

because Nehemiah himself tells us that this custom of bringing gifts was not allowed by him. Such a reference is quite out of place in its application to a governor as conspicuous for his generosity as we know Nehemiah to have been.

Now, the second of these considerations forces us to the conclusion that the words of Malachi must have been uttered during the time that Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem at the Persian court. That it was during this absence that the evils and abuses with which Nehemiah himself had afterwards to grapple sprang up, we know from Nehemiah's own statement (xiii. 6). But when was this absence? Here again we meet with difficulties. From Neh. xiii. 6 it would appear as if Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem until the year 433 (the 32nd year of the reign of Artaxerxes), that he then went to Susa to resume the duties of his office as cup-bearer of the king, and that after remaining there for a short time—"certain days"—he obtained permission to return to Jerusalem. But that the people should relapse into all of their old abuses during so short an absence on the part of Nehemiah as this, especially after they had been under his guidance for twelve years, is not only improbable but impossible. Such a supposition must simply be ruled out. There is a very serious difficulty in the way of the acceptance of this theory. And to interpret "certain days" as meaning several years is unnatural and unjustifiable.

But is not another interpretation of Neh. xiii. 6 possible? May not the coming to the king in the two-and-thirtieth year of Artaxerxes spoken of refer *not to Nehemiah's return from Jerusalem* but to his going to the palace to serve his turn as cup-bearer? The king, as we know, was attended by a number of cup-bearers, the service of no one of which would be constant. For example, when Nehemiah first heard of the sad condition of Jerusalem he was absent from the court. This is clear from chaps. i. and ii., from which we learn that it was not till some months after hearing from his brother that he visited the king. Thus there is no inconsistency in making his going to the king here refer to his taking up in his proper turn the duties of cup-bearer. In this case, then,