.

Vers. 7.—Ye are gone away (have turned aside) from mine ordinances. Disobedience was no new offence; they had always from early days been persistent in wickedness; and if the performance of God's sure promise was delayed, this was because they had not fulfilled the conditions on which rested its accomplishment. **Return unto me, and I will return unto you** (Zech. i. 3, where see note). Man must co-operate with God's preventing grace, and then God gives him further grace unto repentance and amendment. Here, if the people followed the preaching of the prophets and obeyed the promptings of the Holy Spirit, God promises to bless and save them. **Wherein shall we return?** Here is the Pharisaical spirit, as in ch. i. 6, etc. They do not acknowledge their offence; they consider that they are righteous and need no repentance.

Vers. 8.—Will a man rob God? The prophet shows the people how they have departed from God, in not keeping even the outward observances of religion. The word translated "rob," defraud, found also in Prov. xxii. 23, etc., is rendered in the Septuagint, *πρὸς τὴν*, "trip up," "supplant;" Vulgate, *si affligit homo Deum*, or, as St. Jerome first translated, "*si affligit homo Deum*," and referred the words to the crucifixion of our Lord. In tithes and offerings. These were due to the Lord, and therefore in withholding them they were defrauding not man but God. (For tithes, see Lev. xxvii. 30, etc.; Numb. xviii. 21. See the complaint of Nehemiah, ch. xiii. 10—12.) The "offering" meant is the heave offering, the breast and shoulder of the peace offering, which were the priests' portion (Exod. xxix. 27; Lev. vii. 14, 32—34; comp. Neh. x. 37—39).

Vers. 9.—Ye are cursed with a (the) curse. The effect of the curse was scarcity and barrenness, as we see from vers. 10—12 (comp. ch. ii. 2; Hag. i. 6). The Vulgate assumes the result: *In penuria vos maledicti estis*. The next clause gives the reason of the

course. **This whole nation.** Not individuals only, but the whole nation (he does not any longer call them God's people) were implicated in this sin. The LXX., reading differently, has, "The year is ended, and ye have brought," etc.

Ver. 10.—**All the tithes; the whole tithe**—not merely a portion of it. God is not served with partial service. **The storehouse.** The tithes were brought to the temple, and laid up in the chambers built to receive them (see Neh. x. 38, 39; xiii. 5, 12, 13; 2 Chron. xxxi. 11, 12). **That there may be meat in mine house.** That they who minister about holy things may live of the things of the temple (1 Cor. ix. 13; Numb. xvii. 21). **Prove me now herewith.** Do your part, perform your duties, and then see if I will not reward your obedience. **Open up the windows of heaven.** The expression implies not only the removal of drought by copious showers of rain, but the diffusion of heavenly blessing in large abundance. That there shall not be room enough to receive it; or, *unto superabundance*; Vulgate, *usque ad abundantiam*; Septuagint, *ὡς τοῦ ἰκανωθῆναι*, "until it suffice;" Syriac, "until ye say, It is enough." The Authorized Version retains the negation in the sentence, and perhaps comes nearest to the meaning of the original (comp. Luke xii. 17, 18).

Ver. 11.—**The devourer.** The locust (see Introduction to Joel, § I.). God would not only give a fruitful season, so that the crops sprang up well, but would guard them from everything that could injure them before they were gathered in. Septuagint, *διαστέλω ὑμῖν εἰς βρώσιν*, which perhaps means, as Schleusner thinks, "I will give a charge unto consumption for your good," though Jerome renders, "dividam vobis cibos."

Ver. 12.—**Shall call you blessed; or, happy,** as ver. 15 (comp. Deut. xxxiii. 29; Zech. viii. 13, 23). **A delightful land; γῆ θελητή** (Septuagint); literally, *a land of good pleasure*—a land in which God is well pleased (comp. Isa. lxii. 4; Jer. iii. 19).

Vers. 13—18.—§ 3. *The impious murmuring of the people is contrasted with the conduct of those who fear God; and the reward of the pious is set forth.*

Ver. 13.—**Your words have been stout against me.** Ye have spoken hard words of me (comp. Jude 15, where we read of "the hard speeches (σκληράν) which ungodly sinners have spoken against" God). Some specimens of these speeches are given in answer to the usual sceptical inquiry. They are of the same character as those in ch. ii. 17, and imply that the course of this world is not directed by a moral Governor. **What have we spoken so much (together) against**

thee? What have we said against thee in our conversations with one another?

Ver. 14.—**It is vain.** It brings no acknowledgment or reward. The Latin and Greek Versions have, "He is vain who serveth God." **Have kept his ordinance (charge).** Have done what he ordered. They are either wilfully deceiving themselves and others by pretending an obedience which they never really paid; or they think that the outward observance of certain legal requirements is all that is required. Some think that an interval of time separates this from the last section, and that meanwhile they had made some efforts at improvement, expecting, however, immediate results in added blessings; and as these did not come as quickly as they hoped, they relapsed into their old distrust. **Have walked mournfully;** *i.e.* in mourning apparel, as if fasting and mourning for sin (Ps. xxxv. 13, 14; Job xxx. 28). Septuagint, "Why went we as supplicants (*ἰκέται*)?" **Before the Lord.** Out of reverence and awe of Jehovah. They attributed a certain virtue to voluntary fasts, without any consideration of the spirit in which they were observed (see the reproof of such formal observances in Isa. lviii. 4, etc.).

Ver. 15.—**We call the proud happy.** This is still the speech of the murmurers. We, they say, do not reckon the humble and meek blessed; we consider that the only blessed ones are the arrogant heathen, or free-thinkers, who meet with prosperity and happiness in this world. For the "proud," the LXX. has, *ἀλλοτρίους*, "strangers," which, doubtless, gives the meaning (comp. Isa. xiii. 11). **Are set up;** literally, *are built up*—have wealth and families, and leave a name behind them (Ps. xvii. 14; see in the original, Gen. xvi. 2; xxx. 3; and comp. Exod. i. 21; Jer. xii. 16, where the phrase, "being built," includes all temporal prosperity). They that tempt God are even delivered; *they tempt God, and are delivered* (ver. 10). They try and provoke God by their impiety, and yet escape punishment. Septuagint, *Ἀντίστησαν τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ ἐσώθησαν*, "They resist God, and yet are safe."

Ver. 16.—With these impious murmurers the prophet contrasts those who fear God, as above (ch. ii. 5—7) he set the picture of the true priest in opposition to his delineation of the evil ministers. **Then.** When the impious made the above infidel remarks, the pious spake often, conversed together. What they said is not repeated, but it was language well-pleasing unto God, who deigned to listen to their words, and to console them by announcing the future destiny of the good and the evil. They may have argued with these impious talkers, and warned others against them; or they may have expostulated as Jer. xii. 1, but yet with

full faith that what God does is always good; and this sentiment was all the harder to cherish because they lived under a system of temporal rewards and punishments. The Septuagint and Syriac have, "These things spake they that feared the Lord," as if the two preceding verses reported the words of the pious. Some Fathers and commentators have taken the same view. But it is difficult to conceive such words coming from the mouth of those who fear God; unless they are so called ironically. But this is inadmissible, as we see that in the present verse they are represented in their true character, and such a sudden change from irony to actuality is unnatural and quite opposed to the prophet's usual manner. **A book of remembrance was written before him.** The book represents God's providence and omniscience, his ever-wakeful care, his unfailing knowledge. "Are not these things noted in thy book?" says the psalmist (Ps. lvi. 8); and when the dead were judged, Daniel saw that the books were opened (Dan. vii. 10). The idea is taken from the national records wherein were noted events of importance, such as we find in the cuneiform inscriptions (comp. 1 Kings xi. 41, etc.; Ezra iv. 15; vi. 1; Esth. vi. 1; Rev. xx. 12). This book was to lie, as it were, always before the eyes of the Lord, to remind him of the pious. Rosenmüller compares the proverbial saying, *Ἐγρόση ἐν Διὸς δέλτα*, "It is written on the tablets of Zeus," on which Erasmus comments in his *Adagia*, under the title "*Fides et Gravitās*." **For them that feared the Lord.** For their

benefit, to preserve their name for ever, **Thought upon his Name.** Prized his Name, regarded it with awe. Septuagint, *ἐβλαβούμενοι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ*, "who revered his Name."

Ver. 17.—**They shall be mine, etc.** This is better rendered, in accordance with the Septuagint and Vulgate, "They shall be to me, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day which I am preparing, a peculiar treasure." This day of the Lord is the day of judgment, which God is always preparing by his visitation of nations and individuals. Then shall the righteous be to God a peculiar treasure (*segullah*), that which he prizes as his special possession (see Exod. xix. 5, whence the expression is derived; and comp. Deut. vii. 6; xiv. 2; xxvi. 18; Ps. cxxxv. 4). **I will spare them;** i.e. when I punish sinners. They are spared on two grounds, because they are his sons, and because they serve him like obedient children (Ps. ciii. 13). Septuagint, *ἀφιεῖν αὐτοῖς*, "I will choose them."

Ver. 18.—**Then shall ye return, and discern; or, ye shall again discern.** They had already had many opportunities, both in the history of the nation and the life of individuals, of observing the different treatment of the godly and of sinners; but in the day of the Lord they should have a more plain and convincing proof of God's moral government (comp. Exod. xi. 7; Wisd. v. 1—5); "So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth" (Ps. lviii. 11).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*The manifestation of Christ a testing-time to all.* We may apply this truth—

I. TO CHRIST'S FIRST MANIFESTATION TO THE WORLD. This truth was foreseen by Simeon (Luke ii. 34, 35). And when Jesus entered on his public ministry, his preaching and his very presence served as a testing-time to all. 1. His teaching was a process of sifting (Matt. iii. 12). Socrates used to go about Athens testing and refining men's ideas, and in his own unrivalled method extracting the few grains of gold from the mass of rubbish in young men's minds. Our Lord did a more valuable service, testing men's hearts rather than their heads, their characters rather than their opinions. Illust.: Nicodemus, tested, convicted of ignorance, but ultimately refined. Others when convicted were offended and repelled; e.g. Matt. xv. 12—14; John vi. 25—66; viii. 23—59. So severe was this testing process that Christ pronounced a special blessing on all who stood it (Luke vii. 23). Yet Christ's teaching held out the door of mercy to all. He showed to the world that in the midst of the dross of some of the foulest lives there were grains of gold, gems of Divinity, which his purifying power could disengage. Sinful men and women "loved much," because through his words they learned that they had been much forgiven. 2. The purity of his life made his very presence like the flame of a refiner's fire. Men could not be much with him without being either attracted and purified or repelled and made worse; e.g. the Gadarenes, the chief priests, Judas. On the other hand we note Zacchæus, the Samaritan woman, the "sinner" (Luke vii. 37), the eleven apostles. This testing

process took effect especially among the religious people of that day (ver. 3). Judgment began at the house of God. Some priests believed in him; few, if any, confessed him. Of most he had to say Matt. xxi. 31; and see vers. 44, 45.

II. TO THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE SOUL OF A MAN. It was not the mere fact of Christ having come to the world and being seen that made him like a refiner's fire; it was when he *came home* to men's hearts and was *manifested* to their consciences that the real testing began. In this sense Christ still comes to our homes and appears to our hearts. Of this manifestation we remark: 1. *We naturally dread it.* John i. 26 is too often true. Many shun that manifestation. They put up the shutters and close every chink, "lest the light," etc. (2 Cor. iv. 4). Thus they can tolerate secret sins of which they would be ashamed "in the light of his countenance." Imagine that we were living in the same house as Jesus Christ, that he noticed every act and word, and that we knew he was acquainted with our thoughts as well. How could we bear it? Should we not at times be constrained to cry out, in distress, if not in defiance, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord"? But alas! we often do not realize "the real presence" of the invisible Christ. When we do, our feelings will be those of guilty Adam or at least of righteous Job. 2. *Yet we ought to desire it.* For everything depends on our knowing ourselves as sinners, and Christ as our Saviour. This should make us very anxious that when Christ reveals himself it may be not simply as the light of God, but as the fire of God. Light merely reveals. Illust.: morning light dawning on the horrors of yesterday's battle-field. But fire may purify, and Christ is like a refiner's fire. The two figures of the text are suggestive. "Two sorts of material for cleansing are mentioned: the one severe, where the baser materials are inwrought with the rich ore; the other mild, where the defilement is easily separable." (1) He is like a refiner's fire. Illust.: Zacchæus "purged from his old sins" by Christ, who not only *came* to his home, but *appeared*, manifested himself in his heart. Like the flame of the fiery furnace, the fire of the Lord's holy love consumed the bonds of sin, but the man himself stood upright and walked at liberty. This refining process may be a very severe one to us. But the refining fire is himself the Refiner. He knows the ore he has to deal with. We can calmly leave him to select every step in the process. We know that he is working towards an end which is, or ought to be, very dear to us—our own sanctification (Ps. lxxix. 9). (2) He is like fuller's soap. This is a milder process. Yet even this may imply some rough treatment like treading, beating, hammering with mallets. Linen after cleansing may show how much dirt there was in it before. So Christ's purifying power may show us how many secret sins there were ingrained in the very essence of our hearts. The discovery may prompt to confession and to prayer (Ps. li. 1--10), which will be met by the promise, Isa. i. 18. Christ is no mere reformer or disciplinarian. He himself is the fire; his blood is the cleansing fountain; his Spirit is the source of our sanctification. Our supreme desire should be that Christ should be manifested to our souls *now* as the purifying fire of that holy God who, because he changeth not, doth not consume us (ver. 6). For otherwise he will for the same reason (vers. 5, 6, "*For I change not*") consume us at last.

III. TO THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. In this prophecy, as Augustine says, "the first and second advents of Christ are brought together." Malachi sees the great white throne in the background (ch. iv. 1). The result of that coming to us will depend on his treatment of us and our treatment of him now (2 Tim. i. 18).

Ver. 6.—*The twofold aspect of the unchangeableness of God.* Three truths are taught here.

I. THAT GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE. 1. His nature is a pledge of it. Being absolutely perfect, any change of nature must be for the worse. The "light" (1 John i. 5) would be dimmed; any "variation" would cause "a shadow that is cast by turning" (Jas. i. 17, Revised Version). He is "Alpha and Omega," and not an intervening letter can be displaced; not a "jot or tittle" can pass away. 2. His Name declares it. Whether we interpret the Divine Name, "I am that I am," or "I will be that I will be," unchangeableness is implied. He "is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty." He has emotions, but these are not the capricious feelings of a changeable creature; e.g. contrast the wrath of God and that of King Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. ii. and iii. He revokes promises or reverses threats; but he "cannot lie" (Titus i. 2; cf. Numb.

xxiii. 19). The strongest assurance of this truth is found in the revelation of the Divine Name in Jesus Christ, who through successive ages is *proving himself* to be "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

II. THAT THIS UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD IS THE GROUND OF HOPE FOR THE GUILTY. For God hath an "eternal purpose, which he hath purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." And he says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." That eternal purpose included his dealings with the elect race of the old covenant. In spite of their many sins, he wrought out his gracious purposes respecting them (cf. Lev. xxvi. 42—45; Deut. vii. 7, 8). And still God remembers the land and the people (Zech. xiv. 10, 11; Rom. xi. 25—29). The same unchangeableness brings hope to all of us who have been invited and have been led to trust in our Saviour-God, "who hath saved us," etc. (2 Tim. i. 9). Those unalterable purposes include our purification (cf. vers. 3, 4). For that end Christ gave himself for us (Eph. v. 26; Titus ii. 14), and towards that end God is ever working. Well may we marvel at the everlasting mercy and the unchanging faithfulness of God (Lam. iii. 22, 23). The immutability of God is the sheet-anchor of our souls when the storm of guilt and fear threatens our destruction. It was a high eulogy on a Roman commander in a time of national peril that he had not despaired of the republic. It is to the glory of God that he does not despair of us sinners, in spite of our inherited and inveterate sinfulness (ver. 7), but "waits, that he may be gracious," etc. (Isa. xxx. 18), and seeks to overcome our evil by his unchangeable good.

III. THAT THIS HOPE FOR THE GUILTY IS A PLEDGE OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE IMPENITENT. This is seen by the connection of vers. 5 and 6. The unchangeableness of God requires that "the transgressors shall be destroyed together" (Ps. xxxvii. 38—40). "There needs no *scire facias*—a writ calling one to show cause, to revive God's judgment; for it is never antiquated or out of date; but against those that go on in their trespasses, the curse of his Law still remains in full force, power, and virtue" (M. Henry); cf. Eccles. viii. 11. But judgment deferred is not forgotten (2 Pet. iii. 8, 9). If judgment is to be escaped, men must change, for God cannot (see the argument in Ezek. xviii. 1—30; and cf. John iii. 7).

Learn: 1. The blessedness of being in unalterable unity with the unchangeable God. For this a reconciliation and a regeneration are provided by God himself (2 Cor. v. 17—21; Jas. i. 18). And then "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Changes in our circumstances need little affect us. Eden was no Paradise to Adam without God; the fiery furnace was no terror to Shadrach with God. 2. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." For the unchangeable holiness of God is a consuming fire, which must destroy us in our sins if it does not separate us from them.

Vers. 7—10.—*The sin of robbing God.* The special form of sin which is here denounced (robbing God of tithes and offerings) is only one manifestation of a sin which is older than the law of tithes, and which survives in all nations to the present day. Observe—

I. THE NATURE OF THIS SIN. It is an ancient and an inveterate sin. The secret of it is alienation of heart from God (ver. 7). It is *due* to God, our Creator, Benefactor, Redeemer, that we make his will the law of our life, and therefore that we present ourselves a living sacrifice, according to the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. If we fail to do so, it must be either because we do not acknowledge the claims which God makes on us, or, acknowledging them, we yet deliberately withhold them. In the first case, we give the lie to God; in the second, we rob God. (Terrible alternative for every neglecter of God and Christ.) If it is robbery to withhold our hearts, ourselves, from God, it must be also to withhold anything from him. For what is there of which we can say, "This is not God's property; it is no part of his estate; we can do what we like with this"? It required no law of tithes to assert God's proprietorship and our stewardship. Cain robbed God when he withheld the offering which God would have accepted, or the spirit of dependence and faith without which even the right offering could not have been received. The withholding of a right spirit from God paves the way for other acts of robbery. The principle of tithes precedes and survives the law of tithes (Prov. iii. 9, 10; xi. 24, 25; 2 Cor. viii. 12; ix. 6—8, etc.). The precept, "Render unto God the things that are God's," applies to things as spiritual as souls

and as material as silver. If we are not proprietors but stewards, our one duty in regard to every talent we are entrusted with should be, "How will the Divine Proprietor wish me to use it?" If through selfishness or criminal carelessness we use it in a way which does not bring to God the honour that he has a right to expect, we are guilty of robbing God. "Give unto the Lord the glory *due* unto his Name."

II. IT IS A SIN WHICH MEN ARE HARD TO BE CONVICTED OF. 1. In ver. 7 we find a reproof and an appeal which should awaken great searchings of heart: "Lord, is it I?" (Lam. iii. 40, 41). But we may be so self-righteous or ignorant as to evade such general appeals as quite irrelevant. So the net must be drawn tighter; the indictment must be made more definite. 2. So the charge of robbing God is suggested. "Will a man rob God?" The very aversion we feel at the thought of being robbed (for we would rather give away or throw away our property than be cheated of it) should prompt the inquiry, "Is it possible that I may be robbing God?" e.g. of the reverence and godly fear due to the Almighty, as though we could disregard him and dare him to do his worst. Or of the gratitude and dependence he deserves as our Father, our Redeemer, as though we could to a considerable extent dispense with him during life, and then "make it up" at the last. Whose conscience could not convince him that in these or other ways he had been often guilty of robbing God? Yet so hard are men to be convinced of the sin, that to God's question and his direct charge there comes the glib reply, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" 3. Thus God is compelled to lay his finger on one most glaring act of robbery: "In tithes and offerings." Some of the offerings were less rigidly regulated by law than tithes, as is the case with the offerings of Christians for the kingdom of Christ and the claims of benevolence. But we may be guilty of robbing God "in offerings." (1) By grudging giving. If we do not "freely give," we withhold from God the right spirit, without which gifts cannot be acceptable. We act as if, though God had a right to demand our money, he had no right to expect the cheerful acknowledgment, "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 14; Matt. x. 8; 2 Cor. ix. 7). (2) By scanty giving. For there is an amount, some proportion of all we are entrusted with, which it is "meet" to give. To "withhold more than is meet" is to rob God. If a man gives *not* "according to that he hath," but as though God had entrusted him with much less, his offerings are not accepted by God. A steward of God (as every one is) is bound conscientiously to consider what proportion of all he receives he should set apart for giving to religious and benevolent objects, so that he may honour the Lord "with the firstfruits of all his increase." The Jewish laws of tithes and offerings may aid him in the estimate. No rule can be laid down for one another, but the Christian steward may fairly start with the presumption that the scale of liberality has not been lowered in the kingdom of Christ, with all its privileges and motives so far in advance of the Jewish theocracy. Lest we should be guilty of robbing God, we should purpose in our heart to devote *so much and no less*, as God may prosper us. The cheerful, systematic dedication of a liberal proportion of our property to the service of God will preserve us from robbing God. We shall give not as small a proportion as we dare to offer, but as large a proportion as love and conscience in council will justify. Special circumstances may call for special sacrifices; but we shall form, as a first charge on our income, a sacred fund set apart for offerings to God. The experience of those who act on these Divine principles of giving may assure all that they will thus realize, as probably they may never have done before, the truth of our Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

III. IT IS A SIN WHICH SHUTS THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN. The excuse which is generally urged for that parsimonious giving which is a robbery of God is, "I can't afford it." This may arise from a criminal ignorance of the claims of God and our relations to him, or from a feeble faith on the part of those who yet acknowledge themselves to be his stewards. The guilt of the former has been exposed; the fear of the latter is here met by God's own challenge, "Prove me now herewith;" "Have faith in God;" "Honour the Lord with thy substance;" "Seek first the kingdom of God;" and then see if God is not faithful to all his promises in regard to both temporal and spiritual blessings. Men may complain of hard times, and may want prosperity to precede liberality. "No," says God to these suffering Jews and to scanty Christian givers who may be in adversity, "honour me first by obedience and cheerful trust, and see if prosperous times will not come then." Illust.: widow (1 Kings xvii. 13);

poor Macedonians (2 Cor. viii. 1—4). Bad times may be the result of past unfaithfulness on the part of God's servants. You may be reaping sparingly because you have sown sparingly. Try the opposite plan. Now the windows of heaven are closed against ourselves by our own sins. God will open those windows as soon as we honour, obey, and trust. He can surpass our hopes and thoughts (Eph. iii. 20). His spiritual blessings will only be limited by our capacity for receiving them. *Illust.* : 2 Kings iv. 6: xiii. 18, 19. And with these best of blessings all temporal blessings that will be good for us will be added (ver. 11; Matt. vi. 33), and showers of blessing on our hearts and homes will descend through the windows of heaven once closed on God's dishonest servants, now opened to his faithful stewards.

Vers. 13—18.—*Hard speeches against God.* Once more God has to bring a charge against his people (ver. 13). Their words were "stout," bold, loud, defiant. Reverence and reticence were both wanting. Once more the plea is entered, "Not guilty." They will not admit that God is justified when he speaketh and clear when he judgeth. So once more God has to unfold the evidence, that their mouths may be stopped and they may be found guilty before God.

I. HARD SPEECHES AGAINST GOD. 1. God's service is unprofitable. They charge God with being an ungenerous Master, who allows them to work hard in order to keep his ordinances and to deny themselves ("walk mournfully"), and yet suffers them to enjoy little or no advantage therefrom. Even the service of God is "vanity and vexation of spirit." This is an old complaint (Job xxii. 15—17) often repeated (Ps. lxxiii.; Isa. lviii. 3, etc.). It reflects on God's equity as well as generosity. This is seen more clearly in the second charge. 2. The wicked are better off than we are. They seem to be "happy;" they are evidently "set up," established by God's providence in much prosperity. And though, instead of "proving" God (ver. 10), they "tempt God," they go unpunished, and are delivered from trials which still oppress us. The facts noted form part of the world-wide and perplexing problem which has often caused atheists openly to blaspheme and Christians to weep in secret. But if ever the problem tries us, let us learn a lesson from the contrast between the conduct of the ungodly professors here and the godly Asaph. These speak openly to others against God, and thus encourage one another in unbelief. But Asaph (Ps. lxxiii. 15—17) speaks in secret to God about the question, and God guides him into truth and peace.

II. CONCLUSIVE REPLIES TO THEM. Answers to all these hard speeches may be found: 1. In the hollowness of the pretences of these stout speakers against God. They did not really "serve God" or "keep his ordinances." If they walked "mournfully," it was a sign that love, gratitude, gladness, were absent, or the joy of the Lord would have been their strength. Since their heart was far from God, so that he says, "In vain do they worship me" (Matt. xv. 8, 9), no wonder they have to confess, "It is vain to serve God." And whenever we find Christian worship or work bringing little profit to our souls, we may well institute great searchings of heart lest the radical difficulty should be found altogether in our own spiritual state in regard to God. If, however, our hearts condemn us not on this charge, we may see a further answer. 2. In the opposite experiences of those "who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." While the murmurers have been talking to one another against God, another company has conversed together" (ver. 16). (Contrast the two gatherings—their spirit, their subjects, their tones.) They can tell a very different tale. They can speak words which God delights to hear and to record. Their experience of the faithfulness of God and the profitableness of his service even in dark days should neutralize the influence of distrustful complainers. Their characters attest their testimony. The confession of a Paul (2 Tim. i. 12) more than compensates for the desertion of a Demas. 3. In the fact that we have not yet "seen the end of the Lord." God speaks of a future, and bids us wait for that (vers. 17, 18). We have seen the end of the Lord in the case of Job (Jas. v. 11) and other tried but triumphant servants of God. We have not yet seen the end of the Lord in that drama of life (sometimes tragical) in which we are taking part. "Therefore judge nothing before the time" (1 Cor. iv. 5). In our present state of education and probation, "all things are ours" by possession or by promise. In vers. 16 and 17 we are reminded of a few of our privileges. We have the ear of God, a record with God,

communion with God, protection by God, and a high estimate in his sight. The ultimate issue (ver. 18) will vindicate the confidence of his servants and silence the murmurs of his foes (Rom. viii. 31—39; Jude 14, 15).

Ver. 16.—*Christian converse.* “Then,” etc. When? When ungodliness was rampant (vers. 13—15). As an excess of carbonic acid in the air makes the lamps in a mine burn dimly, so the atmosphere of prevailing ungodliness makes it hard to maintain a brightly burning piety. Christian converse is one means of sustaining a bright and vigorous godliness “in this present evil world,” especially when the evil is more than usually “present” and pressing upon us. (1) *The servants of God conversing*; (2) *God listening and approving.*

I. THE SERVANTS OF GOD CONVERSING. The description of them, “They that feared the Lord,” reminds us of the godly jealousy they cherished for the honour of God, like Noah, Nehemiah, and other servants of God in a corrupt age. Such fear is a source of purity (Ps. xix. 9; Prov. xiv. 27), and a safeguard in the most ungodly days (Isa. viii. 13, 14). Fearing God, they think much on his Name so deeply dishonoured in their midst; and they do so because (as the term implies) “they highly esteemed his Name.” They feel the danger of spiritual contagion and disease (Matt. xxiv. 12). Lest their love should cool or their faith should fail, they conversed one with another. While the ungodly were uttering “stout” words against God (ver. 13), they were speaking warm words on his behalf. Learn: 1. Changing circumstances may call for new means of grace. *E.g.* the meetings of the sons of the prophets and traces of public religious services (2 Kings iv. 23) in the dark days of Elijah and Elisha. The institution of synagogue-worship in the Captivity. The secret services of the catacombs. The gatherings in woods or on moors of Covenanters, Nonconformists, and the martyr-Church of Madagascar. “The word of the Lord was precious in those days.” 2. Private Christian communion may do much to supplement or to supply more public means of grace. From public Church-fellowship the godly could gain little in the days of Malachi. There was neither purity nor unity (ch. ii. 10, 11). In such circumstances all the more need for godly converse. “When the fire burns low, the coals that are alive should be brought together, that they may be blown into a flame.” *Illust.*: Jonathan and David (1 Sam. xxiii. 16—18); Jeremiah and Baruch (Jer. xlv. 1—5); Paul in prison and his friends “which have been a comfort unto me” (Col. iv. 11; cf. Heb. iii. 13; x. 24, 25). Such converse is enjoined in the family (Deut. vi. 6—8) and among believers (Eph. v. 19). But to be a means of grace, it needs to be natural and spontaneous.

“But conversation, choose what theme we may,
And chiefly when religion leads the way,
Should flow, like water after summer showers,
Not as if raised by mere mechanic powers.”

The spirit of it may be seen in Ps. xxxiv. 1—3, 11; lxvi. 16.

II. GOD LISTENING AND APPROVING. 1. “The Lord hearkened, and heard.” It is a solemn truth that God listens to everything we say (Numb. xii. 2; Jer. viii. 6; Ps. cxxxix. 4). Here this truth wears a cheerful face. As illustrations: Two Christians encouraging one another in God; Christ in their midst (Matt. xviii. 20; Luke xiv. 13—31). A Christian man on a lonely walk, courteously conversing with a stranger, and seeking to commend Christ to him. The stranger may go away to pray or to scoff. But that is not all. God hearkened and heard and noted the good deed done in his name. God listens with pleasure to all we say for him as well as to him. 2. “And a book of remembrance,” etc. Older than the chronicles of the kings of Persia (Esth. vi. 1) or of Israel is the book of remembrance of the Divine King (Ps. lvi. 8). “Never was any good word spoken of God or for God from an honest heart, but it was registered, that it might be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, and in no wise lose its reward.” That reward is referred to in ver. 17.

LESSON. (Col. iv. 6.) Supposing a Christian’s talk for one day were taken down verbatim, what proportion of it could be entered in God’s book of remembrance as “good to the use of edifying” (Eph. iv. 29), and of any service in the great day of account (Matt. xii. 37)?

Ver. 17.—*The Divine Proprietor and his peculiar treasure.* We adopt, as a more accurate translation, the rendering, "And they shall be to me, saith Jehovah, in the day that I am preparing, a peculiar treasure," etc., and thus learn—

I. THAT THE SERVANTS OF GOD ARE HIS PECULIAR TREASURE. It is a joy to know that in such a world as this there is anything which God can regard as his own peculiar treasure. For sin is here. The serpent's trail is found in every earthly paradise. "The works of the devil" have done much to dim the glory and mar the beauty of the works of God. True, his material works are as attractive as ever (Ps. civ. 31). But a moral Being cannot find his peculiar treasure in material works. Of what value are the precious metals and the rare gems of earth to God? If they cannot satisfy the hunger of the created spirit, how can they be a special treasure to the Spirit that created all (Job xxxvi. 19)? It was a man who was first called "the friend of God" (Jas. ii. 23). It was to a nation that the promise was first given, "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine" (Exod. xix. 5). Though the heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charges the angels with folly, yet he can find a peculiar treasure in sinful souls that fear and love him, that think upon his Name, and nurture in one another's hearts the elements of a Divine life. While the whole Church of God is his treasure, every individual is an object of special regard and value. God says, "I know thee *by name*, and *thou* hast found grace in my sight." Every believer may appropriate the love and sacrifice of Christ, "who loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." So that each individual in the universal Church may be regarded as a jewel in the Divine treasury. They are God's "hidden ones," but not overlooked; scattered, but not lost; the world knoweth them not, but "the Lord knoweth them that are his." Apply to different classes; *e.g.* godly children; the obscure poor; uneducated saints ("rough diamonds"); the donors of widow's mites to the Master's service; an Abijah in the house of Jeroboam;—all are jewels in God's treasury of redeemed souls.

II. THAT THEY SHALL BE TREATED WITH PECULIAR CARE. "The day" which Jehovah was preparing may represent all the various troubles and dangers which may await both the righteous and the ungodly. We may apply the term: 1. To days of trial in this life. We do not expect exemption from all trials. But we may expect two things. (1) Spiritual safety in spite of our trials (1 Cor. x. 13). Nay, more, our trials will work for us "experience" (*δοκιμή*, "probation," a state in which we have stood the test, and are the stronger and therefore the safer for having done so). We shall still be God's; "mine, saith the Lord." The great robber of God and murderer of souls shall fail to pluck us out of the mightier Shepherd's hands (John x. 27, 28). (2) Providential discrimination (ver. 18) and alleviation. God will "spare them as a man," etc. (see next sketch). Illust.: Ebed-melech (Jer. xxxix. 16—18); Baruch (Jer. xlv. 5); the Christians escaping to Pella before the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. xxiv. 15—20; Ps. xxxiv. 19). 2. To the day of death. But "death is yours," and cannot "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The day of death is the day of promotion, when, in an especial sense, we become a peculiar treasure because redeemed from all iniquity and purified for all eternity unto all good works (Titus ii. 14). 3. The day of judgment. (Matt. xiii. 41—43; xxv. 34.) Who will not claim his offered place among the peculiar treasures of God? Who can bear the thought of hearing from the Judge in that day, "I never knew you; that is no part of my treasure; *take it away*?"

Ver. 17.—*God's dealings with his servants and with his own beloved Son.* "I will spare them," etc. These words suggest a comparison and a contrast, and lessons therefrom.

I. GOD'S PROMISE TO HIS SERVANTS. These words are one of the "exceeding great and precious promises" on which we, the children of the kingdom, may rest. Loving protection is promised us by the great Father on the ground of our filial relationship ("his own son"), and as a reward of filial duty ("that serveth him"). Such is the assurance given to the adopted children of God. But now notice—

II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS OWN BELOVED SON. Contrast ver. 17 with Rom. viii. 32. There is one in the universe who is God's Son, not by adoption, but by nature and likeness. He is "his own Son;" his "only begotten Son" (where we lay

the emphasis on "only" not on "begotten"). He stands in a relation to God which none other could occupy. None other is "the Brightness of his glory," etc. The universe knows only one incarnate God. And he was a Son "who served him." (John vi. 38; viii. 29). How well-beloved he was a voice from heaven twice declared (see John iii. 35, etc.). The love of Mordecai to his adopted Esther, of David to his worthless Absalom, and of Jacob to his dutiful Joseph, are conspicuous examples of earthly paternal love. But who can measure or imagine the love of God to his own sinless Son Jesus Christ? Surely such a Father will not permit such a Son to suffer. Surely he shall be anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. A cloud shall never sit on his brow; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. But no. He "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." His love to his sinful children made him willing to sacrifice his sinless Son (Heb. ii. 10). The Father's sacrifice in allowing Christ to suffer and die must be remembered if we would interpret the words, "God so loved the world," etc. (John iii. 16). In reading the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mark xii. 1—9), we may have felt some surprise that the father should expose his beloved son to the treachery and cruelty of such wicked men. The reason is explained: "They will reverence my son." But the Divine Father knew what treatment his Son would receive among "his own;" yet "he spared him not." He knew what "travail of soul" would come on him when "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all;" yet "he spared him not." This contrast between what we might have expected and what we have seen in the experience of Jesus Christ, God's sinless Son, teaches us: 1. The reality of the atonement (Rom. iii. 25, 26; 2 Cor. v. 21). 2. The intensity of God's love to sinners (1 John iv. 9, 10). 3. The fuller blessings of salvation which God will give to reconciled sinners (Rom. v. 10; viii. 32). 4. The discipline and self-sacrifice which the saved children of God may be called to pass through if, like their Master, they seek "by all means" to "save some." The promise of protection (ver. 17) will not debar us from the privilege of self-denial (Matt. x. 24, 25).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Preparation-work*. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." It is fully recognized that the allusion here is to the ministry of John the Baptist. In him was realized the fulfilment of the promise that Elijah should come again. Our Lord declared that Elijah had come, in his time, and had not been recognized. And the disciples understood him to speak of John the Baptist. The more familiar figure of a "preparer of ways" is that given in Isa. xl. 3, 4. In vision the prophet sees the march of a triumphant king and army. The heralds pass on before, ordering the removal of every obstacle, making level and safe the road-way, and proclaiming with sound of trumpet the speedy coming of the great king. If John was the Lord's herald or messenger, he certainly was a very strange one. There was nothing whatever about him that suggested the herald; no gay clothing, no bannered trumpet. He did not hurry through the land, proclaiming his message in every market-place. He tarried by the banks of the Jordan, a quiet man, dressed only in cheap camel's hair garments, and satisfied with a leather thong for a girdle. The mission entrusted to him was distinctly and only a mission of *preparation*. But that work was complete in itself, and of the utmost importance in relation to the after-work of the Redeemer. The subject suggested is the mission of those who effect no results, but only prepare the way for those who achieve results.

I. PREPARATION-WORK IS ESSENTIAL. The secret of the failure of many enterprises that looked hopeful is found in the fact that they were not efficiently prepared for. The Reformers before the Reformation were preparers of the Reformation. A building depends upon the skill with which the lines for its walls are dug, and the concrete foundations laid. David did an invaluable work when he gathered the material for the temple which he might not build. Two things may be opened out. 1. The man prepared for can never do the preparer's work. He is not fitted for it. And yet he is wholly dependent on that preparer's faithfulness. With reverence we may say that our Lord could not do John's work, yet John's work must come before his. 2. Material

preparations often precede spiritual missions. There is a removing of obstructions, a mastering of difficulties, and a smoothing of roads, which must precede the free exertion of moral and spiritual influences.

II. PREPARATION-WORK IS REALLY COMPLETE WORK. It always is relative to the man who does the preparations. It does not seem to be when we are judging the whole work. A man does his life-work well who just completes the preparations entrusted to him. But there is no encouragement of manifest results; and men entrusted with preparation-work have to be men of faith.—R. T.

Ver. 1.—*The unexpectedness of the advent.* "Shall suddenly come." Two messengers are spoken of in this verse. John, the messenger, prepares the way for Jesus; and Jesus, the Messenger, prepares the way for God. Each was a sent and commissioned one. The coming to the temple is a figure of speech, and means coming to the people, not our Lord's actually entering into the temple. The people of Israel were the temple of the Lord, and of that true temple the material building was a sign. The point indicated in the expression of the text is that Messiah came with surprising suddenness upon the preparing work of John the Baptist. Only some six months of heralding when the King came. The suddenness may be illustrated along three lines.

I. THERE WAS GENERAL EXPECTATION OF MESSIAH. But it was general and vague, and in no way definite and precise. It anticipated the coming of some great One, but when he was coming, or for what he was coming, none seemed quite to know. So when he did come everybody was surprised. They did not think of his coming then, or in that particular way. Stapfer says that "the expectation of Messiah was visionary indeed. It was confused, capricious, fantastic, and at the same time precise and minute in detail, just like a dream. The very name he was to bear was doubtful."

II. THERE WAS GENERAL DELUSION RESPECTING MESSIAH. We are familiar with the idea of his delivering Israel from the Roman yoke, and restoring the kingdom of David, but this was quite the most sober form of the delusion of the age. Extravagant ideas so occupied men's minds that they could give no room to the idea of a spiritual Saviour from sin. Misconceiving the images under which Christ's coming had been foreshadowed, the people were expecting an earthly deliverer, a champion who would free them from foreign bondage, and they would gladly have spread their garments, waved their palm branches, and shouted their hosannas, if he had come to them as a conquering King. John broke into their delusions by his demand of repentance. Jesus broke into them still further by his ministry to sufferers and sinners. Suddenness and surprise characterized his going to and fro among the people, healing the sufferers and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Suddenness was needed to awaken them out of their delusions. The world had to be startled into thought.

III. THERE WAS GENERAL UNPREPAREDNESS FOR MESSIAH. The servants had not put the house ready for the Master. The priests had not. The scribes had not. Those who had prepared themselves were private persons who had very little influence on society. The unpreparedness is typified in this, "There was no room for him in the inn." His coming was not sudden to Simeon and Anna, because they were prepared through the revealed Word.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The severe side of Messiah's mission.* "Like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." It is usually shown that the triumphant side of Messiah's mission wholly occupied the mind of the Jews, and that consequently the stern, judgment side needed to be presented vigorously. But some recent accounts of the actual condition of Jewish thought in the first century suggest that the *fears* of Messiah's time were so extravagant that they needed to be corrected and qualified. The stern things of the Gospels are mild and reasonable when compared with the extravagant fears of the people. "The people looked forward with dread to the coming of the Messianic era. They were afraid of seeing the war of Gog and Magog, which the scribes predicted as its precursor. They looked for fearful calamities. Rabbi Eliezar ben Abena said, 'When ye shall see nations rising up one against the other, then look for Messiah to follow. In the weeks of years in which the Son of David shall come, there will be in the first year abundance of rain upon one city, and drought upon another. In the second year the arrows of famine will go abroad. In the third there will be a great famine, and men, women,

and children will die, as well as the saints and the rich; and there will be a judgment of forgetfulness upon those that study the Law. In the fourth there will be abundance for some and barrenness for others. In the fifth a great abundance; and they shall eat, drink, and rejoice, and the Law shall be again held in honour, among those who teach it. In the sixth year voices will be heard. In the seventh wars will break out, and at the end of the seventh the Son of David will appear." It was as necessary to correct these delusions as those which pictured a triumphant earthly conqueror. The severity must be fully recognized as a moral, not material, severity.

I. MESSIAH WORKS TO REVEAL EVIL. This his very presence does. Put a foul thing beside a pure thing, and the pure thing shows and intensifies the foulness. Let God show, in a man's human life among men, what he requires and what he can accept, and wherever that man goes he is sure to bring evil to light. Christ is doing that work still.

II. MESSIAH WORKS TO PUNISH EVIL. "All judgment is committed unto the Son." But the sphere of the punishment is moral and spiritual. Christ never asked the secular arm to carry out his condemnations.

III. MESSIAH WORKS TO DELIVER FROM EVIL. This is indicated in his work as *Refiner*. He is getting the metal freed from the dross. Much of our evil is not us, only attached to us, blended with us, a bondage of us.

IV. MESSIAH WORKS TO CLEANSE FROM EVIL. This is indicated in the soap figure. The evil is conceived of as *in us*, and as having to be got out by the severe processes of the fuller, or washer, by pounding.—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*Messiah as a Refiner*. Moses gives Messiah the Leader, who should permanently take his place. Isaiah gives us Messiah the Sufferer, Conqueror, and Comforter, matching the condition of Israel as suffering and exiled. Danie^l gives us Messiah the Prince, matching the condition of the people as anticipating the restoration of their kingdom. Malachi gives Messiah the Refiner, matching the condition of the people as in a state of moral and religious degradation. It is important to note the many-sidedness of Christ's adaptation to human needs. This aspect of Christ as the Refiner is one that is suited to every age. Men make grave objections to the doctrine of human depravity, and yet all history declares, as with one united voice, that man has never yet been able to keep anything clean. Let him touch anything, and he brings in the stain. 1. Take the sphere of man's thinking. It is constantly observed that the followers of all great philosophers and teachers and thought-leaders always complicate and deteriorate their systems. They bring in the dirt and the dross. 2. Take the sphere of man's religion. All the world over, and all the ages through, you may see man recalled to pure principles, and soon losing them again under the accumulating and debasing dross of ceremonies and superstitions. 3. Take the sphere of man's social relations. Self-interest has always proved to be the dross that gathers on and spoils the most perfect social schemes man has ever devised. 4. Take the sphere of man's personal life. The noblest ideals are unattained, for the dross of self-indulgence soon gathers, and in middle life men are content with low attainments. Getting the dross away is the great Refiner's work in every age and sphere.

I. GOOD SILVER MIXED WITH DROSS. There is a compliment in speaking of God's people as "silver," for silver is worth refining. It is a genuine and valuable metal. For mixture with dross see how lead, silver, and gold are found in the ore, surrounded with that which is comparatively worthless. Humanity is thus represented. It is not as God made it; it has become mixed. There is dross of heresy, vice, crime, etc.

II. GOOD SILVER FREED FROM DROSS. The result of renewed processes; always involving suffering for the refined, and anxiety for the Refiner. Silver has to go through the process seven times. The issue is the purity of the metal, by getting the dross perfectly away. Nothing can be usefully done with the metal while the dross still clings to it. Conclude by showing that Messiah did (1) the work of his age; (2) and does the work of *this* age. He did his own work as Refiner then; he does God's refining work now.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*The pleasantness of religious offerings*. The idea of offerings being pleasant to God reminds one of Noah's sacrifice on the cleansed and restored earth: "And

Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour." The opposite sentiment, God finding man's offerings unpleasant, and even offensive, reminds of Isaiah's opening reproaches, uttered in God's name: "Incense is an abomination unto me. . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." The carelessness of the Levites in the time of Malachi had been making the offerings an offence to God. It was evident enough that they were routine and formality. One sign, and the first sign, of spiritual purification would be that the public sacrifices and services would take a new and acceptable tone.

I. THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH FINDS PLEASURE IN MAN'S OFFERINGS. It might have been that God only *required* offerings, and felt no personal concern in the offerings, as expressing the feelings of the offerers. It is the marvel of God's grace that he puts personal feeling into men's acts and relations; and by his personal feeling calls upon us to put our personal feeling into those acts. Then the value of an offering lies not in what it is, but in the pleasure which it gives to God; and that pleasure depends not on its mere value, but on the feeling of the offerer which it carries. The test of every offering is this—Can God be pleased with it? Of the supreme offering of the obedient Son, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Of some offerings the apostle could say, "With such sacrifices God is well pleased."

II. THE DUTY OF MAN TO FIND GOD PLEASURE THROUGH HIS OFFERINGS. A duty resting on (1) obligation; (2) gratitude; (3) personal affection. If we realize what God claims, we must seek to please him. If we realize what he has done for us, we must seek to please him. And the impulses of love will surely lead us to seek to please him. What man asks by his gifts and sacrifices is, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." "The essence of all sacrifice is the same in every age. No sacrifice is pleasing to God, if not accompanied with the sacrifice of the heart and will, and of all the faculties, intellectual, spiritual, bodily, of the offerer; and no sacrifice is pleasing to God, except by virtue of its reference to the one sacrifice of the dearly beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased" (Bishop Wordsworth). Still, to God, formality is an offence; routine a weariness; hypocrisy the supreme offence; and still, to God, humility, thankfulness, trust, and love are a holy joy.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*Messiah's relation to society sins.* It is important to see that God both considers and deals with society sins as well as individual sins. Not sufficiently is it pressed on attention, that he deals with the evils which are characteristic of aggregates of men—with sins of classes and of nations. It is in the necessary judgment of classes and nations as such that the innocent are wont to suffer with the guilty; and then the interest of the class must be seen to override the interests of the single individual. Society sins are much the same in every age. They are classed in this verse. They run riot when the religious restraint is weakened. 1. Religious deceptions. 2. Immoralities specially bearing on family life. 3. Untrustfulness in everyday relations. "False swearers." 4. Sweating the workman, and forcing down the wage of the labourer. 5. Taking advantage of the distressed to secure selfish advantage; the "widow, fatherless, and stranger." How these sins corrupt society to-day may be unfolded according to the skill of the preacher. The prophets teach that whenever God manifests himself, he puts forth his power against society sins, and Malachi declares this to be one of the most marked characteristics of Messiah.

I. MESSIAH CUTS DOWN SOCIETY SINS AS BEING FALSE GROWTHS. The farmer will go into his meadows and cut down the coarse grass, which the cattle would not eat, and whose rank growth is crushing out the useful white clover. When a field is left uncultivated, and the good plants are left un nourished, there soon springs up a plentiful crop of weeds, groundsel, rag-wort, and thistles, and if there is to be any reviving of profitable vegetation in that field, these rank growths must be cut down. Illustrate from our Lord's dealing with the society sentiment concerning rabbinism. With some society sins the same must be done now.

II. MESSIAH SEEKS TO CLEAR THE ROOTS OF SOCIETY SINS OUT OF THE SOIL. Cutting off is only a preliminary to rooting out. Presently the farmer ploughs up and harrows the soil, carefully gathering the roots for the burning. Malachi, in God's

name, tried to get at the roots of the society evils of his day. He found them in the self-indulgence of the priesthood, and the self-seeking of the people. He prophesied that Messiah would do the same work.

III. MESSIAH ENRICHES THE SOIL TO BEAR GOOD GROWTHS. We should never see Christ's work only on the negative side. It has two sides. To remove society sins is to give a chance for the nourishment of Christly-toned society virtues.—R. T.

Ver. 6.—*Man's hope lies in God's unchangeableness.* "I am the Lord, I change not." Man had changed toward God, not in mere relations, but in spirit and purpose. God had been therefore compelled to alter his relations towards men; and his ways of dealing with them; but this must never be assumed to involve any change on the part of God's feeling towards them. Those whom he loves he loves with an everlasting love. In the motive of his dealings he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Reference here is directly to the purpose to save Israel. No matter what the appearances of things might be, that purpose had never been changed, and never would be. "Because it is the Eternal's unchangeable will that the sons of Jacob, his chosen ones, should not perish as a nation, he will purify them by the eradication of the wicked among them, that the remnant may return to their allegiance."

I. MAN'S HOPE IN THE CHANGEABLENESS OF GOD'S ADAPTATIONS. Changeableness is not altogether the appropriate term, but it is required for the sake of contrast. If God's ways with us were ordered by fast and unvariable rules, we should lose all sense of personal feeling, personal relations, and personal adaptations. Adjustment to individuals upon exact knowledge of individuals, and adjustment to circumstances upon exact knowledge of circumstances, are the very glory of God. It is because of this Divine characteristic that we would rather fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. If set rules had been worked without qualification or exception, then many a time Israel must have been abandoned or destroyed. Men make so much of being under the "reign of law;" but that is precisely what we had better not be. It is a truly awful *régime*. There is no considerateness, no pity, no adaptation, in it. Far better that we are in the personal rule of a Divine and infinitely loving Lawgiver.

II. MAN'S HOPE IN THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD'S PRINCIPLES. The Divine adaptations are always within the limitations of the Divine principles. We can never be sure that our fellow-man does not change through weakness, and risk principles in making change. We may have perfect confidence that God never does. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" True to his word; but only speaking words that express eternal principles. The point of the text is, that God's unchangeableness guarantees Israel's security, and God's changeableness guarantees Israel's disciplining and refining.—R. T.

Ver. 7.—*A twofold return.* "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." And Zechariah has a similar expression (i. 3), "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." The direction to *turn* from the evil way is very familiar in the books of the prophets, and should be read in the light of their work as social and moral reformers. Some evil custom is indicated, which the people were *turned to*, and this the prophets anxiously endeavoured to get them *turned from*. This turning is the root-idea of the term "conversion," which should always be associated with conviction, or the sense of sin, and contrition, or sorrow for sin. Then properly comes conversion, or turning from sin. This is met by the remission of sin, and acceptance as free from sin. The word "conversion" is generally used for the whole process, but this use is apt to produce confusion of ideas. Special significance may properly attach to the turning from sin, because it is the recognized sign and expression of sincerity and earnestness. If a man gives up things he loves that are evil, there is good evidence that he is sincere. Reference in this passage is to the national loyalty to the Mosaic ordinances. By it the national piety could be tested. But they were manifestly turned from anything like a loving, hearty, spiritual obedience of those ordinances, such as God could approve and accept. Consequently his favour and blessing were manifestly turned from them.

I. MAN CANNOT RETURN TO GOD UNTIL GOD RETURNS TO HIM. While God holds

aloof from the sinner, that sinner may feel remorse and misery. "His bones may wax old through his roaring all the day long;" but he will feel no penitence, no element of *hope* can enter into his distress. The first move always comes from God. Zacchæus does not know that he is really seeking Jesus, until he discovers that Jesus is seeking him. Our Lord put this truth into his familiar expression, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." It is the testimony of universal experience that God is always beforehand with us. And, rightly viewed, this shows us to be without excuse if we keep on in sin.

II. GOD CANNOT RETURN TO MAN UNTIL MAN RETURNS TO HIM. This puts the truth in paradoxical form; and yet it is precisely the statement of the text. God speaks. But he says he will not turn till man does. God is first in opening negotiation, and yet he says he must come second. Explain that God cannot do his gracious work in the man until the man is in that right *moral state* represented by penitence and turning to God.—R. T.

Ver. 8.—*Defrauding God.* The people of Malachi's days met his reproof in a quibbling and self-justifying spirit. Men who are self-satisfied can resist all appeal. Religious formalities have this as their supreme peril—they satisfy men, and prevent them from feeling moral and spiritual anxieties, and from responding to moral and spiritual demands. These men could not see that there was any sense in which they were depriving God of his rights. The prophet puts his finger on one thing. That suffices to prove his accusation. They were withholding and limiting the tithes and offerings due to God's house. How could citizens be loyal who neglected to pay in those *taxes* of the king which were the very sign of loyalty? "One might reasonably think such a presumption could not enter into any man's thoughts, as to rob God of those things which are dedicated to his service; when he considers that he hath received all things from him, and therefore ought in gratitude to set apart some share of his substance for the maintaining of his worship and the public exercises of religion" (Louth). Consider—

I. WHAT GOD'S CLAIMS ON MEN ARE. 1. His natural claims, as the Author, Designer, Creator, practical Arranger of man's body, life, relations, and associations. See the rights of a man in the house he builds, the garden he lays out, the machine he makes, the child he rears. Of everything that a man does he expects some appropriate form of return. 2. His revelational claims. Israel was under special obligation because it had received special revelation. 3. His experimental claims. He had gained rights, and reasonably formed expectations, out of his pitiful and gracious dealings through long years.

II. ON WHAT BASIS DO GOD'S CLAIMS REST. Not merely the supreme rights of Deity; but here especially man's own acceptance of his claims. Claims are sterner things when they are both made and *accepted*.

III. HOW GOD'S CLAIMS MAY BE NEGLECTED OR REFUSED. 1. By the delusion that those claims have been relaxed. 2. By the hope that something can be put in place of obedience to them. 3. By sheer listlessness. 4. By persistent wilfulness. 5. But it is more subtle and searching to say—God's claims are now chiefly missed through man's over-occupation. The world and self fill men up.

IV. HOW IS SUCH NEGLECT OF GOD'S CLAIMS TO BE DEALT WITH? 1. Call it by its right name—robbing God. 2. Bring discipline to bear upon the neglecters, etc.—R. T.

Ver. 10.—*Recognition of practical penitence.* "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." *All* must include those which *ought* to have been brought and had not. It was the paying up of old debts which would show the practical and sincere character of the penitence. Sin brings its own punishment. God will treat us relatively to our treatment of him. He recompensed this restored nation of Israel according to their doings. He blighted their fields and blemished their flocks, so that the land groaned beneath the curse. The only way to remove the evil was for the people to turn from the evil of their way. The sign of such return would be an earnest effort to fulfil their religious obligations. Of such fulfilment the offering of tithes might be a representative instance.

I. THE MORAL HELPLESSNESS OF SENTIMENTAL PENITENCE. Remorse is the carica-

ture of penitence on the one side, and sentimentality on the other. And sentimentality may be the more subtle evil. A man may be distressed about the consequences of sin, who has no estimate of the evil of the sin. A man may be carried away by a surrounding excitement of penitence without having any real humiliation of heart. This may be illustrated from the excitement produced by Savonarola's preaching at Florence, and by the bad sides of modern revivals and missions. Convictions which reach no further than a man's sentiments are not merely helpless to influence conduct, but they are morally mischievous, because they delude, persuading the man that he is right, when his motive and heart are untouched. Some men who persist in living in sin nevertheless have seasons of gushing penitence; but it is only surface feeling, they have no root in themselves. The test of repentance is found in this question.—What does it make the man *do*?

II. THE MORAL VALUE OF PRACTICAL PENITENCE. The Apostle Paul calls it "godly sorrow," and reminds of its practical working. "Ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" If a man steals from another, all his protestations of sorrow are without moral value unless he restores what he has stolen. God looks for moral value in everything relating to his people; and finds it only when they bring in the tithes which they had been withholding. Restoring, dealing resolutely with cherished sins, "cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes," are the revelation of sincerity, depth, and moral value, in all professions of penitence. It is only when God can approve of and accept the penitence thus revealed that he can respond by opening the windows of heaven to pour out blessing.—R. T.

Vers. 14, 15.—*Doubt of profit in serving God.* "It is vain to serve God." The Prophet Zephaniah is more severe. "It shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph. i. 12). "The prophet condescends to identify himself with those whom he reproveth. 'We call the proud happy; yea, we say, they that work wickedness are set up. Therefore it is vain to serve God.' But he suddenly quits the seat of the scornful. He retires aside from the crowd, who proudly rely on their own popular verdicts, vaunting their own intelligence, and setting at naught the decrees of God; and, standing aloft from them, he joins the smaller company of the faithful few who wait and fear the Lord, and think upon his Name."

I. THE SIN OF SERVING GOD FOR THE SAKE OF PROFIT. This is seen in the case of Ananias and of Simon Magus. It is illustrated by Bunyan, in his character of Pliable, the man who was going on pilgrimage for the sake of what he could get. God asks for the service of *love*. Such service as alone can please him is the service rendered under the impulse of love. It is not possible to serve God acceptably in the spirit of the hireling. It is equally true that God cannot be rightly served under the expectation of pay or reward in the next life.

II. THE SIN OF DOUBTING WHETHER GOD REWARDS SERVICE. It is the sin of unbelief. "He who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him." But it really is a deeper and a more subtle sin than that; it is the sin of self-centredness. Only the man who thinks overmuch about himself questions whether his work will be fittingly recognized. This is a constant secret sin, even of good people. They never master it until they can learn of Christ to work for love, and let rewards come or not as they may. A man never conceives of Divine indifference, or hardness, or unreasonableness, until he gets into a bad frame of mind himself, and then he makes God the shadow of his own badness. It was thus with the persons whom Malachi reproveth. Only because they wanted to serve themselves did they think it was vain to serve God. The man who loves God and wants to serve him is sure never to think that.

III. THE SIN OF THINKING THOSE ARE REWARDED WHO SERVE OTHERS AND NOT GOD, (Ver. 15.) The proud, who serve themselves. Good people, like the poet Asaph, are often tempted to think that the wicked have the best of it in this life. To think so is to "offend against the generation of the upright," and to dishonour God.—R. T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The list of the loyal ones.* "A book of remembrance was written before him. . . . They shall be mine . . . in that day when I make up my jewels." Reference is to those persons who "by their pious discourse confirmed each other in goodness, and armed themselves against the impressions which wicked and doubting suggestions might make upon their minds." "God took special notice of what these pious persons did and said: it was as safely laid up in his memory as if it had been entered into a register, in order to be produced at the day of judgment, to their praise and honour." It is possible that the reference of these verses may be to "the growth of something like a brotherhood or order, not claiming or professing the inspiration of the older schools of the prophets, not entering, as they had done, on any vigorous effort at correcting the corruptions that were eating into the nation's life, but bearing a silent witness by lives of holiness and devotion, associated by the bonds of prayer and mutual love, handing down from generation to generation the tradition of higher truths and better hopes." Illustration may be taken from the Chasidim, or Brothers of Mercy, in the time of Judas Maccabæus, or the Essenes of the New Testament period.

I. GOD'S LOYAL ONES ARE THEY WHO KEEP HIS HONOUR IN IMPERILLED TIMES. Compare the seven thousand in Elijah's day who had not bowed the knee to Baal. 1. The loyal ones may have no public spheres. But the truest work for God is done in the private spheres of home and social intercourse. 2. The loyal ones may have no voice with which to testify. But the mightiest of all arguments is a godly life; the strongest of all persuasions is the winsomeness of a sanctified character. Our witness may have to be rendered in our simply standing aloof, and that may be the very holiest reproach. It may be ours thus simply, but persistently, to keep the honour of God's (1) Name, (2) claims, (3) Word, as these are imperilled by the self-seeking of our times.

II. GOD'S PRESERVING HAND IS EVER UPON HIS LOYAL AND FAITHFUL ONES. He is even represented as keeping a list of them before him, so that by no possibility shall the interests of any one of them be forgotten. And his personal concern is intimated by his speaking of them as his "jewels." The term suggests: 1. Their value in his sight. 2. Their variety; they are of different colours and qualities and tints. 3. Their safety. They are all there in that day. Jesus said of his disciples, "None of them is lost."—R. T.

Vers. 1—4.—*Christ as a spiritual Reformer.* "Behold, I will send my messenger," etc. This passage seems to be an answer to the question of the sceptic in the last verse of the preceding chapter, "Where is the God of judgment?" It informs us that he will come, but that a preparatory work is necessary. It points to the advent of John the Baptist, the herald of that great Messiah predicted by ancient prophets, and who was the "Desire of all nations" (Hag. ii. 7, Authorized Version). The passage points to Christ as the great spiritual Reformer of the world, and teaches that as a Reformer—

I. HE IS GLORIOUS. This appears: 1. *From the fact that a Divine messenger was sent to prepare the way for him.* This messenger who did the preparatory work was John the Baptist, to whom Isaiah (xl. 3—5) referred when he spoke of a voice crying in the wilderness. This man was not only the greatest of all the prophets, but Christ tells us he was more than a prophet. He presented to his age, on the banks of the Jordan, in words of flame and a voice of thunder, an epitome of all the teaching of the previous prophets. He denounced sin, he urged repentance. But this man, great as he was, only prepared the way for the true Reformer. 2. *From the description that is here given of him.* He is here represented as the Proprietor of the temple, and as the "Messenger of the covenant." Christ is the world's spiritual Reformer. He revolutionizes the thoughts, the emotions, the aims, and habits of mankind. No one else has ever done this, and no one else ever can do it.

II. HE IS AWE-INSPIRING. "Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth?" In the presence of this Reformer, whose eye will penetrate into the depths of every soul, unrenewed men everywhere will stand aghast and tremble at their own moral enormities. When he appeared to them he would not flatter their theocratic nation's prejudice, but he would subject their principles to the fiery test of his heart-searching truth. Listen to what John the Baptist, his herald,

said of him : " And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire : whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner ; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Even Peter, in his awe-inspiring presence said, " Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man ! "

III. HE IS THOROUGH. " He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." Two figures are here employed to indicate how thorough his reformation is. The smelter's fire, which burns out the corrupt ingredients that are mixed with the gold and silver ; and the fuller's soap, whose alkaline salt cleanses all polluted garments from their dirt. In Christ's reformation, everything that is wrong, that is impure, is worked out of the human soul.

IV. HE IS PERSISTENT. " He shall sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver." He is intent upon the work, and makes no slight or passing business of it. As a refiner of gold and silver sits over the burning crucible until he sees his own face reflected in the metal, so Christ will continue his work until it is fully accomplished.

V. HE IS SUCCESSFUL. " He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." He will constitute for men one day a " holy priesthood," a priesthood that will render to the Almighty offerings that are holy and acceptable to him.

CONCLUSION. Blessed be the Eternal Father for sending such a Reformer into this corrupt world, One in every way qualified for the work, One who has reformed millions now in Paradise, is still reforming thousands on this earth, and will one day work out the moral reformation of the race. " He will not fail nor be discouraged, until he hath set judgment [rectitude] in the earth " (Isa. xlii. 4).—D. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The world of sinners.* " And I will come near to you to judgment." From this passage we are reminded—

I. THAT SINNERS EXIST IN THIS WORLD IN GREAT VARIETY. Here are " sorcerers," " adulterers," " false swearers," and heartless oppressors. The first were very general in Judæa. " There was," says Lightfoot, " hardly any people in the whole world that more used or were more fond of amulets, charms, mutterings, exorcisms, and all kinds of enchantments. The elder who was chosen to sit in the Sanhedrin was obliged to be skilled in the arts of astrologers, jugglers, and sorcerers, that he might be able to judge those who were accused of practising such arts." Perhaps we have few, if any, professional sorcerers in England ; but what is as bad, if not worse, practical deceivers abound. Adulterers, too, and liars, and ruthless oppressors, where are they not ? Sinners exist, alas ! in a great variety of type and in a great variety of degree. " There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not."

II. THAT SINNERS OF EVERY VARIETY ARE EXPOSED TO A DIVINE JUDGMENT. " I will come near to you to judgment ; and I will be a swift Witness." I " whom ye challenged, saying, ' Where is the God of judgment ? ' " I will be a swift Witness. I whom ye think far off, and to be slow in judgment, am near, and will come as a " swift Witness," not only as a Judge, but as an Eye-witness ; for mine eyes see every sin, though ye think I take no heed. Earthly judges need witnesses to enable them to decide aright. I alone need none. Sinners will be awfully undeceived who flatter themselves, ' God will never see it. How doth God know ? and is there knowledge in the Most High ? ' (Ps. x. 11 ; lxxiii. 11 ; xciv. 7) " (Fausset).

III. THAT SINNERS ARE PRESERVED ON ACCOUNT OF THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD. " I am the Lord, I change not ; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Ewald translates this verse, " For I, Jehovah, have not changed ; but ye sons of Jacob, have not ye altered ? " I have not altered towards you, but you have altered towards me. Because I have not changed you are preserved. I determined to continue you a distinct people on the earth, and therefore, notwithstanding all your murmurings and transgressions, you are not " consumed." God's immutability explains the continua-

tion of sinners on the earth. He is essentially Love, and a change in him would be a change from love, and a change from love would be the ruin of sinners. When he says, "I change not," it means, "I am as full of love as ever." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner."—D. T.

Vers. 7—12.—*A Divine complaint and a Divine invitation.* "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances," etc. In these words we have two things—a Divine complaint and a Divine invitation; and both are addressed to sinners. Notice—

I. A DIVINE COMPLAINT AGAINST SINNERS. The complaint involves three charges. 1. *The charge of apostasy.* "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances." Your fathers who brought on themselves the Babylonian captivity departed from my ordinances, and you are doing what they did. All sin is an apostasy, a departure from God's "ordinances" both moral and positive. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13). Like the prodigal son, we have all gone away from our Father into the "far country" of practical atheism and sin. 2. *The charge of dishonesty.* "Will a man rob God? Yet he have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Their dishonesty consisted in withholding from him his claims. Thus they robbed or defrauded him. "Ye have robbed me." "Ye have done so to me in respect to the tithes due to me; viz. the tenth of all the remainder after the first-fruits were paid, which tenth was paid to the Levites for their support (Lev. xxvii. 30—33), a tenth paid by the Levites to the priests (Numb. xviii. 26—28), a second tenth paid by the people for the entertainment of the Levites and their own families at the tabernacle (Deut. xii. 18); another tithe every third year for the poor, etc. (Deut. xiv. 28, 29). 'Offerings.' Not less than one-sixth part of corn, wine, and oil (Deut. xviii. 4). The priests had this perquisite; also the tenth of the tithes which were the Levites' perquisite. But they appropriated all the tithes, robbing the Levites of their due nine-tenths; as they did also, according to Josephus, before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. Thus doubtless was God defrauded—the priests not discharging aright their sacrificial duties, and robbing God of the services of the Levites who were driven away by destitution" (Fausset). Thus men rob God now; they keep back what belongs to him. They cannot take anything from him, and thus make him poorer, as in the case of man robbing man, but they can rob him by appropriating to their own use that which he demands, by acting like Ananias and Sapphira. 3. *The charge of insensibility.* "Ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee?" They had lost all sense of their obligation in relation to these tithes, and become utterly indifferent to the Divine claims. "Wherein have we robbed thee?" As if they did not know their fraud on God. Thus men go on keeping from God what is his due without any sense of wrong. Sinful habits blind and deaden a man's conscience to his momentous duties.

II. A DIVINE INVITATION TO SINNERS. Here is an invitation to return: 1. *To Divine friendship.* "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." Return to me by rendering to me my dues, and working lovingly and loyally in my service. "Return to me"—this has been God's voice to sinners in all ages; this was the invitation of Christ: "Come unto me," etc. The return is in a sense mutual. God says, "I will return unto you." This does not, of course, mean that God compromises, changes; but it expresses his readiness to receive them, as the father of the prodigal was ready to receive his lost son. He waits to be gracious. 2. *To honest service.* "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house." Nehemiah calls the "storehouse" (xiii. 5) a great chamber where they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels. To put this to its proper use is what Jehovah would have them to do, and he promises, if they accede: (1) To give them good in abundance. "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." From heaven all good comes. Sometimes the windows seem so closed up that blessings descend not to some men. When God says, "I will open you the windows," it means good shall come pouring down in abundance. (2) To give them good in connection with the produce of the earth. "And I will rebuke the

devourer [perhaps the locusts] for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field." Their vines should produce fruit in the season. (3) To give them good in the *affections of men*. "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts;" "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the Shield of thy help, and who is the Sword of thy excellency? And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places" (Deut. xxxiii. 29).

CONCLUSION. Learn: 1. *That a man is a bad man who withholds from God his due*. What are God's dues? All we have and are. "All souls are his." And if we render not up to him our souls—our all—we are bad. 2. *A bad man becomes good by surrendering his all to God*. By bringing his all into the storehouse of God, devoting all to the Divine service. 3. *The more good a man has in himself, the more good he has from the universe*. If his whole soul is filled with supreme love and reverence for right and God, all the heavens outside of him will "open their windows" and rain blessings on him. Religious liberality is of all profitable investments the most profitable. And the converse. The niggard is "cursed with a curse." The man who robs and defrauds God robs and defrauds himself. As the fabled eagle who robbed the altar set fire to her nest with the burning coals that adhered to the stolen flesh she bore away, so the soul that defrauds God of his claims will set itself in flames.—D. T.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Religion delineated and depreciated*. "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord," etc. In these words we have religion *delineated and depreciated*.

I. PRACTICAL RELIGION DELINEATED. Three expressions are here used to represent it. 1. *To serve God*. "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God." There is a great difference between serving God and serving man. (1) In the one case the servant benefits the master, in the other the sole benefit is the servant's. (2) In the one the service is estimated by work actually done, in the other by work earnestly purposed. (3) In the one there is a surrender of freedom; in the other there is the attainment of it. He who engages to serve man must surrender some portion of his liberty; he who serves God alone secures the highest freedom. 2. *To keep God's ordinances*. "We have kept his ordinance." This is only a branch of the service, or perhaps the method of doing it. God has ordinances or institutes, some of which are moral, some are ceremonial; the latter may cease to bind, the former are everlastingly in force. 3. *To walk mournfully before the Lord*. "We have walked mournfully before the Lord." To "walk" before the Lord is religion in perfection, religion in heaven. It implies an abiding consciousness of the Divine presence, and continual progress in the Divine will. Walking "mournfully" characterizes the religion of earth; it is associated with penitence, contrition, etc. The walk of religion is only mournful here.

II. PRACTICAL RELIGION DEPRECIATED. "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?" Men say this: 1. *When religion does not answer their secular expectations*. Many take up with religion in these days because of the secular good they expect will accrue from their profession of it; if the good comes not, they think it vain. 2. *When they see the truly religious in poverty and affliction*. Asaph saw this, and he said, "I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Ps. lxxiii. 13). 3. *When they have taken up religion from selfish motives*. A man who takes up with religion for the sake of good will get no good out of it: he will get disappointment and damnation; for "he that seeketh his life shall lose it." No truly religious man has said religion is *vain*; he feels it to be its own reward—the highest reward. For in truth, it is the only service on earth that will not prove vain. Whatever other labour fails, the success of this is ensured—ensured by the Word of God, the constitution of mind, and the arrangements of the universe. "Therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding," etc. (1 Cor. 15, 58).—D. T.

Vers. 16—18.—*Genuine religion*. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one

to another," etc. We shall use these words to illustrate *genuine religion*, and three things are noteworthy—

I. THE ESSENCE OF GENUINE RELIGION. "They that feared the Lord." The men who fear God may be divided into two classes. 1. *Those who fear him with a slavish fear.* The unrenewed millions when they think of him at all dread him; their guilty consciences invest him with attributes of such horror that they shudder at the idea of him, they flee from his presence. "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." All that is superstitious in the world, all that is barbaric in the religion of Christendom, spring from this dread of God. 2. *Those who fear him with a filial fear.* The fear which a loving child has for a worthy and noble sire. There is, perhaps, always a kind of fear in connection with true love. We fear, not that the object will harm us, but that we may harm or displease the object. Our fear is that we shall not please the object up to the measure of our intense desire. The fear of genuine religion is not the fear of suffering, but the fear of sin, not for the consequences of wrong, but for the fact of wrong. This filial fear with all is the beginning of wisdom.

II. THE SOCIALITY OF GENUINE RELIGION. "Spake often one to another." We are social beings, and what interests us most has the chief power in bringing us together. Nothing interests a religious man so much as religion. Hence the few good people living in this corrupt age of Malachi met and "spake often one to another." Spake, no doubt, in language of mutual instruction, mutual comfort, mutual exhortation. There is no force in the world so socializing as religion; it brings souls together, and centres them in a common object of love, in a common current of sympathy, in a common course of life.

III. THE WORTH OF GENUINE RELIGION. See what God does with the genuinely religious. 1. *He specially attends to them.* "The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them." This does not, of course, mean literally that God keeps a book, or that he has any difficulty in remembering what takes place. It is an anthropomorphism, a symbolizing of the special interest of God. 2. *He claims them as his own.* "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts." My friends, my children, mine to love and serve me. 3. *He appreciates them as precious.* "In that day when I make up my jewels." The word here rendered "jewels" is in Exodus (xix. 5) rendered "peculiar treasure." "They are peculiarly precious to me." He knows the worth of their existence, the cost of their restoration, the greatness of their capabilities. 4. *He distinguishes them from all others.* Here they are so mixed with worldly and worthless men that they are mostly undiscerned and undistinguished. One day he will separate them, the sheep from the goats.

CONCLUSION. To attain religion should be the supreme aim of our life. It is not a means to an end; it is the grand end of being; it is the Paradise of soul.—D. T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Vers. 1—3.—§ 4. *The final separation of the evil and the good at the day of judgment.*

Ver. 1.—*Burn as an oven (a furnace).* Fire is often spoken of in connection with the day of judgment and the advent of the Judge. It is a symbol of the holiness of God, which consumes all impurity, and also represents the punishment inflicted on the ungodly (Ps. l. 3; Isa. x. 17; lxvi. 15, 16; Dan. vii. 9, 10; Joel ii. 30; 1 Cor. iii. 13; 2 Pet. iii. 7, etc.). The LXX. adds, "and it shall burn them." Stubble (see note on Obad. 18); or, perhaps, *chaff*, as Matt. iii. 11, 12. Root nor branch. The ungodly are regarded as a tree which is given up to be burned so that nothing of it is left. The

same metaphor is used by John the Baptist (Matt. iii. 10; comp. Amos ii. 9). The Hebrew text includes this chapter in ch. iii.

Ver. 2.—*The Sun of Righteousness.* The sun which is righteousness, in whose wings, that is, rays, are healing and salvation. This Divine righteousness shall beam upon them that fear the Name of God, flooding them with joy and light, healing all wounds, removing all miseries, making them incalculably blessed. The Fathers generally apply the title of "Sun of Righteousness" to Christ, who is the Source of all justification and enlightenment and happiness, and who is called (Jer. xxiii. 6), "The Lord our Righteousness." Grow up; rather, *gambol*; *σκιρταε* (Septuagint); *salielis* (Vulgate). "Ye shall leap!" comp. Jer. l. 11). The word is used of a horse galloping (Hab. i.

8). The happiness of the righteous is illustrated by a homely image drawn from pastoral pursuits. They had been, as it were, hidden in the time of affliction and temptation; they shall go forth boldly now, free and exulting, like calves driven from the stall to pasture (comp. Ps. cxiv. 4, 6; Cant. ii. 8, 17).

Ver. 3.—*Ye shall tread down the wicked* (comp. Micah iv. 13). They who were once oppressed and overborne by the powers of wickedness shall now rise superior to all hindrances, and themselves tread down the wicked as the ashes under their feet, to which the fire of judgment shall reduce them. *In the day that I shall do this; rather, as in ch. iii. 17, in the day which I am preparing.*

Vers. 4-6.—§ 5. *Concluding admonition to remember the Law, lest they should be liable to the curse. In order to avert this, the Lord, before his coming, would send Elijah to promote a change of heart in the nation.*

Ver. 4.—If the people would meet the judgment with confidence and secure for themselves the promised blessings, they must remember and obey the Law of Moses. Thus the last of the prophets set his seal to the Pentateuch, on obedience to which depended, as of old (see Lev. xxvi.; Deut. xxviii.), so now, the most abundant blessings. *My servant.* Moses was only the agent and interpreter of God. The origin and authority of the Law were Divine. *Horeb.* The mention of the mountain would remind the people of the awful wonders that accompanied the promulgation of the Law (Exod. xix. 16, etc.; Deut. iv. 10-15). For all Israel. Not merely for the people who heard the Law given, but for the nation unto all time. Nor could they be true Israelites unless they observed the terms of the covenant then made. With the (*even*) statutes and judgments. These terms, which explain the word "Law," include all the enactments, legal, moral, ceremonial. Malachi might well remind the people of their duty, and thus support Nehemiah in his struggle to win them to obedience (see Neh. ix. 38; x. 29). The LXX. places this verse at the end of the chapter, probably because the original conclusion (ver. 6) was thought too harsh to be left as the close of the Old Testament. The Jews had a feeling that books in the Bible should end with the name *Jehovah*. In the case of Isaiah and Ecclesiastes, they repeated, after the last verse, the last but one.

Ver. 5.—*Elijah the prophet.* This is not the same personage as the "messenger" in ch. iii. 1; for the latter comes before the

first advent of the Lord, the former appears before the day of judgment; one comes to prepare the way of the Lord, and is followed immediately by Messiah's coming to his temple; the other is sent to convert the chosen people, lest the land be smitten with a curse. There seems to be no valid reason for not holding the literal sense of the words, and seeing in them a promise that Elijah the prophet, who was taken alive from the earth, shall at the last day come again to carry out God's wise purposes. That this was the view adopted by the Jews in all ages, we see by the version of the LXX., who have here, "Elijah the Tishbite;" by the allusion in Eccles. xlviii. 10; and by the question of our Lord's disciples in Matt. xvii. 10, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come." Christ himself confirms this opinion by answering, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things." He cannot be referring here to John the Baptist, because he uses the future tense; and when he goes on to say that "Elias is come already," he is referring to what was past, and he himself explains that he means John, who was announced to come in the spirit and power of Elias (Luke i. 17), but of whom it could not be said that he "restored all things." The same opinion is found in the Revelation (xi. 3, 6), where one of the witnesses is very commonly supposed to be Elijah. It is argued by Keil, Reinke, and others, that, as the promise of King David in such passages as Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23; xxxvii. 24; Hos. iii. 5, etc., cannot imply the resurrection of David and his return to earth, so we cannot think of an actual reappearance of Elijah himself, but only of the coming of some prophet with his spirit and power. But, as Knabenbauer points out, for the attribution of the name David to Messiah, long and careful preparation had been made; e.g. by his being called "the rod of Jesse," the occupant of David's throne, etc.; and all who heard the expression would at once understand the symbolical application, especially as David was known to have died and been buried. But when they found Malachi speaking of the reappearance of "Elijah the prophet," who, as they were well aware, had never died, of whose connection with the coming Messenger they had never heard, they could not avoid the conclusion to which they came, viz. that before the great day of judgment Elias should again visit the earth in person. This prophecy concerns the very last days, and intimates that before the final consummation, when iniquity shall abound, God will send this great and faithful preacher of repentance, whose mission shall have such effects that the purpose of God for the

salvation of Israel shall be accomplished. We may therefore assume that in the gospel the appellation "Elias" stands both for John and for Elijah himself; for the messenger who prepared the way for Christ's first advent, and for the prophet who was to convert the Israelites before the judgment day; for him who came in spirit and power, and him who shall come in bodily presence. **The great and dreadful day.** The day of final judgment. No other crisis could be named in such terms (see Joel ii. 31, whence the words are taken).

Ver. 6.—**He shall turn**, etc.; i.e., taking the preposition, rendered "to," in the sense of "with," he shall convert one and all, fathers and children, young and old, unto the Lord. Or, in agreement with the versions, he shall bring back the Jews then living to the faith of their ancestors, who rejoiced to see the day of Christ (John viii. 56); and then the patriarchs, who for their unbelief had

disowned them, shall recognize them as true Israelites, true children of Abraham. Others explain—He shall unite the Jews who are our fathers in the faith to us Christians who are their children (see Luke i. 17, where the angel Gabriel quotes part of the passage, and applies it to John the Baptist). **The heart.** Here not the seat of the intellectual powers, but of love and confidence, which lead to union and concord. **Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse; or, smite the land with the ban.** This is an allusion to the ban threatened in the Law, which involved extermination (see Lev. xxvii. 29; Deut. xiii. 16, 17; xx. 16, 17). So Elijah shall come and preach repentance, as the Baptist did at Christ's first coming; and unless the Jews listen to him and turn to Christ, they shall be destroyed, shall share in that eternal anathema which shall fall on the ungodly at the day of judgment.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—"*The Sun of Righteousness.*" In vers. 1 and 2 we are once more presented with the twofold aspect of a Divine fact. (See homilies on ch. iii. 2 and iii. 6.) "*Dies ira, dies illa.*" But "that day" need not be a "day of wrath." It may be memorable, admirable, as the day of full salvation. As the first coming of Christ was for the "rising again" of some, "that they which see not might see" (John ix. 39), so at his second coming, though "revealed from heaven in flaming fire," he shall be "admired in all them that believe;" for he shall bring "rest" and full redemption to them (2 Thess. i. 6—10). The great and terrible day of the Lord will have both a bright and a dark side, like the cloud that came between the Egyptians and the Israelites. To "the proud and all that do wickedly" it will be a day of utter destruction. It will "burn like an oven," fire burning more fiercely in a furnace than in the open air. The wicked, having made themselves like "the dry tree," "ready for the burning," will be consumed root and branch, with no hope of renewed life such as might survive the stroke of the feller's axe (Job xiv. 7—9). These threats are applicable to all times of judgment, when "the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud . . . and upon all the cedars of Lebanon," etc. (Isa. ii. 12—17). We may see fulfilments of them in successive epochs of judgment, from the troublous times that followed the days of Malachi down to the destruction of Jerusalem and the judgment of the great day. Similar figures of destruction by fire justify this extended application (Ps. xxi. 9, 10; Isa. v. 24; x. 17, 18; Nah. i. 5; Zeph. i. 18; Matt. iii. 12; 2 Pet. iii. 7—10). But such times need be no terror to the faithful servants of God, for "unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." As we do not confine the prediction of "the day of the Lord" to any one day, so we do not limit the promise of "the Sun of Righteousness" to any one person. Whenever a signal manifestation of God's righteousness is displayed on behalf of his servants, it is like the rising of the sun on a dark, cold, and unhealthy land. But the manifestation of the righteousness of God in the Person and work of Christ so far excels all other manifestations that we may limit our further application of the words to our Lord Jesus Christ, "that in all things he may have the pre-eminence." What the sun is to the material world, the Messiah is to the moral world. The following blessings are suggested by the figure. 1. Light after darkness. Such is Christ to all men (John i. 4, 9), especially to his own countrymen (Luke i. 78, 79; Matt. iv. 12), but in a deeper sense to all that followed him (John viii. 12). He brought the light of truth (Isa. ix. 2), for he was himself "the Truth." Where he rises, like the dawn, upon the benighted and bewildered traveller, he guides into the way of

peace and of salvation. The light of truth shows us "the paths of righteousness" (Ps. cxliii. 8, 10). 2. Warmth after cold (Ps. xix. 6). Christ not only gives light, but life. His presence causes that spiritual warmth which is a life-giving power. He is "a quickening Spirit" (John v. 21, 25; vi. 47, etc.). There is a spiritual as well as a solar chemistry. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness both enlighten, warm, and quicken (1 Cor. i. 30). 3. Health after sickness. The figure of "wings" may allude to the rays of the sun, or perhaps to the breeze which in many hot regions, especially in the zones of the trade winds, begins to blow over the land early in the morning, bringing freshness and health with it. (In the West Indies and elsewhere this morning breeze is popularly called "the doctor.") The Jews had a proverbial saying, "As the sun riseth, infirmities decrease." Christ, when in our midst, scattered around him blessings of healing, both physical and spiritual. At Jericho he brought sight to blind Bartimæus and life to dead Zacchæus. So is it wherever he rises, like the light of life, on the souls of men (Ps. cxlvii. 3; Isa. lvii. 19; Ezek. xlvi. 12; 1 John v. 11, 12). The terms "righteousness" and "healing," being very comprehensive, remind us of the blessings brought by Christ at both his first and second comings. At the first advent he diffused the rays of righteousness, whereby he both justifies and sanctifies those who turn to him, just as the sun imparts light, life, and joy to all who turn towards it. At the second, he will own the righteousness which he gave, and will exhibit it, cleared of all the misjudgments of the world, before men and angels. By his first advent he gave spiritual healing, justification, and all its allied blessings, summed up in the royal gift of "eternal life." At his second he will bring full salvation, when, as one has said, there shall be "understanding without error, memory without forgetfulness, thought without distraction, love without simulation, sensation without offence, satisfying without satiety, universal health without sickness" (Isa. lx. 20, 21; Rev. xxi. 23; xxii. 1—5).

Vers. 4—6.—*The sufficiency of God's successive revelations.* The introduction of the appeal in ver. 4 between the predictions and promises of vers. 2, 3 and 5, 6 has at first sight an appearance of abruptness. The promise of ver. 5 lay in the indefinite, and as we know the distant, future. Malachi proved to be the last of the prophets of the old covenant. In the long interval between Malachi and John the Baptist there were times when Israel looked and longed for a new prophet to arise (1 Macc. ix. 27; xiv. 41), though sometimes this was only for the purpose of settling very unimportant questions (e.g. 1 Macc. iv. 41—46). But all the while they had in their hands a revelation from God that was amply sufficient for their present guidance, and the right use of which would prepare them for further blessings and preserve them from wrath to come. We are thus reminded of the truth of the *sufficiency of God's revelations for those to whom they are granted.* We may apply this truth—

I. TO GOD'S UNWRITTEN REVELATIONS. The declarations of God's truth and of his will to Adam and the patriarchs were less definite than when "the Law came in beside" (Rom. v. 14, 20). But though in our sense "exceeding broad" as compared with the multifarious laws of Moses, they were sufficient to produce a conviction of sin (e.g. Gen. iv. 7; xlii. 21, 22, etc.), and therefore of the need of forgiveness (Gen. iv. 13, margin), and to enable men to walk with God (Gen. v. 24; vi. 9). So is it with the heathen (Rom. i. 20; ii. 14, 15). The revelations through the worlds of matter and of mind are sufficient as a rule of life, though not as a means of full salvation (comp. Acts x. 35, "acceptable" (δεκτός) and iv. 12).

II. TO THE LAW OF MOSES. This answered all needful questions as to the character and the will of God. Moses, the first writer in the Bible, and his Law are honourably mentioned by the last writer, this fact supplying one out of many testimonies to the unity of the Bible. Similar witness to the value and the sufficiency of the Law of Moses "for the time then present" is borne by Christ (Matt. v. 17—19; Mark xii. 28—34; Luke x. 25—28; xvi. 29; John v. 39, etc.). The prophets came not to supersede but to expound the Law, to bring out the fulness of its morality, and to apply its fundamental teachings to the changing scenes of national life (Isa. viii. 20; Jer. xxxiv. 12—14, etc.). Moses and the prophets "received not the promise" (Heb. xi. 32, 39), yet Christ could say, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John iv. 22).

III. TO THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION. Upon us "the ends of the ages are come"

(1 Cor. x. 12). Yet there is an eternity beyond. We cannot believe that God has spoken his last word to the sons of men. Now we know in part. There are treasures of wisdom and knowledge still hidden in Christ. At times we long to have fuller access to them. We should be thankful if some infallible living teacher could expound to us "the book," or guide us in the path of duty. But we find ourselves between two great epochs, the first advent and the second. We live in what a distinguished writer has called one of the great "pauses" of the world. "Miracles have ceased. Prophecy has ceased. The Son of God is ascended. Apostles are no longer here to apply infallible judgment to each new circumstance as it arises, as St. Paul did to the state of the Corinthian Church." The written Word must be our appeal, and the Divine Spirit, leading each believer into the truth, must be our Interpreter. He may show us fresh truths in the old familiar Word, just as Christians after the destruction of Jerusalem saw further and fuller meaning in our Lord's predictions of his second coming. But the revelations of doctrine and duty in that written Word are all we now need, and all we have a right to expect. If there are future revelations, they are among "the secret things" that "belong unto the Lord our God;" it is "*those things that are revealed*" which "belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words" of God's Law (Deut. xxix. 29). Then we may expect to "see greater things than these" (Matt. xiii. 12). As the Old Testament closes with promises of larger blessings (vers. 5, 6), so does the New Testament (Rev. xxi. 1—7, 9—27; xxii. 1—5). We know that a glorious future awaits the sons of God (1 John iii. 1, 2). Yet in the midst of the most glowing promises occur awful threats. Here we read of "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" and "the curse." In the New Testament we find, embedded in its final chapters, such words as Rev. xxi. 8; xxii. 11, 15, 18, 19 (like traces of a past volcanic eruption and warnings of a future one amidst the flowers and foliage of some sun-lit mountain). These warnings emphatically bid us "remember the Law," take heed to that gospel of Christ which comes to us with all the authority of a law (Acts xvii. 30; 1 John iii. 23), and is all that we need for salvation. The Jews, who would be wiser than the prophet, insert the fifth verse again, and read it a second time, because Malachi ends so awfully. But the Creator of men's hearts knew best how to reach the hearts he had created. In a somewhat similar way some Christians would not end God's present revelation where he ends it. In Christ's description of "the last day" which is revealed to us, they would, as it were, after Matt. xxv. 46, read again Matt. xxv. 34, and apply it to all. They would interpolate their own speculations of *what God may do* among the revelations of *what God would have us to do*. Instead of pursuing such a perilous path, we bid men "remember." We point them back to the only and unchangeable Saviour and the unalterable gospel (John iii. 18, 36; Gal. i. 8, 9), which is all that we need for salvation, and "whereunto we do well that we take heed," etc. (2 Pet. i. 19).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The Divine fire*. "The day cometh that shall burn as an oven." Fire is one of the most familiar figures of the Divine working. It is one of the forces which man most dreads when it gets beyond control. And it is the force on which man most relies for the purifying of the good and the destruction of the evil. The fire of the oven is fire at its intensest. A hole is dug in the ground, a fire of stubble is kindled in it; by this fire a large stone is heated, and on the stone the bread can be baked. Malachi has already dealt with the refining power of the fire of God. That which is good is freed and cleansed and improved by means of it. The prophet does not see the whole of the features of the day of God; only those which are directly related to the condition and needs of the people in his day. Every prophet is one-sided; and we must learn from all if we would apprehend the *whole* of truth, even concerning the Divine fire. Malachi had to adapt his teachings to some who were sincere but mistaken. To them the Divine fire is disciplinary. "He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver." But he had also to adapt his teachings to some who were wilfully and persistently wrong. To them the Divine fire is, in some sense, destructive, consuming. "The proud shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall

burn them up." There are two things characteristic of the Divine fire, which are suggested by the double figure of refining and consuming.

I. THE OPERATION OF THE DIVINE FIRE DEPENDS ON WHAT IT OPERATES ON. This is one of the most marked peculiarities of common fire. It scatters water; it melts wax; it destroys wood; it hardens clay; it purifies metal. It makes silver valuable; it makes dross worthless. And so with the Divine fire. The apostle dwells on its testing power (1 Cor. iii. 13); but here its actual moral effect on differing characters is indicated. Take classes of character in Malachi's time, and show the different effects which Divine dealings had upon them. Take types of character now, and show how Divine dealings soften or harden.

II. THE DIVINE FIRE IS DESTRUCTIVE OF THE FORMS OF THINGS, NOT OF THINGS. Science now explains that common fire destroys nothing; it only changes the forms and relations of things. When the state of the wicked is irremediable by any existing moral forces, then their form and relation must be changed. As in the time of the Flood, humanity had to be put in new conditions. God's fire-destructions always begin a new *régime*.—R. T.

Ver. 2.—*The healing sunrise*. "The Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." "As the rising sun diffuses light and heat, so that all that is healthy in nature revives and lifts up its head, while plants that have no depth of root are scorched up and wither away, so the advent of the reign of righteousness, which will reward the good and the wicked, each according to his deserts, will dissipate all darkness of doubt, and heal all the wounds which the apparent injustice of the conduct of affairs has inflicted on the hearts of the righteous" (W. H. Lowe). The figure of "healing in his wings" may be illustrated by the fact that, off Smyrna, every morning about sunrise a fresh gale of air blows from the sea across the land, which from its wholesomeness and utility in clearing the infected air is always called "the doctor."

I. THE WORLD UNDER THE DARKNESS OF REIGNING EVIL. Represented by those dark, depressing, unhealthy days when there is no light in the sky, and the damp mists lie low. Then the plants droop, the flowers do not care to open, and the leaves hang. The song-birds are silent, and the hours drag on wearily. To the good the darkness of prevailing evil sentiment, evil opinion, evil practice, is necessarily afflictive. These things make an unnourishing atmosphere and bad circumstances. When the darkness of evil prevails in (1) the intellectual world, or (2) the moral world, or (3) the social world, then there will surely be abounding error, moral mischiefs, spiritual depression, and vital disease. As Malachi saw the people in his day, they were in the gloom of triumphant self-will, and there was no sunlight of God in their sky. That sunshine was his hope for the future.

II. THE WORLD IN THE LIGHT OF REIGNING RIGHTEOUSNESS. And that time he saw dawning when Messiah should appear. The birth of the Babe of Bethlehem was the strong sunrise of righteousness. Picture the dawning of the sun in full, clear strength after weeks of dullness, damp, and disease. How the sunbeams dry up the mists, warm the chilled earth, awaken the music of the birds, make the flowers smile, and gladden man's heart. "Notice these flowers all around us, how they turn smiling to the sun's ardent gaze, bend forward in seeming reverence, throw open their pretty cups, and cast around their sweetest perfume. So, when the Sun of Righteousness shines, all moral goodness joyously responds. Evil slinks away into the shadows. When that Sun shines on through the eternal day, man's answering goodness may flourish abundantly."—R. T.

Ver. 3.—*The secret of triumph over wickedness*. The figure of "treading ashes" is suggested by the previous figure of "burning." When the wicked are burned up in the fire of God, all their power to injure the good will be gone. They will but be as ashes of the oven, ashes spread abroad, ashes made a path to walk over. The tone of the prophet is not one of glorying over the fate of the wicked, but of rejoicing in the removal of the hindrance which the wicked ever put in the way of God's faithful servants.

I. THE ILL ESTATE OF THE GOOD WHEN THE WICKED, OR GODLESS, TRIUMPH. This may be illustrated in every sphere. 1. *The national*. Illustrate from the times of Jeremiah, when a godless party held power in the state, and tried to force an Egyptian

alliance. Or from the times of Malachi, when formalist and careless Levites were corrupting the religious sentiments of the people. Or from the state of the Jewish nation in the time of our Lord, when the fountains of religious and secular authority were corrupt, and the crucifixion of ideal virtue was a possibility. Show in what an evil case good people, who feared the Lord, were placed at such times. See the sufferings of Jeremiah and of our Divine Lord. So there are national times now when evil sentiment prevails, and the servants of God have to "keep silence," because it is an "evil time." 2. *The intellectual.* The deistic age of our grandfathers was an evil time for devout believers. This critical age of ours is a time of sore strain for those who would preserve the simplicity of faith. The same truth may be illustrated in the smaller spheres of family, or school, or business. Whenever self-indulgence, bad sentiments, or evil characters have power, those who would live godly, sober, and righteous lives are sorely put to it. Though for them this need be but culturing discipline, the treading on the camomile plant that makes it yield freely its fragrance.

II. THE ILL ESTATE OF THE WICKED WHEN THE GOOD, OR GOD-FEARING, TRIUMPH. This can be treated without any unworthy glorying over the disabilities of others. The point may be illustrated in every sphere, national, political, social, intellectual, or in the smaller spheres of the family, the school, the business, the Church. The point to dwell on is the distress of the wicked, not from personal suffering, but from their inability to do mischief. We may rejoice that the wicked are made helpless by the triumph of goodness.—R. T.

Ver. 4.—*Loyalty to God's revealed will.* It was characteristic of the restored exiles that they endeavoured exactly to reproduce the old Mosaic system; but there was a grave danger involved in their effort. They could not precisely reproduce everything. There must be some adjustment to the very different social and religious sentiments and relations. But those who claimed the authority to make the adjustments would be almost sure to carry their authority too far, and claim to alter and amend the very laws and rules. Under the guise of translation, adaptation, and amplification, the new law of the rabbis became established; and the mischief that it had become in the time of our Lord is evident in its actually overlaying the revealed Law of God, and making the Jehovah-religion a burden beyond bearing. Malachi seems to foresee the mischievous growth of an evil which had already begun in his time, and in this closing passage of his work solemnly calls the people back to the unquestionable and unrivalled authority of the Horeb-revelation given to Moses. It is the great recall that has been again and again found necessary in the course of the ages. It is the recall needed to-day. "To the Law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. viii. 20).

I. THE SIGN OF GOODNESS IN GOD'S PEOPLE. Practical interest in God's revealed Word. The old Jew had none of the difficulties which modern infidelity and modern criticism have put in our fathers' way and in ours. Our fathers were troubled by being assured that a book-revelation was impossible. They might have confidently, yet meekly replied, "But here it is." We are troubled by being told that the Bible is not at all what we think it to be, and is not trustworthy. We may quietly reply, "Whatever it is, it is 'a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path.'" Treatment of the Word is the best test of the godly life.

II. GOD'S REVEALED WORD SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND. It is designed to replenish our life at its fountains of thought, knowledge, and feeling. Therefore the prophet says, "*Remember ye the Law of Moses.*" Keep it in mind; freshen the memory continually.

III. GOD'S REVEALED WORD IS BEST KEPT IN MIND BY KEEPING IT IN THE LIFE. "If any will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." Practical obedience is (1) the best teacher; and (2) our best and constant revealer of the need of teaching.—R. T.

Ver. 5.—*The mission of the second Elijah.* There is no reason for doubting that John the Baptist is referred to. Our Lord's allusions to John as fulfilling this prophecy should suffice to settle the question (see Mark ix. 11—13, Revised Version). There need be no difficulty in admitting John to be the second Elijah, if we apprehend the figurative and poetical character of the prophetic Scriptures. One who would do for

his age a similar work to that which was done by Elijah for his age would, in Scripture, be called an Elijah. There is no occasion whatever for imagining that any miraculous reappearance of Elijah was in the mind of Malachi, or a part of his prophetic message. The Jews overpressed a literal interpretation, and to this day they earnestly pray for the coming of Elias, which, they assume, will immediately precede the appearance of Messiah. Dean Stanley says, "Elijah was the prophet for whose return in later years his countrymen have looked with most eager hope. . . . It was a fixed belief of the Jews that he had appeared again and again, as an Arabian merchant, to wise and good rabbis, at their prayers or on their journeys. A seat is still placed for him to superintend the circumcision of the Jewish children. Passover after Passover the Jews of our own day place the paschal cup on the table, and set the door wide open, believing that that is the moment when Elijah will reappear. When goods are found, and no owner comes; when difficulties arise, and no solution appears, the answer is, 'Put them by till Elijah comes.'"

"Twice in her season of decay,
The fallen Church hath felt Elijah's eye,
Dart from the wild its piercing ray, . . .
The herald star,
Whose torch afar
Shadows and boding night-birds fly."
(Keble.)

Matthew Henry, in a few skilful sentences, suggests the likenesses and the contrasts of the two Elijahs. "Elijah was a man of great austerity and mortification, zealous for God, bold in reproving sin, and active to reduce an apostate people to God and their duty. John the Baptist was animated by the same spirit and power, and preached repentance and reformation, as Elias had done; and all held him for a prophet, as they did Elijah in his day, and that his baptism was from heaven, and not of men." Rabbi Eliezer closes a curious chapter on repentance with these words: "And Israel will not make great repentance till Elijah—his memory for blessing!—come." For fair comparison of the two Elijahs, it is necessary to make careful comparison of the times to which they were sent, noticing the essential sameness underneath the manifest differences. Rabbinism had really driven the spiritual religion of Jehovah from the land in John's days, just as the Astarte form of Baalism had driven the Jehovah-worship from Israel in the days of Elijah. The two men may be compared in relation to—

I. **THEIR PERSONS.** In each case there was an arresting personal appearance, and an unusual power of personal impression. In each case we have a man marked'y different from surrounding men. This is noticeable in the dress, but more in the men themselves. And their mission largely lay in their *personnel*. Men minister for God in what they are in figure, countenance, and impression.

II. **THEIR HABITS.** Both were wilderness men, whose very food was a reproach of prevailing luxury. Their indifference to personal pleasure declared their absorption in their work for God.

III. **THEIR MISSIONS.** Both were sent to be forerunners of a coming God, in grace, to his people. Both were sent to call the people to repentance. *Turning*—turning the people to God, was the work of both. Both had to make the same abrupt demand.

IV. **THEIR SPIRIT.** Both were absolutely loyal to Jehovah. Both were perfectly fearless of all consequences in doing their work. Both were stern in their tone, and saw the sterner side of truth. Both were humanly weak in times of unexpected strain.

V. **THEIR INCOMPLETENESS.** That characterizes the work of all who have preparing work to do. Neither Elijah nor John could count up results. To both life-work might seem a failure. To Elijah, in a mood of depression, it did. But no life is incomplete that is but a piece of a whole, if, as a *piece*, it is complete. That is a comforting truth for the two Elijahs, and for us who now may have but pieces of work given us to do.—R. T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*The day of Divine manifestation.* The margin of the Revised Version

gives the rendering *with*, as preferable to *to*, in the clause, "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children," etc. Then the reference is to the work and influence of the second Elijah on all classes of society, on the hearts of both fathers and children. Keil, however, suggests a more difficult, yet more likely, explanation of the verse, "The fathers are rather the ancestors of the Israelitish nation, the patriarchs, and generally the pious forefathers. . . . The sons, or children, are the degenerate descendants of Malachi's own time and the succeeding ages." The Messiah is designed to be the bond of union for them all. What arrests attention in these closing verses of the Old Testament canon is that the stern side of Messiah's mission gains exclusive prominence. That sterner side specially interested the judgment-prophets of Israel's degenerate days. And it was more particularly suitable for Malachi, because the very form of evil that was to hinder Messiah was beginning in his day. Malachi saw rabbinism taking root.

I. THE DREADFULNESS OF MESSIAH'S DAY FOR THE JEWISH NATION. All days of God, all Divine manifestations, are necessarily two-sided. They are dealings with moral beings, and their results must depend on the response of the moral beings. Every day of God must be a "'savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.' What the coming of Christ was to Simeon and Anna, to the disciples, and to the Church of all the ages, we are constantly dwelling on. That is the bright and sunny side of Messiah's mission. But we may ask—What was Messiah's coming to the officials of the Mosaic religion, and for the Jewish nation that rejected him, under the leading of those officials? It was their last opportunity, their final testing. It proved them to be beyond moral recovery. It removed the last check, and their woe came. Their house was left unto them desolate."

II. THE DREADFULNESS OF CHRIST'S DAY FOR THE SELF-WILLED IN EVERY AGE. For Christ's test of the Jewish nation did but illustrate the test that he is, wherever and whenever he comes. Men reject him still at a peril which they seldom recognize. There is the stern side to a preached gospel. Christ proclaimed as Saviour makes for every man a new and overwhelming condition for the testing of the judgment-day.—R. T.

Vers. 1—3.—*The day of the world's retribution.* "For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven," etc. A graphic representation of these verses is given by Stanley: "The day spoken of was to be like the glorious but terrible uprising of the Eastern sun, which should wither to the roots the insolence and the injustice of mankind; but as its rays extended, like the wings of the Egyptian sun, God should, by its healing and invigorating influences, call forth the good from their obscurity, prancing and bounding like the young cattle in the burst of spring, and treading down under their feet the dust and ashes to which the same bright sun had burnt up the tangled thicket of iniquitous dealing." These words lead us to consider the day of the world's retribution.

I. IT WILL BE A TERRIBLE DAY TO THE WICKED. "Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Primarily this may refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was indeed a time of judgment, but it points on through the whole period of retribution. Mark two things. 1. *How this retributive period regards the wicked.* They are "stubble;" without life, beauty, or value; utterly worthless. They may be wealthy, learned, influential; yet they are nothing but "stubble," destitute even of one grain of moral wheat. 2. *How this retributive period will destroy the wicked.* (1) Painfully; by fire. They shall writhe in the scorching flames of moral remorse and awful forebodings. (2) Completely. "Shall leave them neither root nor branch." To destroy them root and branch may not mean the extinction of their existence, but the extinction of all that makes existence tolerable or worth having. This day of retribution is really going on now, but it is only in dawn; the full noon is in the centuries to come.

II. IT WILL BE A GLORIOUS PERIOD TO THE RIGHTEOUS. "But unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." This language may be regarded as indi-

cating the blessedness of the world to a good man. 1. *It is a world of solar brightness.* "The Sun of Righteousness" arises on the horizon of his soul. There are souls that are lighted by sparks of their own kindling, and by the gaseous blaze springing from the bogs of inner depravity. All such lights, whether in the forms of philosophic theories or religious creeds, are dim, partial, transitory. The soul of a good man is lighted by the sun. The sun: (1) Throws his beams over the whole heavens. (2) Reveals all objects in their true aspects and proportions. (3) Quickens all into life and beauty. (4) Is the centre, holding the whole system in order. The soul of the good man is lighted by something more than the brightest lights of human genius; something more, in fact, than moon and stars; lighted by the Sun himself, the Source of all light and warmth and life. Christ is the Light of the good. 2. *It is a world of Divine rectitude.* "Sun of Righteousness." "The kingdom of God is within you." Eternal right is enthroned. God's will is the supreme law. The meat and drink of godly souls are to do the will of their Father who is in heaven. Such a soul is right: (1) In relation to *itself*. All its powers, passions, and impulses are rightly adjusted. (2) In relation to the *universe*. It renders to others what it would have that others should render unto it. (3) In relation to *God*. The best Being it loves the most; the greatest Being it reverences the most; the kindest Being it thanks the most. 3. *It is a world of remedial influence.* "With healing in his wings." The sun's beams are in Scripture called his wings (Ps. cxxxix. 9). The soul through sin is diseased, its eyes are dim, its ears are heavy, its limbs are feeble, its blood is poisoned. The godly is under remedial influences. The beams of the "Sun of Righteousness" work off the disease, repair the constitution, and enable it to run without being weary, and to walk without being faint. There is a proverb among the Jews that "as the sun riseth, infirmities decrease." The flowers which droop and languish all night revive in the morning. The late Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, called upon a friend just as he had received a letter from his son, who was surgeon on a vessel then lying off Smyrna. The son mentioned in his letter that every morning about sunrise a fresh gale of air blew from the sea across the land, and from its wholesomeness and utility in cleansing the infected air the wind was called "the doctor." Christ is the Physician of souls. 4. *It is a world of buoyant energy.* "Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." See the calf which from its birth has been shut up in the stall, let forth for the first time into the green fields of May, how full of buoyant energy! it leaps, and frolics, and frisks. This is the figure employed here to represent the gladness with which the godly soul employs its faculties under the genial beams of the "Sun of Righteousness."—D. T.

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