

of the most glaring sins of priests and people was the putting away of their lawful Jewish wives, and the marrying of heathen women. This evil, which overwhelmed Ezra with piercing sorrow, calls forth some of the severest condemnation in this prophecy. The reference to this great wrong is one of the most striking passages in this book :

“ Yet ye say, Wherefore ? Because the Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion and the wife of thy covenant. And did He not make one ? Yet had He the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one ? That He might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away ” (ch. ii. 14, 15, 16).

The reasons for this condemnation are evident. It was a union with idolaters, that would hardly fail, as in Solomon's case, to turn away their hearts from the God of their fathers. Such marriages were also a treacherous violation of a solemn covenant, and a cruel abandonment of those to whom they owed faithful love. It is clearly intimated that it was contrary to the Divine purpose in the institution of marriage. He made one, because He sought a godly seed. There is something very graphic and suggestive in the thought that the altar of the Lord was covered “ with tears, with weeping and crying out, insomuch that He regarded not the offering any more.” The idea is that the altar was covered with the tears of the women who had been basely cast off; and therefore the prayers of the transgressors were disregarded; “ because the Lord of the altar has been witness of the unfaithfulness consummated by divorce, of which they have been guilty towards the wives to whom they were bound by the tender recollections of youthful love, by the intimate companionship of married life, and by the solemn covenant which united them to each other ” (Perowne). The thoughts here respecting the sacredness of marriage and the wickedness of divorce are almost identical with the words of our Lord on this subject, in reply to the Pharisees. By Malachi, Jehovah declares that He hates divorce. We have no reason to believe that it is more pleasing in His sight now.