

# INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.



## CHAPTER I.

### ON THE DEFINITION OF THE PARABLE.

WRITERS who have had occasion to define a parable<sup>1</sup> have found it no easy task to give such a satisfying definition as should omit none of its distinctive marks, and at the same time include nothing superfluous and merely accidental. Rather than attempt to add another to the many definitions already given,<sup>2</sup> I will seek to note briefly what seems to me to differ-

<sup>1</sup> Παραβολή, from παραβάλλειν, projicere, objicere, *i.e.* τι τιμί, to put forth one thing before or beside another; and it is often assumed that the purpose for which they are set side by side is, that they may be compared one with the other: thus Plato (*Phil.* 33, B): παραβολή τῶν βίων: and Polybius (i. 2. 2.): παραβολή καὶ σύγκρισις. In this way we arrive at that technical use of παραβολή, which is not, however, peculiar to sacred Greek; for we meet it in Aristotle (*Rhet.* ii. 20), and in Longinus (*παραβολαὶ καὶ εἰκόνες*, 37). At the same time this notion of comparison is not necessarily included in the word, the whole family of cognate words, as παράβολος, παραβόλος, parabolanus, being used in altogether a different sense, yet one growing out of the same root. In all these the notion of *putting forth* is retained, but not for the purpose of comparison, which is only the accident, not of the essence, of the word. Thus παράβολος, qui *objicit se* præsentissimo vitæ periculo, one who exposes his life, as the parabolani at Alexandria who buried infected corpses.—The chief Latin writers are not agreed in their rendering of παραβολή. Cicero (*De Inv. Rhet.* i. 30) represents it by collatio; Seneca (*Ep.* 59) by imago; Quintilian (*Inst.* v. 11. 8) by similitudo.

<sup>2</sup> Tryphon, a Greek grammarian of the age of Augustus, has the

ence it from the fable, the allegory, and such other forms of composition as are most nearly allied to, and most closely border upon it. In the process of thus distinguishing it from those forms of composition with which it is most likely to be confounded, and of justifying the distinction, something will have been said for the bringing out of its essential properties more clearly than in any other way I could hope to do this.

1. There are some who have identified the parable with the Æsopic *fable*, or drawn a slight and hardly perceptible line of distinction between the two: as for instance Lessing and Storr, who affirm that the fable relates an event as having actually taken place at a certain time, while the parable only assumes it as possible. But not to say that examples altogether fail to bear them out in this assertion, the difference is much more real, and far more deeply seated, than this. The parable is constructed to set forth a truth spiritual and heavenly: this the fable, with all its value, is not. It is essentially of the earth, and never lifts itself above the earth. It never has a higher aim than to inculcate maxims of prudential morality, industry, caution, foresight, and the like; and these it will sometimes recommend even at the expense of the higher self-forgetting virtues. The fable just reaches that pitch of morality which the world will understand and

following definition: 'A story which by a comparison of something similar gives a forcible presentation of its subject.' Many from the Greek Fathers are to be found in Suicer, *Thes. s. v. παραβολή*. Jerome, on Mark iv., defines it thus: 'A useful discourse, expressed under an appropriate figure, and containing in its folds some spiritual lesson'; and elsewhere (*Ad Algas.*), 'as a shadow going before the truth.' Bengel: 'A parable is a form of speech which by means of a fictitious narration, which yet resembles the truth, and is taken from matters belonging to the usages of ordinary life, represents truths which are less known or of a moral nature.' Teelman: 'A parable is a similitude taken from ordinary and obvious matters for conveying some spiritual and heavenly meaning.' Unger (*De Parab. Jesu Naturá*, p. 30): 'A parable of Jesus is a comparison by means of a little narrative, imaginary yet resembling truth, by which some sublimer matter is seriously illustrated.'

approve. But it has no place in the Scripture,<sup>1</sup> and in the nature of things could have none, for the purpose of Scripture excludes it; that purpose being the awakening of man to a consciousness of a divine original, the education of the reason, and of all which is spiritual in man, and not, except incidentally, the sharpening of the understanding. For the purposes of the fable, which are the recommendation and enforcement of the prudential virtues, the regulation of that in man which is instinct in beasts, *in* itself a laudable discipline, but *by* itself leaving him only a subtler beast of the field,—for these purposes, examples and illustrations taken from the world beneath him are admirably suited.<sup>2</sup> That world is therefore the haunt and the main region, though by no means the exclusive one, of the fable. Even when men are introduced, it is on the side by which they are connected with that lower world; while on the other hand, in the parable, the world of animals, though not wholly excluded, finds only admission in so far as it is related to man. The relation of beasts to one another not being spiritual, can supply no analogies, can be in no wise helpful for declaring the truths of the kingdom of God. But all man's relations to man are spiritual; many of his relations to the world beneath him are so as well. His lordship over the animals, for instance, rests on his higher spiritual nature, is a dominion given to him from above

<sup>1</sup> The two fables of the Old Testament, that of the trees which would choose a king (Judg. ix. 8-15), and of the thistle and the cedar (2 Kin. xiv. 9), may seem to impeach the universality of this rule, but do not so in fact. For in neither is it God who speaks, nor yet messengers of his, delivering his counsel; but men, and from an earthly standing-point, not a heavenly. Jotham will teach the men of Shechem their folly, not their sin, in making Abimelech king over them; the fable never lifting itself to the rebuke of sin, as it is sin—this lesson lies outside of its sphere—but only in so far as it is also folly. And Jehoash, in the same way, would make Amaziah see his presumption and pride, in challenging a mightier to the conflict; not thereby teaching him any moral lesson, but only giving evidence in the fable which he uttered, that his own pride was offended by the challenge of the Jewish king.

<sup>2</sup> The greatest of all fables, the *Reineke Fuchs*, affords ample illustration of all this; it is throughout a glorifying of cunning as the guide of life and the deliverer from all evil.

(Gen. i. 28 ; ii. 19 ; ix. 2 ; Ps. viii. 6-8) ; will serve, therefore, as in the instance of the shepherd and sheep (John x.), and elsewhere, to image forth deeper truths of the relation of God to man.

It belongs to this, the loftier standing-point of the parable, that it should be deeply earnest, allowing itself therefore in no jesting nor raillery, at the weaknesses, the follies, or the crimes of men.<sup>1</sup> Severe and indignant it may be, but it never jests at the calamities of men, however well deserved, and its indignation is that of holy love : while in this raillery and in these bitter mockings the fabulist not unfrequently indulges ;<sup>2</sup> he rubs biting salt into the wounds of men's souls—it may be,

<sup>1</sup> The definition by Phædrus of the fable squares with that here given :

Duplex libelli dos est, quod *risum* movet,  
Et quod *prudenti* vitam consilio monet.

Twofold my booklet's dowry, to move mirth,  
And by wise counsel to wise life give birth.

<sup>2</sup> As finds place, for instance, in La Fontaine's celebrated fable,—La Cigale ayant chanté tout l'été,—in which the ant, in reply to the petition of the grasshopper, which is starving in the winter, reminds it how it sung all the summer, and bids it to dance now. That fable, commending as it does foresight and prudence, preparation against a day of need, might be compared for purposes of contrast to more than one parable urging the same, as Matt. xxv. 1 ; Luke xvi. 1 ; but with this mighty difference, that the fabulist has only worldly needs in his eye, it is only against these that he urges to lay up by timely industry a sufficient store ; while the Lord would have us to lay up for eternal life, for the day when not the bodies, but the souls that have nothing in store, will be naked, and hungry, and miserable,—to prepare for ourselves a reception into everlasting habitations. The image which the French fabulist uses was very capable of such higher application, had he been conscious of any such needs (see Prov. vi. 8, and on that verse, Cotelier, *Patt. Apost.* vol. i. p. 104, note 13 ; and Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* lxvi. 2). In Saadi's far nobler fable, *The Ant and the Nightingale*, from whence La Fontaine's is undoubtedly borrowed, such application is distinctly intimated. Von Hammer has in this view an interesting comparison between the French and the Persian fable (*Gesch. d. schön. Redek. Pers.* p. 207). The fable with which Cyrus answered the Ionian ambassadors, when they offered him a late submission, is another specimen of the bitter irony of which this class of composition is often the vehicle (Herodotus, i. 141).

perhaps generally is, with a desire to heal those hurts, yet still in a very different spirit from that in which the affectionate Saviour of men poured oil and wine into the bleeding wounds of humanity.

There is another point of difference between the parable and the fable. While it cannot be affirmed that the fabulist is regardless of truth, since it is neither his intention to deceive, when he attributes language and discourse of reason to trees and birds and beasts, nor is any one deceived by him; yet the severer reverence for truth, which is habitual to the higher moral teacher, will not allow him to indulge even in this sporting with the truth, this temporary suspension of its laws, though upon agreement, or at least with tacit understanding. In his mind, the creation of God, as it came from the Creator's hands, is too perfect, has too much of reverence owing to it, to be represented otherwise than as it really is. The great Teacher by parables, therefore, allowed Himself in no transgression of the established laws of nature—in nothing marvellous or anomalous; He presents to us no speaking trees nor reasoning beasts,<sup>1</sup> and we should be at once conscious of an unfitness in his so doing.

2. The parable differs from the *mythus*, inasmuch as in the *mythus* the truth, and that which is only the vehicle of

<sup>1</sup> Klinckhardt (*De Hom. Div. et Laz.* p. 2): 'A fable illustrates some precept of ordinary life and manners in a simple and sometimes jocose story by means of an imaginary example generally contrary to the truth of nature: a parable, on the other hand, illustrates some loftier meaning (pertaining to things divine) in a story which, though simple, is weighty and serious, by means of an example so devised as to seem to be in the closest agreement with the nature of things.' And Cicero (*De Invent.* i. 19): 'The fable is a story which contains matter neither true nor resembling truth.' But of the parable Origen says, 'A parable is a story professedly of something which takes place, which does not indeed take place according to the account given, but is capable of taking place.' There is, then, some reason for the fault which Calov finds with Grotius, though he is only too ready to find fault, for commonly using *fabula* and *fabella* in speaking of our Lord's parables, words which certainly have an unpleasant sound in the ear. Compare Pressensé, *Jésus-Christ, son Temps, sa Vie, son Œuvre*, p. 368.

the truth, are wholly blended together: and the consciousness of any distinction between them, that it is possible to separate the one from the other, belongs only to a later and more reflective age than that in which the mythus itself had birth, or those in which it was heartily believed. The mythic narrative presents itself not merely as the vehicle of the truth, but as itself being the truth: while in the parable, there is a perfect consciousness in all minds, of the distinctness between form and essence, shell and kernel, the precious vessel and yet more precious wine which it contains. There is also the mythus of another class, the artificial product of a later self-conscious age, of which many inimitable specimens are to be found in Plato,<sup>1</sup> devised with the distinct intention of embodying some important spiritual truth, of giving an outward subsistence to an idea. But these, while they have many points of resemblance with the parable, yet claim no credence for themselves either as actual or possible (in this differing from the parable), but only for the truth which they embody and declare.<sup>2</sup> The same is the case when upon some old legend or myth that has long been current, there is thrust some spiritual significance, clearly by an after-thought; in which case it perishes in the letter that it may live in the spirit; all outward subsistence is denied to it, for the sake of asserting the idea which it is made to contain. To such a process, as is well known, the later Platonists submitted the old mythology of Greece. For instance, Narcissus falling in love with his own image in the water-brook, and pining there, was the symbol of man casting himself forth into the world of shows and appearances, and expecting to find the good that would answer to his nature there, but indeed finding only disappointment and death. It was their meaning hereby to vindicate that mythology from charges of absurdity or immorality, to put a moral life into it, whereby it should maintain its ground against the new life of Christianity; though, indeed, they were only thus hastening the

<sup>1</sup> Thus *Gorg.* 523, *a*; *Phædo*, 61, *a*; cf. Plutarch, *De Ser. Num. Vind.* 18.

<sup>2</sup> The λόγος ἐν μύθῳ.

destruction of whatever lingering faith in it there might yet survive in the minds of men.

3. The parable is also clearly distinguishable from the *proverb*,<sup>1</sup> though it is true that, in a certain degree, the words are used interchangeably in the New Testament, and as equivalent the one to the other. Thus, 'Physician, heal thyself' (Luke iv. 23), is termed a parable, being more strictly a proverb;<sup>2</sup> the same may be affirmed of Luke v. 36; which is a proverb or proverbial expression, rather than a parable, which name it bears: compare 1 Sam. xxiv. 13; 2 Chron. vii. 20; Ps. xlv. 14; Wisd. v. 3. On the other hand, those are called 'proverbs' in St. John, which, if not strictly parables, yet claim much closer affinity to the parable than to the proverb, being in fact allegories: thus Christ's setting forth of his relations to his people under those of a shepherd to his sheep, is termed a 'proverb,' though our Translators, holding fast to the sense rather than to the letter, have rendered it a 'parable' (John x. 6: cf. xvi. 25, 29).<sup>3</sup> It is easy to account for this interchange of the words. Partly it arose from one word in Hebrew signifying both parable and proverb;<sup>4</sup> which circumstance must have had considerable influence upon writers accustomed to think in that language, and is itself to be explained from the parable and proverb

<sup>1</sup> Παροιμία, that is, παρ' οἴμον, a *trite*, *wayside* saying; or, as some have understood it, a saying *removed* from the ordinary way, an uncommon saying. Some derive it from οἴμη, a tale, or poem; yet Passow's explanation of the latter word shows that at the root the two derivations are the same. See Suicer, *Thes.* s. v. παροιμία.

<sup>2</sup> It is current at least now in the East, as I find it in a collection of Turkish proverbs, in Von Hammer's *Morgenl. Kleeblatt*, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Παραβολή, I need hardly say, never occurs in the Gospel of St. John, nor παροιμία in the Synoptic Gospels.

<sup>4</sup> חֲשֵׁן. This word the LXX render παροιμίαι in the title of that book which we also call *The Proverbs* of Solomon; and παραβολή elsewhere, as at 1 Sam. x. 12; Ezek. xviii. 2. In *Ecclesiasticus* the two words more than once occur together: thus, xlvii. 17, παροιμίαις καὶ παραβολαῖς, 'the countries marvelled at thee for thy proverbs and parables': xxxix. 3, ἀπόκρυφα παροιμιῶν ἐν αἰνίγμασι παραβολῶν, 'He will seek out the secrets of grave sentences, and be conversant in dark parables.'

being alike enigmatical and somewhat obscure forms of speech, 'dark sayings,' uttering a part of their meaning, and leaving the rest to be inferred.<sup>1</sup> This is evident of the parable, and is not in fact less true of the proverb. For though such proverbs as have become the heritage of an entire people, and have obtained universal currency, may be, or rather may have become, plain enough; yet in themselves proverbs are very often enigmatical, claiming a quickness in detecting latent affinities, and not seldom a knowledge which shall enable to catch more or less remote allusions, for their right comprehension.<sup>2</sup> And yet further to explain how the terms should be often indifferently used,—the proverb, though not necessarily, is yet very commonly, parabolical,<sup>3</sup> that is, it rests upon some comparison either expressed or implied, as for example, 2 Pet. ii. 22. Or again, the proverb is often a concentrated parable; for instance, that one above quoted, 'If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch,' might evidently be extended with ease into a parable; and not merely might many proverbs thus be beaten out into fables, but they are not unfrequently allusions to or summing up in a single phrase of some fable already well known.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So we find our Saviour contrasts the speaking in proverbs or parables (John xvi. 25) with the speaking plainly (*παρρησία*, *i.e.* *πᾶν ῥῆμα*, or every word).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, to take two common Greek proverbs: *Χρῦσα χαλκείων* would require some knowledge of the Homeric narrative; *βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσης* of Attic moneys. The obscurity that is in proverbs is evidenced by the fact of such books as the *Adagia* of Erasmus, in which he brings all his immense learning to bear on the elucidation, and yet leaves many with no satisfactory explanation. Cf. the *Paræmiographi Græci* (Oxf. 1836), pp. 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> It is not *necessarily*, as some have affirmed, a *λόγος ἐσχηματισμένος*, *i.e.* figurative: thus, 'Ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα, 'a foe's gifts are an ill-having,' or *Γλυκὸς ἀπίρρη πόλεμος*, 'He jests at scars that never felt a wound,' with innumerable others, are expressed without figure; but very many are also parabolical, and generally the best, and those which have become most truly popular.

<sup>4</sup> Quintilian: 'The *Παροιμία* is a shorter fable, . . . the parable sets forth the things compared at greater length.' On the distinction



4. It remains to consider wherein the parable differs from the *allegory*. This it does in form rather than in essence; in the allegory an interpenetration of the thing signifying and the thing signified finding place, the qualities and properties of the first being transferred to the last, and the two thus blended together, instead of being kept quite distinct, and placed side by side, as is the case in the parable.<sup>1</sup> Thus, John xv. 1-8, 'I am the true Vine, &c.,' is throughout an allegory, as there are two allegories scarcely kept apart from one another, John x. 1-16; the first, in which the Lord sets Himself forth as the Door, the second as the good Shepherd, of the sheep. So, 'Behold the Lamb of God,' is an allegorical,—'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,' a parabolical expression.<sup>2</sup> The allegory needs not, as the parable, an interpretation to be brought to it from without, since it contains its interpretation within itself; and, as the allegory proceeds, the interpretation proceeds hand in hand with it, or at all events never falls far behind.<sup>3</sup> And thus the

between the *παραβολή* and *παροιμία* there are some good remarks in Hase, *Theol. Nov. Theol. Philolog.* vol. ii. p. 503; and in Cremer, *Wörterbuch d. Neutest. Gräcität*, p. 83, s. v. *παραβολή*.

<sup>1</sup> Thus Lowth (*De Sac. Poës. Heb. Præl.* 10): 'To this must be added what may be taken as a law of the parable, namely, that it is self-consistent in all its parts, and does not admit of any blending of the things themselves with the things called in to illustrate them. In this it differs greatly from the first kind of allegory, which in its gradual advance from the simple metaphor does not in all cases continuously exclude the thing itself, but sinks gradually from the thing itself into those transferred for its illustration, and by certain steps returns with no greater effort from the thing transferred to the thing itself.'

<sup>2</sup> Thus Isai. v. 1-6 is a parable, of which the explanation is separately given, ver. 7; while Ps. lxxx. 8-16, resting on the same image, is an allegory; since, for instance, the casting out of the *heathen*, that the *vine* might be planted, is an intermingling of the thing signifying and that signified, wherein the note of the allegory as distinguished from the parable consists, as Quintilian (*Inst.* viii. 3. 77) observes; for having defined the allegory, he proceeds: 'In every parable either the similitude precedes and the matter itself follows, or the matter itself precedes, and the similitude follows; but meantime its two parts are kept free and distinct.' The allegory, then, is *translatio*, the parable *collatio*.

<sup>3</sup> Of all this the *Pilgrim's Progress* affords ample illustration, 'Inter-

allegory stands to the metaphor, as the more elaborate and long drawn out composition of the same kind, in the same relation that the parable does to the isolated comparison or simile. And as many proverbs are concise parables, so also many are brief allegories. For instance, the following, which is an Eastern proverb—‘This world is a carcass and they who gather round it are dogs,’—does in fact interpret itself as it goes along, and needs not, therefore, that an interpretation be brought to it from without; while it is otherwise with the proverb spoken by our Lord, ‘Whosoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together;’—this gives no help to its own interpretation from within, and is a saying, of which the darkness and difficulty have been abundantly witnessed by the many and diverging interpretations which it has received.

To sum up all, then, the parable differs from the fable, moving as it does in a spiritual world, and never violating the actual order of things natural—from the mythus, there being in the latter an unconscious blending of the deeper meaning with the outward symbol, while the two remain separate and separable in the parable—from the proverb, inasmuch as it is more fully carried out, and not accidentally and occasionally, but necessarily figurative—from the allegory, comparing as it does one thing *with* another, but, at the same time, maintaining their distinctness as an inner and an outer, and not transferring, as does the allegory, the properties and qualities and relations of one *to* the other.<sup>1</sup>

preter’ appearing there as one of the persons of the allegory. Hallam (*Liter. of Europe*, vol. iv. p. 553) counts it a defect in the book, that, ‘in his language, Bunyan sometimes mingles the signification too much with the fable; we might be perplexed between the imaginary and the real Christian;’ but is not this of the very nature of the allegorical fable?

<sup>1</sup> On the whole subject dealt with in this chapter see Gerber, *Sprachlehre als Kunst*, Bromberg, 1873, vol. ii. pp. 44, 109 sqq.