

CHAPTER II.

ON TEACHING BY PARABLES.

HOWEVER our Lord may on one or more occasions have made use of this manner of teaching by parables, with the intention of withdrawing from certain of his hearers the knowledge of truths, which they were unworthy or unfit to receive;¹ so that, in Fuller's words, the parables on such occasions were 'not unlike the pillar of cloud and fire, which gave light to

¹ Macrobius (*Somn. Scip.* i. 2): 'By figures which defended his secret meaning from the base.' No one can deny that this was sometimes the Lord's purpose, without doing great violence to his words (Matt. xiii. 10-15; Mark iv. 11, 12; Luke viii. 9, 10; cf. Ezek. xx. 49). And even if we could successfully deal with the *ἴνα* and the *μήποτε* there, still the passage of Isaiah (vi. 10) is in the way. Where would then be the fulfilment of his prophecy? There can be no doubt that the prophet speaks of a *penal* blindness, a punishment of the foregoing sins of his people, and namely this punishment, that they should be unable to recognize what was divine in his mission and character; which prophecy had its crowning fulfilment, when the Jewish people were so darkened by previous carnal thoughts and works, that they could see no glory and no beauty in Christ, could recognize nothing of divine in the teaching or person of Him who was 'God manifest in the flesh.' It is not that by the command, 'Make the heart of this people fat,' we need understand that any peculiar hardening then passed upon them; but that the Lord, having constituted as the righteous law of his moral government, that sin should produce darkness of heart and moral insensibility, declared that He would allow the law in their case to take its course, and so also with this latter generation: even as that law is declared in the latter half of Rom. i. to have taken its course with the Gentile world: in Augustine's awful words, 'God the only great, who by his ceaseless law casts penal blindness over unlawful lusts.' The fearful curse of sin is

the Israelites, but was a cloud of darkness to the Egyptians ;¹ yet we may assume as certain that his general aim² was not different from that of others who have used this method of teaching, and who have desired thereby to make clearer,³ either to illustrate or to prove the truths which they had in hand :—I say either to illustrate or to prove ; for the parable or other analogy to spiritual truth appropriated from the

that it ever reproduces itself, that he who sows in sin reaps in spiritual darkness, which delivers him over again to worse sin :

‘ For when we in our viciousness grow hard,
Oh, misery on’t, the wise gods seel our eyes,
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at us, while we strut
To our confusion.’

¹ *Pisgah Sight of Palestine*, p. 148.

² Bacon has noted this double purpose of parables (*De Sap. Vet.*) : ‘ Among men a twofold usage of parables has been discovered and has grown into fashion, so that, what is still more remarkable, they are applied to opposite purposes. For parables are serviceable as a mask and veil, and also for elucidation and illustration.’ Cf. *De Augm. Scient.* ii. 13 ; and the passage from Stobæus, on the teaching of Pythagoras, in Potter’s edit. of Clement of Alexandria, p. 676, note.

³ This has been acknowledged on all sides, equally by profane and sacred writers ; thus Quintilian (*Inst.* viii. 3. 72) : ‘ Similitudes are an admirable invention for throwing light on a subject.’ And Seneca (*Ep.* 59) styles them, ‘ the props which help our weakness.’ Again, they have been called ‘ mediators between knowledge and ignorance.’ The author of the treatise *ad Herennium* : ‘ A similitude is used for the sake either of ornament, or of proof, or of clearness in teaching, or of bringing something before our eyes.’ Tertullian (*De Res. Carn.* 33) expressly denies concerning parables that they darken the light of the Gospel (obumbrant Evangelii lucem). Basil calls the parable, a profitable discourse μετ’ ἐπικρύψεως μετρίας, *i.e.* with that moderate degree of concealment which shall provoke, not such as shall repel or defeat, inquiry. The Lord, says Chrysostom (*Hom.* 69 in *Matth.*), spoke in parables, ἐπεθίζων καὶ διεγείρων, *i.e.* by way of rousing and exciting, or, as he expresses it elsewhere (*De Prec. Serm.* 2), that we might dive down into the deep sea of spiritual knowledge, from thence to fetch up pearls and precious stones ; see too the quotation from him in Suicer, *Thes.* s. v. And Jeremy Taylor : ‘ He taught them by parables, under which were hid mysterious senses, which shined through their veil, like a bright sun through an eye closed with a thin eyelid.’

world of nature or man, is not merely illustration, but also in some sort proof. It is not merely that these analogies assist to make the truth intelligible, or, if intelligible before, present it more vividly to the mind, which is all that some will allow them.¹ Their power lies deeper than this, in the harmony unconsciously felt by all men, and which all deeper minds have delighted to trace, between the natural and spiritual worlds, so that analogies from the first are felt to be something more than illustrations, happily but yet arbitrarily chosen. They are arguments, and may be alleged as witnesses; the world of nature being throughout a witness for the world of spirit, proceeding from the same hand, growing out of the same root, and being constituted for that very end. All lovers of truth readily acknowledge these mysterious harmonies, and the force of arguments derived from them.² To them the things on earth are copies of the things in heaven. They know that the earthly tabernacle is made after the pattern of things seen in the Mount (Exod. xxv. 40; 1 Chron. xxviii. 11, 12);³ and the question suggested by the angel in Milton is often forced upon their meditations,---

‘What if earth

Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein

Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?’⁴

¹ So Stellini: ‘As a rule we are so formed as to confuse the proof of an idea with the vividness of the impression which it makes, and to think that we have a clearer understanding of the things by which our power of imagination has been more keenly struck: those things also which are commended to us by their novelty, take firmer hold of us and so abide long in our memory, and do not grow old with any length of time.’ And Spanheim (*Dub. Evang.* vol. ii. p. 497), though he does not urge this side exclusively: ‘They have their use,’ he says, ‘from the impulse they give to the moods of our mind: for parables bring not only greater light, but also stronger emotion.’

² It is from this point of view that Eustathius gives his definition: ‘A parable is a discourse inculcating and lending credibility to the subject by illustrations from common occurrences.’

³ See Irenæus, *Con. Hær.* iv. 14. 3.

⁴ Many are the sayings of a like kind among the Jewish Cabbalists. Thus in the book *Sohar*: ‘Whatsoever is on earth, that also is in heaven.’

For it is an entire misunderstanding of the matter to regard these as happily, but arbitrarily, chosen illustrations, skilfully selected out of the great stock and storehouse of unappropriated images; from whence the same skill might have selected others as good, or nearly as good. Rather they belong to one another, the type and the thing typified, by an inward necessity; they were linked together long before by the law of a secret affinity.¹ It is not a happy accident which has yielded so wondrous an analogy as that of husband and wife, to set forth the mystery of Christ's relation to his Church (Ephes. v. 23-32). There is far more in it than this: the earthly relation is indeed but a lower form of the heavenly, on which it rests, and of which it is the utterance. When Christ spoke to Nicodemus of a new birth (John iii.), it was not merely because birth into this natural world was the most suitable figure that could be found to express that spiritual act which, without any power of our own, is accomplished upon us when we are brought into God's kingdom; but all the circumstances of this natural

and there is nothing so insignificant in the world that it does not correspond to something similar which is in heaven.' In Gfrörer's *Urchristenthum*, vol. ii. pp. 26-30, and Bähr's *Symb. d. Mos. Cult.* vol. i. p. 109, many like passages are quoted. No one was fuller of this than Tertullian: see his magnificent words on the resurrection (*De Res. Carn.* 12): 'All things here,' he says, 'are witnesses of a resurrection, all things in nature are prophetic outlines of divine operations, God not merely *speaking* parables, but *doing* them' (*talia divinarum virium lineamenta, non minus parabolis operato Deo quam locuto*). And again, *De Animâ*, 43, the activity of the soul in sleep is for him at once an argument and an illustration which God has provided us, of its not being tied to the body, to perish with it: 'God stretches out a hand to faith, which has to be helped in the easier form of similitudes and parables, not only of words, but also of things.'

¹ Out of a true sense of this has grown our use of the word *likely*. There is a confident expectation in the minds of men of the reappearance, in higher spheres, of the same laws and relations which they have recognized in lower; and thus that which is *like* is also *likely* or *probable*. Butler's *Analogy* is just the unfolding, as he himself declares at the beginning, in one particular line of this our consciousness that the *like* is also the *likely*.

birth had been preordained to bear the burden of so great a mystery. The Lord is King, not borrowing this title from the kings of the earth, but having lent his own title to them—and not the name only, but having so ordered, that all true rule and government upon earth, with its righteous laws, its stable ordinances, its punishment and its grace, its majesty and its terror, should tell of Him, and of his kingdom which ruleth over all—so that ‘kingdom of God’ is not a figurative expression, but most literal: it is rather the earthly kingdoms and the earthly kings that are figures and shadows of the true. And as with the world of man and human relations, so also is it with the world of nature. The untended soil which yields thorns and briers as its natural harvest is a permanent type and enduring parable of man’s heart, which has been submitted to the same curse, and without a watchful spiritual husbandry will as surely put forth *its* briers and *its* thorns. The weeds that *will* mingle during the time of growth with the corn, and yet are separated from it at the last, tell every one and the same tale of the present admixture, and future sundering, of the righteous and the wicked. The decaying of the slight unsightly seed in the earth, and the rising up, out of that decay and death, of the graceful stalk and the fruitful ear, contain evermore the prophecy of the final resurrection; even as this is itself in its kind a resurrection,—the same process at a lower stage,—the same power putting itself forth upon meaner things (1 Cor. xv. 35–38). Of all such correspondences, as drawn out in Scripture, we ought not to say that they are finely chosen similitudes, but rather rightly appropriated types.

Doubtless it will be always possible for those who shrink from contemplating a higher world-order than that imperfect one around them,—and this, because the thought of such would rebuke their own imperfection and littleness,—who shrink too from a witness for God so near them as even that imperfect order would render, to deny this conclusion. It will be possible for them to reply that it is not as we affirm;

but that our talk of heavenly things is only a transferring of earthly images and relations to them;—that earth is not a shadow of heaven, but heaven, such at least as we conceive it, a dream of earth; that the names Father and Son for instance (and this is Arianism) are only *improperly* used, and in a secondary sense, when applied to Divine Persons, and then are terms so encumbered with difficulties and contradictions that they had better not be used at all; that we do not find and recognize heavenly things in their earthly counterparts, but only dexterously adapt them. This denial will be always possible, and has a deeper root than that it can be met with argument; yet the lover of a truth which shall be loftier than himself will not be moved from his faith that however man may be the measure of all things here, yet God is the measure of man,—that the same Lord who sits upon his throne in heaven, does with the skirts of his train fill his temple upon earth,—that these characters of nature which everywhere meet the eye are not a common but a sacred writing,—that they are hieroglyphics of God: and he counts this his blessedness, that having these round about him, he is therefore never without admonishment and teaching.

For such is in truth the condition of man. Around him is a sensuous world, yet one which need not bring him into bondage to his senses, being so framed as, if he will use it aright, continually to lift him above itself—a visible world to make known the invisible things of God, a ladder leading him up to the contemplation of heavenly truth. And this truth he shall encounter and make his own, not in fleeing from his fellows and their works and ways, but in the mart, on the wayside, in the field—not by stripping himself bare of all relations, but rather by the recognizing of these as instruments by which he is to be educated into the knowledge of higher mysteries; and therefore dealing with them in reverence, seeking by faithfulness to them in their lower forms to enter into their yet deeper significance—entertaining them, though they seem but common guests, and finding

that he has unawares entertained angels. And thus, besides his revelation in words, God has another and an elder, and one, indeed, without which it is inconceivable how that other could be made, for from this it appropriates all its signs of communication. This entire moral and visible world from first to last, with its kings and its subjects, its parents and its children, its sun and its moon, its sowing and its harvest, its light and its darkness, its sleeping and its waking, its birth and its death, is from beginning to end a mighty parable, a great teaching of supersensuous truth, a help at once to our faith and to our understanding.¹

It is true that men are ever in danger of losing 'the key of knowledge,' which should open to them the portals of this palace: and then, instead of a prince in a world of wonder that is serving him, man moves in the midst of this world, alternately its taskmaster and its drudge. Such we see him to become at the two poles of savage and falsely cultivated life—his inner eye darkened, so that he sees nothing, his inner ear heavy, so that there come no voices from nature unto him: and indeed in all, save only in the one Man, there is more or less of the dulled ear, and the filmed eye. There is none to whom nature tells out all that she has to tell, and as constantly as she would be willing to tell it. Now the whole of Scripture, with its ever-recurring use of figurative language, is a re-awakening of man to the mystery of nature, a giving back to him of 'the key of knowledge,' of the true *signatura rerum*: and this comes out, as we might expect, in its highest form, but by no means exclusively, in those which by pre-eminence we call the parables. They have this point of likeness with the miracles, that those, too, were a calling of heed

¹ Abelard's are striking words (*Introd. ad Theol.* ii. 2): 'God takes so much delight in his handiwork that oftentimes He chooses to be figured in the natures of the things which He created, rather than to be expressed in words of human imagination and invention, and is more pleased by the natural similitude of things than by any fitness in human language; and so also the Scripture as regards beauty of eloquence prefers to use the actual natures of things according to some similitude rather than to follow out a strict description in its fulness.'

to powers that were daily working, but which, by their continual and orderly repetition, which ought to have kindled the more admiration, had become *wonder*-works no more, had lost the power of exciting admiration or even attention, until men had need to be startled anew to the contemplation of the energies which were ever working among them.¹ In like manner the parables are a calling of attention to the spiritual facts which underlie all processes of nature, all institutions of human society, and which, though unseen, are the true ground and support of all. Christ moved in the midst of what seemed to the eye of sense an old and worn-out world, and it evidently became new at his touch; for it told to man *now* the inmost secrets of his being, answered with strange and marvellous correspondences to another world within him, helped to the birth great thoughts of his heart, which before were helplessly struggling to be born,—these two worlds, without him and within, each throwing a light and a glory on the other. For on this rests the possibility of a real teaching by parables, such as, resting upon a substantial ground, shall not be a mere building on the air, or painting upon a cloud,—on this, namely, that the world around us is a *divine* world, that it is God's world, the world of the same God who is leading us into spiritual truth; that the ghastly dream of Gnostic and Manichæan, who would set a great gulf between the worlds of nature and of grace, ascribing this to a good, but that to an imperfect or an evil power, is a lie; and that, being originally God's world, it is therefore a sharer in his redemption.

And yet this redeemed world, like man, is in part redeemed only in hope (Rom. viii. 20); being in no present possession, but only in the assured certainty, of a complete deliverance. For this, too, we must not forget, that nature, in its present state, like man himself, contains but a prophecy of its coming glory; it 'groaneth and travaileth;' it cannot tell out all its secrets; it has a presentiment of something, which it is not yet, but hereafter shall be. It, too, is suffering under our

¹ See my *Notes on the Miracles*, 11th edit. p. 9, sqq.

curse: yet thus in its very imperfection wonderfully serving us, since thus it has apter signs and symbols to declare to us our disease and our misery, and the processes of their healing and removing; it has symbols not merely of God's grace and power, but also of man's sins and wretchedness. It has its sores and its wounds, its storms and its wildernesses, its lion and its adder, by these interpreting to us death and all that leads to death, no less than, by its more beneficent workings, life and all that tends to the restoring and maintaining of life.

But while thus it has this gracious adaptation to our needs, not the less does it, in this fallen estate, come short of its full purpose and meaning: it fails in part to witness for a divine order, *tantâ stat prædita culpâ*,—as one, whose eye was mainly directed to this its disorder and deficiency, exclaimed. It does not give always a clear witness, nor speak out in distinct accents, of God's truth and love. Of these it is oftentimes an inadequate expression—yea, sometimes seems not to declare them at all, but rather in volcano and in earthquake, in ravenous beasts and in poisonous herbs, to tell of strife, and discord, and disharmony, and all the woful consequences of the Fall. But one day it will be otherwise; one day it will be translucent with the divine idea which it embodies, and which even now, despite these dark spots, shines through it so wondrously. For no doubt the end and consummation will be, not the abolition of this nature, but the glorifying of it; that which is now nature (*natura*), always, as the word expresses, striving and struggling to the birth, will then be indeed born. The new creation will be as the glorious child born out of the world-long throes and anguish of the old. It will be as the snake casting its wrinkled and winter skin; not the world, but 'the fashion of the world,' passing away, when it puts off its soiled work-day garments, and puts on its holiday apparel for the great Sabbath which shall arrive at last. Then, when it too shall have been delivered from its bondage of corruption, all that it now has of dim and contradictory and perplexing shall disappear. This nature, too, shall be a mirror in which God will perfectly glass Himself, for it shall

tell of nothing but the marvels of his wisdom and power and love.

But at present, while this natural world, through its share in man's fall, has won in fitness for the expression of the sadder side of man's condition, the imperfection and evil that cling to him and beset him, it has in some measure lost in fitness for the expressing of the higher. It possesses the best, yet oftentimes inadequate, helps for this. These human relationships, and this whole constitution of things earthly, share in the shortcoming that cleaves to all which is of the earth. Obnoxious to change, tainted with sin, shut in within brief limits by decay and death, they are often weak and temporary, where they have to set forth things strong and eternal. A sinful element is evidently mingled with them, while they yet appear as symbols of what is entirely pure and heavenly. They break down under the weight that is laid upon them. The father chastens after his own pleasure, instead of wholly for the child's profit; in this unlike that heavenly Father, whose character he is to declare. The seed which should set forth the Word of God, that Word which liveth and abideth for ever, itself decays and perishes at last. Festivals, so frequently the image of the pure joy of the kingdom, of the crowning communion of the faithful with their Lord and with one another, will often, when here celebrated, be mixed up with much that is carnal, and they come to their close in a few hours. There is something exactly analogous to all this in the typical or parabolical personages of Scripture—the men that are to set forth the Divine Man. Through their sins, through their infirmities—yea, through the necessary limitations of their earthly condition, they are unable to carry the correspondences completely out. Sooner or later they break down; and very often even the part which they do sustain, they sustain it not for long. Thus few would deny the typical character of Solomon. His kingdom of peace, the splendour of his court, his wisdom, the temple which he reared, all point to a Greater whom he foreshadowed and foreshowed. Yet this gorgeous forecasting of the coming glory is vouchsafed to

us only for an instant ; we catch a glimpse of it and no more. Even before his reign is done, all is beginning to dislimn again, to lose the distinctness of its outline, the brightness of its colouring. His wisdom is darkened, the perfect peace of his land has disappeared (1 Kin. xi. 14, 23, 26) ; and the gloom on every side encroaching warns us that this is but a fleeting image, not the very substance, of the true kingdom of peace.

Again, there are men who only in some single point of their history are brought into typical relation with Christ : such was Jonah, the type of the Resurrection ; others, again, whose lives at one moment and another seem suddenly to stand out as symbolic, but who then sink back so far that we hesitate whether we may dare to consider them as such at all, and with whom the attempt to carry out the resemblance into greater detail would involve in infinite embarrassment. Samson will at once suggest himself as one of these. Doubtless something more was meant than is contained in the letter, when he out of the eater brought forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness (Judg. xiv. 14) ; or when he wrought a mightier deliverance for Israel through his death than he had wrought in his life (Judg. xvi. 30). Yet we hesitate how far we may proceed. And so it is in every case, for somewhere or other every man is a liar ; he is false, that is, to the divine idea, which he was meant to embody, and fails to bring it out in all its fulness and perfection. So that of the truths of God in the language of men (this language of course including man's acts as well as his words), of these sons of heaven married to the daughters of earth, it may truly be said, ' we have this treasure in earthen vessels.' And we must expect that somewhere or other the earthen vessel will appear, that the imperfection which cleaves to our forms of utterance, to men's words and to their works, will make itself felt either in the misapprehensions of those to whom the language is addressed (as at John iii. 4), or by the language itself, though the best that human speech could supply, by the men themselves, though the noblest, it may be, of their age and nation,

—yet failing to set forth the divine truth in all its fulness and completeness.¹

No doubt it was a feeling, working more or less consciously, of the dangers and drawbacks that attend all our means of communication—a desire, also, to see eye to eye, or, as St. Paul terms it, face to face² (1 Cor. xiii. 12), which caused the

¹ It is now rather ‘in part,’ ‘darkly,’ or ‘in a riddle,’ ‘through a glass’ (1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12), in proverbs (John xvi. 25); cf. Bernard, *In Cant. Serm.* xxxi. 8. A Persian mystical poet has finely expressed this truth:

Sense-world of spirit-world is as a shadow
 And draws from it its sustenance. Our feelings
 Are like imprisoned monarchs, and lie hid
 In verbal dungeons. When the Eternal enters
 The wise man’s heart, then must he straightway soar
 To understanding, and with shadow-pictures
 His visitant interpret. Yet is the image
 Still incomplete: knowledge of self alone
 Can truly profit. This once gained, thou drawest
 From every picture its true consequences;
 But here must much forego, which the Hereafter
 Shall see supplied.

Translated from Tholuck, *Blüthensamml. aus d. Morgenl. Mystik*, p. 216.

² John Smith (*Select Disc.* p. 159) observes that the later Platonists had three terms to distinguish the different degrees of divine knowledge, *κατ’ ἐπιστήμην, κατὰ νόησιν, and κατὰ παρουσίαν*. If we assumed these into Christian theology,—and they very nearly agree with the threefold division of St. Bernard (*De Consid.* v. 3), *opinio, fides, and intellectus* (intuition),—we might say of the first, that it is common to all men, being merely notional, knowing about God: the second is the privilege of the faithful now, the knowing God: the third, the *αὐτοφάνεια* of the same school, the *Arcanum facierum* of the Jewish doctors, will be their possession in the world to come, that seeing of God, the reciprocity of which is finely indicated by Augustine, when he terms it, *Videre Videntem*. It was this, according to Jewish interpreters, which Moses craved, when he said, ‘I beseech thee, shew me thy glory,’ but which was denied him, as being impossible for man in this present life: ‘Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live’ (Exod. xxxiii. 18–20). Yet he, too, they say, came nearer to this than any other of the Lord’s prophets (see Meuschen, *N. T. ex. Talm. illustr.* p. 373). In a striking Mohammedan tradition, the Lord convinces Moses how fearful a thing it would be to comply with his request, ‘Show me thy glory,’—

Mystics to press with such earnestness and frequency, that we should seek to abstract ourselves from all images of things ; that to raise ourselves to the contemplation of pure and naked truth is the height of spiritual attainment, towards which we should continually be struggling.¹ But in requiring this as a test and proof of spiritual progress—in setting it as the mark towards which men should strive, they were not merely laying unnecessary burdens on men's backs, but actually leading astray. For whether one shall separate in his own consciousness the form from the essence,—whether the images which he uses shall be to him more or less conscious symbols,—does not depend on his greater or less advance in spiritual knowledge, but on causes which may or may not accompany religious growth, and mainly on this one,—whether he has been accustomed to think upon his thoughts, to reflect upon the wonderful instrument which in language he is using. One who possesses the truth only as it is incorporated in the symbol, may have a far stronger hold upon it, may be influenced by it far more mightily, may far more really be nourished by it than another, who, according to the mystic view, would be in a higher and more advanced state. It is true, indeed, that for them who have not merely to live upon the truth themselves, but to guard it for others,—not only to drink themselves of the streams of divine knowledge, but to see that the waters of its well-heads be not troubled for their brethren,—for them it is well that they should be conscious, and the more conscious the better, of the marvellous thing which language is,—of the power and mystery, of the truth and falsehood, of words ; and as a part of this acquaintance, that the truth, and that which is the vehicle of the truth, should for them be separable ; but then it should be even for them as soul and body, not as kernel and husk. This last comparison by suffering a spark of that glory, the fulness of which Moses had craved to see, to fall upon a mountain, which instantly burst into a thousand fragments.

¹ Thauler, for instance, is continually urging, 'That we strip and divest ourselves of all images,'—Fénelon the same ; and, indeed, all the Mystics, from Dionysius downward, agree in this.

has been often used, but may easily be pushed into an error. It has been said that, as when the seed is cast into the ground, after a time the kernel disengages itself from the outer coating, and alone remains and fructifies, while the husk decays and perishes ; so in the seed of God's word, deposited in man's heart, the sensible form must fall off, that the inner germ, releasing itself, may germinate. But the image, urged thus far, does not aptly set forth the truth ; it will lead in the end to a perilous slighting of the written word, under pretence of having the inner life. The outer covering is not to fall off and perish, but to become glorified, being pierced and penetrated by the spirit that is within. Man is body and soul, and, being so, the truth has for him need of a body and soul likewise ; it is well that he should know what is body, and what is soul, but not that he should seek to kill the body, that he may get at the soul.

Thus it was provided for us by a wisdom higher than our own, and all our attempts to disengage ourselves wholly from sensuous images must always in the end prove unsuccessful. It will be only a changing of our images, and that for the worse ; a giving up of living realities which truly stir the heart, and a getting of dead metaphysical abstractions in their room. The aim of the teacher who would find his way to the hearts and understandings of his hearers, will never be to keep down the parabolical element in his teaching, but rather to make as large use of it as he can. To do this effectually will demand a fresh effort of his own ; for while all language is, and must be figurative, yet long familiar use is continually wearing out the freshness and sharpness of the stamp—(who, for example, that speaks of *insulting*, retains the lively image of a leaping on the prostrate body of a foe ?) ; so that language is ever needing to be recalled, minted and issued anew, cast into novel forms, as was done by Him of whom it is said, that without a parable spake He nothing ; He gave no doctrine in an abstract form, no skeletons of truth, but all clothed, as it were, with flesh and blood. He did, as He declared his Apostles must do, if they would be

scribes instructed unto the kingdom, and able to instruct others (Matt. xiii. 52); He brought forth out of his treasure things new and old; by the help of the old He made intelligible the new; by the aid of the familiar He introduced that which was strange; from the known He passed more easily to the unknown. And in his own manner of teaching He has given us the secret of all effectual teaching, of all speaking which shall leave, as was said of the eloquence of Pericles,¹ stings in the minds and memories of the hearers. There is a natural delight² in this manner of teaching, appealing, as it does, not to the understanding only, but to the feelings, to the imagination; calling the whole man, with all his powers and faculties, into pleasurable activity: and things thus learned with delight are those longest remembered.³

Had our Lord spoken naked spiritual truth, how many of his words, partly from his hearers' lack of interest in them, partly from their lack of insight, would have passed away from their hearts and memories, and left no trace behind them.⁴ But being imparted to them in this form, under some lively image, in some short and perhaps seemingly paradoxical sentence, or in some brief but interesting narrative, they aroused attention, excited inquiry, and even if the truth did not at the moment, by the help of the illustration used, find

¹ Cicero, *De Orat.* iii. 34.

² This delight has left its mark upon our language itself. To *like* a thing is to compare it with some other thing which we have already before our natural, or our mind's eye; and the pleasurable emotion always arising from this act of comparison has caused us to give the word a wider sense than belonged to it at first. That we *like* what is *like*, is the explanation of the pleasure which rhyme gives us. For the connexion between *leikan* and *leiks* see Dieffenbach, *Goth. Sprache*, vol. ii. pp. 133, 134.

³ Thus Jerome (*Comm. in Matt.* in loc.): 'In order that what the hearers cannot retain if it be presented to them as a bare precept, may be retained by means of similitude and examples.'

⁴ It was, no doubt, from a deep feeling of this that the Jewish Cabalists affirmed, 'The heavenly light never descends without a veil;' with which agrees the saying of the pseudo-Dionysius, so often quoted by the Schoolmen, 'It is impossible that the Divine ray can shine upon us unless it be shrouded with a diversity of sacred coverings.'

an entrance into the mind, yet the words must thus often have fixed themselves in their memories and remained by them.¹ And here the comparison of the seed is appropriate, of which the shell should guard the life of the inner germ, till that should be ready to unfold itself, till there should be a soil prepared for it, in which it could take root and find nourishment suitable to its needs. His words, laid up in the memory, were to many that heard Him like the money of another country, unavailable for present use,—the value of which they only dimly knew, but which yet was ready in their hand, when they reached that land, and were naturalized in it. When the Spirit came, and brought all things to their remembrance, then He filled all the outlines of truth which they before possessed with its substance, quickened all its forms with the power and spirit of life. Not perhaps at once, but gradually, the meanings of what they had heard unfolded themselves to them. Small to the small, they grew with their growth. And thus must it ever be with all true knowledge, which is not the communication of information, the transfer of a dead sum or capital of facts or theories from one mind to another, but the opening of living fountains within the heart, the scattering of sparks which shall kindle where they fall, the planting of seeds of truth, which shall take root in the new soil where they are cast, and striking their roots downward, and sending their branches upward, shall grow up into goodly trees.

Nor must we forget, when we are estimating the amount of the parabolic element in Scripture, how much besides the spoken, there is there of acted, parable. In addition to those parables which, by a more especial right, we separate off, and call by that name, every type is a *real* parable. The whole Levitical constitution, with its outer court, its Holy, its Holiest of all, its High priest, its sacrifices, and all its ordinances, is such, and is declared to be such, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 9). The wanderings of the children of

¹ Bernard: 'Is it not well to hold in its veiled form that which thou canst not receive in its nakedness?'

Israel have ever been regarded as a parable of the spiritual life. In like manner we have parabolic persons, who teach us not merely by what in their own characters they did, but as they represented One higher and greater men whose actions and whose sufferings obtain a new significance, inasmuch as they were in these drawing lines, though often quite unaware of it themselves, which Another and a greater should hereafter fill up; as Abraham when he cast out the bond-woman and her son (Gal. iv. 30), Jonah in the whale's belly, David in his hour of peril or of agony (Ps. xxii.) And in narrower circles, without touching on the central fact and Person in the kingdom of God, how often has He chosen that his servants should teach by an acted parable rather than by any other means, and this because no other teaching was fitted to make so deep and so lasting an impression. Jeremiah breaks in pieces a potter's vessel, that he may foretell the complete destruction of his people (xix. 1-11); he wears a yoke, himself a prophecy and a parable of their approaching bondage (xxvii. 2; xxviii. 10); he redeems a field, in pledge of a redemption in store for all the land (xxxii. 6-15); and these examples might be infinitely multiplied. And as God will have his servants by these signs to teach others, He continually teaches *them* by the same. It is not his word only that comes to his prophets, but the great truths of his kingdom pass before their eyes incorporated in symbols, addressing themselves first to the spiritual eye, and only through that to the spiritual ear. They are eminently *Seers*. Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah will at once suggest themselves, as those of whom, more than, perhaps, any others, this was true. And in the New Testament we have a great example of the same teaching in St. Peter's vision (Acts x. 9-16), and in all the visions of the Apocalypse. Nay, we might venture to affirm that so it was with the highest and greatest truth of all, that which includes all others—the manifestation of God in the flesh. This, inasmuch as it was a making intelligible of the otherwise unintelligible; a making visible of the invisible; a teaching, not by doctrine, but by the embodied doctrine

of a divine life, was the highest and most glorious of all parables.¹

It would be an interesting study to trace the distinctive character of the several Gospels in the parables which they severally record; or, when the parables are common to more than one, in the especial circumstances which they bring prominently out. Here, indeed, only St. Matthew and St. Luke will come into comparison, St. John having allegories, as of the Good Shepherd, the True Vine, but no parables; while St. Mark has only one parable peculiarly his own (iv. 26), and in his record of those which he shares with the other two, presents no very distinctive features. We may say generally of the parables, thus compared, that St. Matthew's are more theocratic; St. Luke's, more ethical; St. Matthew's are more parables of judgment—St. Luke's, of mercy; those are statelier, these tenderer. St. Matthew's are frequently introduced as containing mysteries of the kingdom of God, language which nowhere occurs in St. Luke. In St. Matthew's God evermore appears as the King who, sitting on his throne, scattereth away all evil with his eyes, and has in readiness to avenge all disobedience of men; many of them concluding with distinct judgment acts of a greater or a lesser severity (xiii. 42, 49; xviii. 34; xx. 14; xxi. 41; xxii. 7, 13; xxv. 12, 30). Such judgment acts are not wanting in the parables of St. Luke, but less frequently occur; while mercy supplies to them their ground-tone, as it does to the whole Gospel whereunto they belong. They are of the tree which was spared at the gardener's intercession (xiii. 6); of the Samaritan who poured oil and wine into the traveller's wounds (x. 30); of the father who welcomed back his penitent son (xv. 11); nay, even the parable of Dives and Lazarus is a parable of mercy, for it is the declaration of what the issues of *not* showing mercy will be.

¹ See a few words on this in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, 5, and in Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6, Potter's ed. p. 803): 'For the character of the Scriptures is naturally parabolical, because the Lord also, Who was not of the world, came unto men in the guise of the world.'

Nowhere do the characteristic differences of the two Evangelists come out more strikingly than where they record parables, whose features in many respects resemble one another. Thus compare St. Matthew's parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (xxii. 1) with St. Luke's of the Great Supper (xiv. 16). These are not, as I hope by and by to show, two different versions or reports of the same parable, but separate parables, akin to, but yet distinct from, one another. As nothing is so ductile as fine gold, so was it with the fine gold of the Saviour's doctrine; which yielded itself easily to be fashioned and shaped into new forms, as need might require; the Evangelists severally giving prominence to that aspect of the parable which corresponded most to their own spiritual predispositions, which consented best with the special purpose of their Gospel. The parable in St. Matthew is of a king, and a king's son, for whom a marriage-festival is made. All is here of the theocracy; roots itself in the hopes which the Old Testament cherishes, in the promises with which it abounds. And then, how characteristic of this Evangelist is the double doom—first, of the open foe, and then of the false friend! In St. Luke all is different, and all characteristic. No longer a king, but simply a certain man, makes a supper; the two judgment acts fall into the background; one indeed disappears altogether; while far more is made of the grace and goodness of the giver of the feast, which lead him again and again to send forth his servant that he may gather in the meanest, the most despised, the most outcast, to his table. These are but slight hints on a matter which each student of the parables may profitably follow out for himself.¹

¹ In addition to our recorded parables, Papias, a hearer of St. John, professed to have received by tradition certain other parables of our Lord's (*ξένας παραβολάς*, Eusebius *H. E.* iii. 39, calls them), which he recorded in his lost book, *An Account of the Lord's Sayings*.