

why this closing prophecy of the Old Testament has awakened so much interest is, because the angel who spoke to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and our Lord Himself, distinctly intimate that this prediction respecting Elijah was fulfilled by the ministry of John.

In studying this prophecy, we may feel at first that the intimations of the coming One and the work of judgment assigned to Him, do not completely agree with our ideas of the character of the Prince of Peace, or the actual fulfilment by Christ. The words, "who may abide the day of His coming?" sound more like wrath than mercy.

This difficulty arises mainly from the blending of the human and divine in the sacred writings. Some prophecies are definite and explicit in their statements respecting coming events. In other cases, the main idea or truth is divinely revealed and firmly grasped by the prophet; but the form of imagery, by which it is expressed by him, has a local coloring, taken from his time and circumstances. We do not believe that the prophet was a mere instrument, through which God spoke words which to him had no meaning; but the way in which God in His providence fulfilled the prophecy is often far higher than the prophet's conception of his message. We make difficulties by giving more prominence in our thought to the Oriental imagery or form, than to the essential reality predicted. This was substantially the mistake of the Jews of our Lord's time. Elijah the prophet did not come as the forerunner; but John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," and prepared the way of the Lord. There is reason to think that the greatness of John's preparatory work has not been estimated by the Church at its full value.

A close study of the New Testament will show a profounder agreement between this prophecy and the fulfilment than a superficial view would detect. Malachi speaks of the coming of the Lord as bringing blessing or punishment to different classes according to their character. St. Paul declares that the heralds of the Gospel were to one class "the savour of death unto death," and to another "the savour of life unto life;" and our Lord himself said, "For judgment I am come