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עַר וְעָנָה in Malachi ii. 12

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IN verses ¹⁰⁻¹² of the second chapter of Malachi, the Prophet is denouncing the faithless among the children of Israel. After making mention of the renegades, who have cast off the religion of Yahwè and joined themselves to foreign gods (vs.¹¹), he proceeds (vs.¹²): "Whoever does this, may Yahwè cut off his whole family from the tents of Jacob!" that is, let not a man of his posterity be left to enjoy the blessings of the chosen people.

There is no doubt that this is the meaning of the verse; the only difficulty is in the phrase עַר וְעָנָה, which must be equivalent to "every individual." The word עַר, as otherwise known, means "waking," and seems to be the participle of עָוַר; Song of Songs 5: ² אָנִי יָשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עָר "I sleep, but my thoughts are awake." The literal translation of עַר וְעָנָה might therefore seem to be, "the one who is awake and the one who answers." But it is not possible to make a suitable phrase out of these materials, as is generally admitted. There is no such correspondence in meaning between "waking" and "answering" as is demanded by the context here, if the phrase is to have any point at all. The reading עַד (cf. the Greek translation, εως = עד) is worse than that of our Massoretic text, as I attempted to show in my article, "The Prophecy of Malachi," in this *Journal*, vol. xvii, 1898, p. 5. At that time I proposed emending the text to עָרַשׁ וְעָנָה, "May Yahwè cut him off root and branch," and this rather desperate suggestion has been approved by Marti in his recent commentary (*Das Dodekapropheton*, 1904).

But the comparison of a parallel in old Arabic usage has led me to change my view, and I now believe that the Masoretic reading עָרַב וְעָרַב is the correct one, though the word עָרַב must be given a new translation. The Arabic phrase is found in the story of the Ayesha scandal (الإندك) as narrated in Ibn Hišām. Ayesha tells how the party went away without her, and how she, returning to the camping-place, found it deserted (ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 782, line 7 f.):

فَرَجَعْتُ إِلَى الْعَسْكَرِ وَمَا فِيهِ مِنْ دَاعٍ وَلَا مُجِيبٍ قَدْ انْطَلَقَ

النَّاسُ; "So I returned to the encampment, but there was not a human being (lit. *one who called and one who answered*) there; the people had gone." This is certainly a very natural proverbial phrase to use in speaking of solitude taking the place of social life. Not a voice is heard; there is no one to begin a conversation nor any to respond. And the Hebrew phrase is the equivalent of the Arabic, if we suppose that עָרַב is a verbal noun with the meaning of עָרַב (Hiphil participle), "the one who *begins* (lit. *arouses or starts*) the conversation, and the one who answers." There is in fact no difficulty in the way of supposing that the verbal noun עָרַב has here the active signification. Aside from the fact that the *Qal* of the verb עָרַב occurs once in the Old Testament (Job 41²) with the transitive meaning "to stir up;" the use of such a noun of the simplest form to correspond to a verb which is regularly used in a derived stem has in it nothing unusual. The familiar example of עָרַב and עָרַב is only one of many which could be given. Jerome and the Jewish tradition which he followed were on the right track with their *magister* (i.e. "the one who arouses or incites"). They saw that the meaning in this context must be active, not stative. As for the choice of the word עָרַב for this particular phrase, while it is true that a verb with the root-meaning *suscitare, provocare*, is very well suited for such an idiom as this one, yet the reason for the selection was undoubtedly the fact that the initial letter of the word is ע. Alliteration is always at a premium in such phrases.

The Massoretic text of Mal. 2²³, then, is right as it stands, namely, יִכְרֹת יְהוָה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה עֵר וְטָנָה מֵאֹהֶל יַעֲקֹב; and the translation is: "May Yahwè cut off, for the man who does this, both the calling one and the answering one out of the tents of Jacob!"