

The Theology of Malachi.

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V. ANOTHER feature of interest in our prophecy is its theodicy. How does it approach the mysteries of suffering—the anomalies of providence—which bewildered almost every Old Testament saint? The apparent inequalities of providence were strongly marked in the days of Malachi. Scepticism was rampant. The faith of many was shattered. ‘The workers of iniquity are built up,’ said they. ‘They that tempt God escape.’ Whatever may have been the state of society in the ‘days of old,’ just ‘now,’ they said, things seem upside down. The proud (**בָּזִים**) are the persons to be congratulated at present (iii. 15). These characters gave immense trouble to the author of Ps. cxix.; and if that Psalm belongs to our period, probably the same individuals are intended there as here. The psalmist complains that the ‘proud’ mocked at him (ver. 51), forged a lie against him (ver. 69), dealt perversely without cause (ver. 78), dug pits for him (ver. 85); but he finds consolation in a closer perusal of God’s *law*. Malachi found relief in the assurance of God’s *love*, and perhaps the two are one; for when the psalmist derived such comfort from the study of the Pentateuch, it may be that it was the assurance of divine love that cheered him, for nowhere in the Old Testament is the doctrine of the love of God so prominent as in the Book of Deuteronomy—which book, by the bye, was also a great favourite with our prophet. Three times God’s love for His people is expressed by the word **בְּרֵאשֶׁת** (Deut. iv. 37, vii. 13, xxiii. 7); eight times by the word **בְּרַחֲמֵי**, which indicates the choice of love; and twice by the word **מִדְנָה**, which denotes the tenderness of love, Deut. xiii. 17, 18; xxx. 3. Amid the seeming anomalies of providence, Malachi had in his possession the master-key to the solution of the mystery, in the conviction of the unchangeableness of divine love. But further, the prophet was convinced that this love, if now apparently dormant, would one day be regnant. He does not find comfort, as some of the psalmists had done, in the shortlivedness of wicked men,—that they should ‘not live out half their days’

(lv. 23); that they were ‘set in slippery places,’ and should become ‘a desolation in a moment’ (lxxiii. 18, 19); that they shall ‘soon be cut down like the grass’ (xxxvii. 2), and in ‘a little while’ each one ‘shall be cut off.’ These, we venture to think, bear the impress of being primitive solutions. The Church outgrew them. It saw too many instances of wickedness triumphant to the last to trust to these explanations. Hence Malachi looks forward to a general renovation—a total *boulevertement* of the present state of things: when ‘the Lord shall come to His temple,’ when ‘judgment shall begin at the house of God’ and shall pass throughout the entire nation, and then ‘shall men clearly perceive (a difference) between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not’ (iii. 18).

VI. The last point that claims our attention is Malachi’s conception of the grand renovation. ‘Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall clear the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the angel of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? for He shall be like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap’ (iii. 1, 2). ‘For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace’ (iv. 1). ‘But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in His wings’ (iv. 2). ‘Behold, I will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord come’ (iv. 5). These passages are beset with difficulties, and have been diversely interpreted. We cannot here discuss these interpretations, but will content ourselves with that explanation which seems to us most reasonable.

First, a word or two as to the phrases, ‘whom ye seek,’ ‘whom ye delight in’ (iii. 1, 2). The systematic reading of the Pentateuch, instituted by Ezra, had rendered the people thoroughly familiar with the history of that period. They had heard of the concrete form in which Jehovah

manifested himself to the patriarchs as 'the Angel.' They know that 'the Angel,' who is also called 'the Face' of Jehovah, went before Israel by night in a pillar of fire, and by day in a pillar of cloud (Ex. xxxiii. 2, 14; Isa. lxiii. 9); that he hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness, and filled the temple with His glory (1 Kings viii. 10). They had read that just before the destruction of the temple the Shekinah forsook it (read Ezek. xi. 23); and though the temple had now been rebuilt, still, according to all Jewish account, 'the Glory' never returned to it. This, then, in my judgment, is the explanation of our text. It was to the returned exile a matter of constant grief that God withheld the manifest token of His presence. They 'desired' and 'sought' earnestly that the Lord would return to His temple, and 'the Angel' visit His people. He is called 'the Angel of the Covenant,' because the guidance of 'the Angel' was the divine promise in connection with the establishment of the Covenant on Sinai (Ex. xxiii. 20), when Israel first accepted the law as its national code. And now that the law had formally been thus accepted a second time, they desired the presence and power of the Covenant-Angel again.

To these desires the reply of the prophet virtually is: 'Ye know not what ye ask.' You profess to desire the coming of the Covenant-Angel to His sanctuary, as in the days of old. In your illusion you have no idea what His coming implies. Who can endure the presence of the Holy God, which is as consuming fire on everything impure and unholy? No man could bear His presence without pain and bitter anguish. Your souls must pass, as it were, through a furnace, and be purified as with lye. Could you endure all this? he virtually asks. Would you be willing to bear the fiery trial, so as to be purified thereby and fitted for the divine presence? 'Who shall stand when He appeareth?' (comp. Joel ii. 11; Isa. xxxiii. 14).

It will thus be seen that the prophet regards the coming of the Lord as a test of character—a view which is prominent throughout the Fourth Gospel (cf. John xi. 39, xii. 31, xiii. 18). 'This is the judgment,' we read, or rather 'the method of judging,' 'that light is come into the world; and (some) men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, . . . but he that doeth the truth cometh to the light.' Some will not submit to the scorching light. They love sin. They

love darkness. They are condemned already. But all who sincerely seek the Lord are 'baptized with fire.' They experience keen pangs of remorse and contrition, but are purified as silver, and cleansed as with fullers' soap.

Before the advent of 'the great and terrible day of the Lord,' the appearance is foretold of the 'messenger' who shall prepare the way before the Lord. In the New Testament this prediction is repeatedly affirmed to have received its accomplishment in the appearance of John the Baptist. He is identified with the messenger, by the angel who appeared to Zacharias (Luke i. 17), and by our Saviour, after the departure of the messengers of John (Matt. xi. 10; Luke vii. 27), as well as by Mark the evangelist in introducing the historic notice of John (Mark i. 3). Thus much seems clear, but when we proceed further, and ask whether John the Baptist was also the Elijah of Matt. iv. 5, we meet with very diverse replies. The Jews of Christ's time lived in constant anticipation of a literal reappearance of Elijah who was translated to heaven. Hence they sent to ask John if he was Elias; and he answered, 'I am not' (John i. 21). Whereas our Lord is recorded to have said, when speaking of John, 'If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah, who was for to come' (Matt. xi. 14); and again, 'Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, and did unto him whatsoever they listed' (Matt. xvii. 11). The explanation of this apparent contradiction is that John was not the *literal* Elijah whom the Jews expected, the veritable Elijah who ascended to heaven; but he had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and if the Jews had 'received him,' and welcomed the Lord whose herald he was, he would have 'restored all things,' and Christ would have 'gathered' them 'as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings.' But Israel did not know their Elijah, nor his Lord, and therefore the restoration was indefinitely postponed, and 'the land' of Israel is under 'a curse' (Mal. iv. 6).

But man's unbelief does not nullify the promises of God. The great and terrible day is yet to come; and one who shall 'come in the spirit and power of Elijah' is yet to be expected, who 'shall restore all things' (Matt. xvii. 11), and 'the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings.' Under this expression we see, not so much the promise of a personal Redeemer as the consum-

mation of salvation, the advent of the reign of universal righteousness: when the gloom of doubt and sorrow and sin shall be dispersed as by the rising of the sun, and light and health and joy

shall reign supreme. ‘And there shall be night no more: for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign for ever and ever.’ ‘And there shall be no more curse’ (Rev. xxii. 3, 5).

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

II.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MANKIND.
By THE REV. JOHN HOWARD CRAWFORD, M.A.
(*T. & T. Clark.* Post 8vo, pp. xii, 379. 5s.) There are thousands who will hail this book as the marching message they have waited for. We confess we cannot. It is a handsome volume, large, beautifully printed, indexed with care, and marvellously cheap. It is written with natural ease and even eloquence. Its scholarship is a constant surprise and delight. Its spirit is noble. And yet we cannot welcome it.

Its object is ‘to show that the end towards which mankind are progressing is a united brotherhood.’ And its purpose is to trace the steps of that movement in history. The object may be challenged, but we do not challenge it. Still less do we deny the skill with which the author has wrought his purpose out. But he rests his argument upon the teaching of Jesus Christ. He claims to trace the working of His words. And it seems to us that he misses an essential distinction in that teaching, whereby he makes not the teaching only, but Jesus Christ Himself, of none effect.

For, unless we miss him utterly, he has it that when Jesus prayed they all might be one, He prayed for the whole world and not for those alone who then heard Him, or who would believe on Him through their word. Two paragraphs will make this manifest. The chapter is ‘The Sacraments,’ and the paragraphs are the third and fourth.

‘That the Church is a universal brotherhood, is clear from the fact that we baptize infants. What right or title can one infant have to baptism more than another? There is no hint in the teaching of Jesus that any child is preferred before another. “Suffer the children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.” “It is not the will of your Father

which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”’

‘It is not by baptism that we become sons of God; we are already His children. But we declare that we recognise our true position towards Him as our Father, who loves us, and has forgiven us. It is from this knowledge of our sonship to the Divine Father that we come to realise our brotherly relation to man.’

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS. By PATON J. GLOAG, D.D. (*T. & T. Clark.* 8vo, pp. xviii, 298. 7s. 6d.) Dr. Gloag has no surprise to give us. The very title of his book tells us that he has no surprise. He still separates the Synoptics from St. John, as it must be admitted current scholarship almost always does, and holds they can be ‘introduced’ apart. We do not believe they can. We believe that some day the relation of St. John to the Synoptics, and the relation of the Synoptics to St. John, will be understood. Some one will come with a theory that will work (they are all unworkable at present), and when he does, the word ‘Synoptic’ will not be found in it. But Dr. Gloag’s purpose is not to startle us. His purpose is to tell us what is most commonly believed among scholars of the present day regarding the origin and relation of the Synoptic Gospels, and there is no man who seems better fitted to do that. He is abreast of the literature, he is free from pet affections and aversions, he is master of a precise and straightforward English style. We must know what is commonly believed among us before we go on to new discoveries, and that Dr. Gloag tells us exceedingly well. It is an *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, candid, capable, and courageous—but not convincing.