

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

THE SWAN SONG OF PROPHECY.

(By Alexander McLaren, D.D.)

"Malachi" means "My messenger," and it may be that the designation is to be taken in this book, not as a proper name, but as a title of office. The book would then be anonymous, and the use of the same designation in the first verse of the lesson would derive great significance. In this last voice of prophecy the note of anticipation is most strongly struck, the seer stands with eyes fixed on the coming Messiah, and outstretched hand pointing to the horizon, where the signs of Messiah's approach may be seen. The prophet's vision of that future is mainly shaped so as to pulverize the nation's presumptuous confidence that that coming will bring them outward good, and will be a cause of joy to them whatever their moral condition. Because they thought thus, Malachi's prediction menaces rather than comforts and throws the judicial aspect of Messiah's coming into all but exclusive prominence. We have to keep the popular misconceptions in view if we should understand the prophet's emphasis on that side of Messiah's mission.

He begins with the ringing announcement of the coming, and, like Isaiah 40, he predicts a "messenger" who prepares the way. "He shall prepare the way before me" is a plain reference to, probably a quotation from, that earlier prophecy, and the same idea is repeated in the crashing last words of the book, where the forerunner is named "Elijah the prophet." Our Lord quotes this prediction in Matthew 11: 10, with a most significant variation, "I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare the way before thee," thus claiming a mysterious unity with Jehovah.

The preparatory mission being finished, the coming of the Lord follows. It is predicted in most remarkable words, which sound as if charged with threatening rather than with good tidings. "The Lord" is brought into enigmatical connection with "the messenger (or angel) of the covenant." If the rendering "angel" is adopted, there may be a reference to Jeremiah 31: 31 ff. In either case there shines out here, though through a cloud, the great truth that the Lord so dwells in the Messiah that the coming can be spoken of as being either the coming of the Lord or of that messenger. And one cannot but remember that, far away back in the progress of revelation, Moses had been promised that an angel should go before him to keep him by the way, of whom it was said: "My name is in him." Neither the prophet nor his hearers could sound the depths of the prophecy, but we with the light of history thrown back on it, can see clearly what they could only dimly discern—that the Lord came when Jesus came, even as he himself said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Keen-edged irony cuts deep in the two clauses, "the Lord, whom ye seek" and "the messenger . . . whom ye delight in." The prophet lashes the gross carnal conceptions of the Messiah and his work, just as Amos 5: 18 pours out scorn and threatening on those "that desire the day of the Lord," and flings at them the question, "Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord?" and warns them that "it is darkness and not light." They had made for themselves conceptions of God and of Messiah far unlike the realities, and the more they sought and delighted in these figments of their own gross minds, the more unwelcome and threatening would the realities be when they came. There is a grim disil-

lusionizing waiting for all who have made for themselves a God or a Christ after their own imaginings who will bring joy to men whatever their moral condition.

Malachi goes on to beat down these fleshly expectations by putting all but exclusive emphasis on the judicial aspect of Messiah's mission. He uses the image of a refiner's fire and of fullers' soap, and in verse 5 brings up the scenery of a court of justice, as Isaiah does in chapter 1, in which God appears as plaintiff and witness against evil-doers. Observe the transition from "he," to "I" in verses 3 and 5. Notice, too, how the various sins specified are all summed up in that which is their common root, namely, "They fear not me." "I, Jehovah, change not"—it is not so much the metaphysical "attribute" of immutability as the concrete fact of God's "faithfulness" to his covenant-purpose, that is here adduced as the reason why Israel's manifold sins have not long since destroyed it. The "sons of Jacob" were tempted to think that their national preservation showed that God was not displeased by their sins. Malachi sweeps away that delusion which, if cherished, would blunt the force of his threatenings of a strict judgment, by pressing home the thought that if God had not had respect to his own plighted word he would before now have consumed them. "Not for your sakes, be it known unto you, but for mine own holy name's sake."

The second part of the lesson (vs. 7-12) is a stern rebuke of national sins, an exhortation to prepare for the coming Messiah by amended lives, and an exuberant promise of good in Messianic times, if his coming is thus prepared for. The rebuke is thrown into Malachi's favorite form of a vehement charge from his lips, rebutted by a scornful question demanding facts to back the charge, and then established by pointing to such facts. Similarly the prophet's urgent call to return to God is met by the contemptuous retort: "Wherein shall we return?" Like so many of us, they are quite unconscious of having done anything that separates them from God. So far away have they wandered that they are unaware of having wandered at all, and as they do not know that they have departed, they of course do not know what his insistent prophet is driving at when he beseeches them to return. How like the gospel call!

Again Malachi comes back to the charge, accusing his people of robbing God; again the indignant repudiation springs to their lips: "Wherein have we robbed thee?" And God, through Malachi, points to the unrendered tithes and offerings for answer. Of course, that answer in deeply dyed in the Old Testament color, and lays greater stress on externals of worship than prophets were wont to do, but in the immediately preceding verses Malachi has dwelt on the "weightier matters of the law" with emphasis enough to show that he gave them their due place. But let us not forget that we "rob God" in guiltier, graver ways, than by withholding tithes and offerings, when we keep back from him our hearts and our wills, and let us remember withal that we do rob him when we do not give him our wealth, either by not using it as his stewards, or by not devoting a portion of it to his direct service.

The call to "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" is, under present conditions, addressed to us. And we must not fall into the common mis-reading of these verses, which leaves out the all-important "herewith," and construes the command, "Prove me now," as meaning to prove by prayer. It is proving by deed, and that deed the giving of our

possessions to God, which is sure to be followed by a return of "blessing." Malachi is preaching on the text: "Give, and it shall be given unto you." He casts the promise into the characteristic Old Testament guise of recompense in kind. But we have to widen and heighten our expectations of what God gives to them who give themselves and their good to him. They receive better things than abundant harvests grown on earthly fields, or ripened grapes glowing in ruddy clusters. "A hundredfold more in this life" is realized by them, not because giving to God is a good investment, and the surest way of making money, but because what "a righteous man hath" is a hundred times sweeter and better, when given to God, than when stolen from him and used for self, "and in the world to come, life everlasting," which, though it is always "the gift of God," is yet bestowed in measure proportioned to the faithfulness of our stewardship here.

WORLD WIDE MISSIONS.

At the end of 1904 the CMS had on its roll 981 missionaries. Of these 572 are supplied with salaries wholly or in part without drawing on the general funds of the society; 101 of them having gone out wholly or in part at their own expense.

During 1904 more than 9,000 persons, more than 6,000 of whom were adults, were baptized in connection with the CMS mission in Uganda. There are now 18,484 pupils and 50,574 baptized Christians in the whole Uganda protectorate.

An interdenominational missionary society has been formed in Great Britain, called the United Sudan Mission. Its headquarters are at Sheffield, England, and its field is in North Nigeria near the Benue River, the first station being at Wase, 400 miles from the mouth of the Niger. Four missionaries were sent out in 1904 and two more (friends from Ohio) have lately joined the mission.

One thousand Chinese Bibles and Testaments have been distributed this year among the post office clerks in China. Each volume was separately addressed, with a personal letter from the members of the International Christian Association of Postal, Telephone, and Telegraph clerks. The books were distributed through the British and Foreign Bible Society, which paid one-half of the cost of the gift.

Branches of the China Inland Mission which have existed for some time—one in Toronto and one in Philadelphia—have now been incorporated as permanent institutions. These two centres of the mission are conducted on the established principle of relying on prayer for the supply of temporal wants without direct solicitations of funds. So far they have found that needed funds come in, not by chance, but in daily answer to prayer.

In 1833 three white men from France appeared before the great chief Moshesh in Basutoland with a message about a Saviour and a Gospel. The chief compared their message to an egg and said he would wait for it to hatch before forming an opinion. The egg has hatched. After seventy years there are in connection with the Paris Mission in Basutoland 27 missionaries and 425 native workers, with 22,356 professed Christians, of whom 14,950 are communicants. In the year 1903-4 these Basuto Christians gave nearly \$20,000 for home and foreign missions. That is to say, they supported all of the 197 out-stations of the Paris Basuto Mission, and besides this they sent \$400 to the Mission in Basutoland on the Zambesi.