THE PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by Barry Alfred

Barry's study of the parables found in the Old Testament, examining the allegorical and symbolic narratives used by the prophets and wisdom writers to convey divine truth through vivid literary imagery.

11 Chapters

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000. Preface

PREFACE. Of the matter contained in these pages, a small portion has already been published in a series of articles in the Quiver; the greater part is new.

It will be seen at once that the work has no claim to originality or independent research; or to that wealth of imagination and learning which has made Trench's "Notes on the Parables of the New Testament "one of the most valuable books of our generation. It addresses itself to simple readers; and is merely a help to Bible reading. Its object is to group together in right connexion and gradation all the phases of parabolic " teaching by comparison "which present themselves in the Old Testament; to suggest the study of certain striking passages, which are usually too apt to be overlooked; and to bring out — what in these days it is especially necessary to dwell upon — the preparatory character (in this respect as in others) of the teaching of the older Scriptures, leading up to the perfect Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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01. Chapter 1

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER I. THE PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW.

I. The general idea of the Parable; its connexion with Mysticism and Analogy; its relation to the doctrine of unity and development in Creation; its various phases. — II. The limitation and the main purpose of parabolic teaching. — III. The various classes of Old Testament parables; the parable of narrative; the parable as riddle and symbolic vision; the parable as proverb; the parable of figurative poetry. — IV. The interest and lessons of parabolic study.

WHILE the parables of the New Testament have become the household words of Christianity — in their simpler beauty and instructiveness the delight of the child, and in their deeper meanings the theme of endless study and comment, — the parables of the Old Testament have been comparatively neglected. The divine perfection of our Lord’s parables has, perhaps naturally, thrown into the shade the earlier and more imperfect forms of the same kind of teaching in the ancient Scriptures. But yet these older parables may well claim a far more careful study than they have usually received, not only for their own sake, but also as being the germs of that which took from His hands this full perfection. Perhaps, as in other investigations, it may even be found that the general law, which runs through all parabolic teaching, is seen with some fresh clearness of illustration in the greater variety and simplicity, which mark the more rudimentary stages of development. Certainly here, as elsewhere, it will be our wisdom to recognise that the voice, which “spake in sundry times and divers manners through the older prophets,” is the voice of the same God “ who in these last days hath spoken to us in His Son.” If we give our deepest and most reverent thought to the Lord’s own words as “ the words of eternal life,” still we may in right measure obey His command by “ searching the “ older “ Scriptures.”

I. The word which we render “parable “ is used in the Old Testament with a far larger variety of signification than in the New. The original word (Mashal) in the Hebrew (like the word parabole in the Greek) has for its fundamental meaning the “ setting one thing beside another,” with the implied object of comparing the two. Parabolic teaching is, therefore, in all its forms a “teaching by comparison.” This leading conception runs through all the various uses of the word; although the form of comparison, and even the clearness and prominence of the idea of comparison, differ greatly in different cases. The form varies from explicit narrative or allegory to simple metaphor. The idea of comparison, in some cases primary and obvious, often becomes secondary, and occasionally is latent, if not entirely lost. This fundamental character of parabolic teaching affords a striking exemplification of the wellknown maxim of the coincidence of the “ first thoughts” of natural instinct with the “third thoughts “ of mature rational principle. In practice such teaching comes down to us from the earliest stages of thought and literature; and in these is due to imaginative and poetic insight, rather than to philosophical reflection. But, nevertheless, it rests on a

fundamental principle of thought, which the advancing knowledge of men brings out with constantly increasing clearness — the conviction of a certain unity ruling, not only the phenomena of Creation, but the laws which govern them, and manifesting itself in different forms through all the kingdoms of the universe, as expressive of the Will, and so of the Nature, of the One Creator. On this unity of law depends the possibility of comparison, while the variety of the forms, in which it embodies itself, results in the exhibition of contrast. The object of parabolic teaching, whether through comparison or through contrast, is to ascend, by virtue of this unity, from the simple to the complex, from the visible to the invisible, from God's dealings with man in the world of Nature to His subtler and higher sway over the world of spirit. Its analogies (as has been well said) [1] "are something more than illustrations, happily but arbitrarily chosen... the world of nature being throughout a witness of the world of spirit, proceeding from the same hand, growing from 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." In a general sense, it is this idea which lies at the root of what is commonly called Mysticism, in its interpretation both of the Book of Nature and of the Book of Holy Scripture. It is easy to show that it has often run wild, in artificial elaboration of arbitrary meanings, or in a luxuriant and subtle exuberance of fancy, reading its own fantastic ideas into that which is seen or recorded literally, and then drawing them out again, as if they were indications of actual law or absolute truth. It is still easier to denounce or ridicule its frequent tendency to ignore or explain away the plain and visible fact, from incapacity to discern its value, or to fit it into a preconceived system of ideas. But there is, nevertheless, a reality of truth and beauty underlying it, which these extravagances cannot destroy, and which the criticism of so-called common-sense is as incapable of discovering, as the dissecting knife or microscope of unveiling the secret of organic life. To the Divine Eye it may ---------- 1 See Trench on the Parables, Introduction sect. ii. well be that all being and all fact are symbolic, as clearly exemplifying the great general laws of God's Will and Nature, and suggesting the analogies, which bring all the exhibitions of these laws into various degrees of connexion. So far as man can enter into the depths of the Divine Wisdom, his mysticism reveals something of this universal truth.. So far as he fails, and tries to eke out the imperfection of his knowledge by arbitrary fancies of his own, he falls into the errors and extravagances, which have brought the very name of Mysticism into excessive discredit. In soberer and more thoughtful use, it is this same idea, which is the fundamental principle of Butler's " Analogy of Nature," and of later works which have trodden the same path of reasoning, and have in some instances gone so far as to assert, not analogy, but identity, of natural and supernatural law. For by " Nature," in this sense, is meant the whole physical and human order of things, as cognisable by our own observation; and the principle of analogy simply compares the laws thus discovered with the great truths of " Natural and Revealed Religion "; guiding us, on the one hand, to the conception of the world unseen, of the future life, of the perfection of the moral government of God; and, on the other, to faith in the reality of miracle, and the supernatural culmination of the great natural law of Mediation in our Lord Jesus Christ. " The things that are seen " are taken as witnessing of the things " that are not seen,"— so far, at least, as to argue that all proceed from one Author.

" The kingdom of heaven " (as in the parables of our Lord) is recognised as having its plain, though imperfect, manifestations before the eyes of men on earth. But modern thought tends, it would seem, to work out this fundamental idea with far greater thoroughness. Philosophic induction toils, slowly but surely, after the rapid intuitions of imagination. What appeared once to be only the

dream of the mystic, or the irresistible tendency of poetic fancy, is now recognised as a solid scientific truth. There lie before us the three great kingdoms of the universe — the kingdom of inorganic matter, the kingdom of organic life, the kingdom of humanity — all in contact with one another, but each separated from the others by barriers which as yet our science cannot pierce. Not only do we trace unity of law ruling the infinite variety of each of these kingdoms, but we cannot but infer some unity underlying the divisions between them. The laws which rule any one realm must have analogy, if not identity, with those which rule the others; for the Supreme Creative Power, whatever it is, must be One throughout, though fulfilling itself in many ways. Its action in the lower spheres may well, therefore, in any case be a parable — a true but imperfect type — of its more mysterious operation in the higher. If we discern in any form the existence of an evolution of higher from lower forms, and of the growth of differentiated variety from simplicity of primordial germs^ and if, at the same time, we believe (as both religion and sound philosophy teach us to believe) in the Supreme guidance of this development by a Divine Mind, then the conviction of this far-reaching analogy becomes continually stronger.

We not only conclude that it would naturally be, but we see that it actually is. Everywhere we watch the process of a gradual development which preserves continuity; and we learn increasingly how instructive is the study of the great laws and forces of being through their simplest and crudest exemplifications.

It is clear that in this we have the rationale of parabolic teaching. It is but an extension of the general principle from the seen to the unseen, when we, as Christians, learn from our Master's lips to believe that the natural order of humanity presents similar types of the supernatural order of the kingdom of Christ, in this world and in the next. Unity underlying variety is the watchword of modern science; and it is the belief in this which is the justification of all teaching by parable. But this teaching by comparison takes many forms.

Sometimes (as in the origin of almost all metaphorical and poetical language) this comparison takes place between different kingdoms of creation — as between the world of inanimate things and the world of life, or between the realm of instinct and the higher realm of reason. Such (to take only Scriptural examples) are the fable of Jotham (Judges 9:7) of the trees choosing a king; or the parables in (Ezekiel 17:3, Ezekiel 19:2, Ezekiel 24:3) of the eagles, the lioness, and the seething-pot; or the command of Solomon (Proverbs 6:6), "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise"; or the remonstrance of Isaiah (Isaiah 1:3), 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Sometimes the comparison is confined within the field of human action, showing how the same great principles of wisdom and folly, good and evil, are involved in the most trivial and the most important acts, extending from the lowest to the highest stations of life. Such is the parable of Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-4), exposing the horrible sin of David by comparison with a homelier form of the same cold-hearted selfishness; or the cunning parable of the widow of Tekoa (2 Samuel 14:4-8), inducing the king to condemn in private life the course which he was himself pursuing in regard to the royal house. Such, again, is the lesson conveyed, directly or by implication, in a large number of proverbs, which illustrate by simple specimens of particular action the general laws of human nature and life.

Sometimes (as constantly in the parables of the New Testament) the comparison is between the dealings of God with man, and the dealings of men with one another; or between the workings of God, in the outer sphere of the visible world and in the inner sphere of spiritual experience, within the narrow limits of this life and in the eternity beyond the grave. Such is the principle of Isaiah's parable of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1); of all the frequent comparisons of the relation of God to His people with the relation of a parent to his children, or a king to his people; of the many parables illustrating the dealings of God with the soul, from the influences of the physical laws of His Providence on the body and the visible life. Of these classes, it is obvious that the last is the highest and most instructive form of teaching. But in all the principle is the same. Whatsoever is done, the Lord is the doer of it. Therefore it is that the simpler laws of Nature illustrate the subtler laws of humanity; therefore the countless acts and thoughts of individual wills are ruled by a few great principles; therefore the actions of God have a perfect unity in their dealings with the body and soul of man, and are, in some degree, set forth by the actions of man, as ** made in the image of God." Accordingly, it is not surprising that, if we take the principle of comparison in its widest sense, it may be almost said to pervade the whole of Scripture, and embody itself in a thousand various shapes. n. The conception of this fundamental principle of parabolic teaching leads naturally to an understanding, first of its limitation, and next of its main purpose.

It is clear that, since the different spheres of being, which the parable brings into comparison, have indeed a general unity, but have also special and distinctive characteristics, the comparison instituted must always be necessarily imperfect. The type will contain at once less and more than the anti-type — less, because, as coming from a lower sphere, it cannot represent the subtler and more spiritual characteristics of the higher — more, because it is apt to have certain features of its own, which may not be preserved in that with which it is compared. It is like a lower organism in comparison with a higher organism of the same great family — having only crude and imperfect indications of certain organs, to which the higher organism gives full perfection of usefulness and beauty, and yet having some organs of its own, which in the higher cease to be useful, and sink into a rudimentary or residual character. This limitation of the completeness of comparison is inevitable, and therefore derogates in no sense from the perfection of the wisdom of the parable. Probably, as the fulness of that wisdom increases, the limitation will be less narrow, because deeper insight will pierce more surely into the common heart of things. But, even if that wisdom be the perfect wisdom of our Lord Himself, some such limitation must still remain.

We may even sec that it subserves the intention of the parable. For if the type were as comprehensive and subtle as the anti-type, it would also be as difficult to understand; and, accordingly, the value of parabolic teaching, as leading from the simple and intelligible to the complex and mysterious, would be impaired, if not lost.

It is of great importance to keep this limitation in mind. Even in the parables of the New Testament it has been too much forgotten by interpreters, as notably in the parables of the Unjust Steward and the Unmerciful Servant. Men have insisted that every detail of the parable shall have something to correspond to it in the reality: they have resolved to find every spiritual feature of the reality shadowed out in the parable. Accordingly they have glided into a fanciful style of interpretation, in which (to use well known language) " anything can be made to mean anything." But in the parables of the Old Testament, which are far less perfect in form and in close- ' ness of comparison, the caution is still more needed.

It must be sufficient to trace out in them a general likeness, without feeling disappointment if we find the points of difference many and striking. It may not, indeed, be unreasonable to conjecture that both analogy and difference have their own 'lessons to convey. We know the One God better, when we see that He works under one great law eternal, but in many and various ways. With this very limitation is closely connected the main use of the parable itself. Our Lord in a celebrated passage (Matthew 13:10-17) — purposely, as we may suppose, couched in startling language — declares that His parables were intended to be a test between those who " seeing see not, and hearing hear not, neither understand," " because their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed," and those whose " eyes see, and ears hear," and to whom therefore " it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." It is manifestly implied that to the one class they would only be stories of obvious beauty, with perhaps a vague suspicion of some secret meaning, into which it was too much trouble to search; to the other they would suggest and stimulate that earnest inquiry, which could pierce to the very centre of their meaning. But it is hardly less manifest that they must have been intended to draw His hearers from the former to the latter class, by arresting attention and suggesting deeper thought. It is impossible to believe that the parable of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son could have failed to force on even the most careless some general conception of their significance, although, no doubt, that conception might stop short of the deeper portions of the whole meaning. Yet this is by no means all that the parable is designed to do.

It has been well said that it is the characteristic of poetry to discover likenesses in things seemingly different; of philosophy to discover distinctions in things seemingly alike. The one process belongs to the bright flashes of imagination; the other to the " dry light " of thought. The office of the parable is, first, to stimulate the one process, and then to lead on to the other; or rather, first, to impress on the imagination the sense of likeness, and then to draw the mind on to that full comprehension, at once poetical and philosophic, in which both likeness and difference are seen in their true relation.

Thus — to take the examples given above — the parable of the Good Samaritan at first sight simply enforces the beauty of charity, as a ruling principle of life, by a lesson drawn from a signal and touching example; next, it may lead on to the conception of our Lord Himself as the true Samaritan, healing, clothing, and succouring the stripped and wounded nature of humanity: but it will not yield its full lesson, until it induces us to pass from the points of likeness to the points of difference, in which the anti-type, as a redemption won by the unspeakable suffering and death of the Redeemer, rises infinitely above even the type of mercy presented in the parable. The parable of the Prodigal Son, in the context in which it appears, leads directly to the conception of the Fatherly love of God; yearning over His erring and repentant children, restoring them at once to a free exuberance of blessing, from which the narrow souls of their brethren recoil in perplexity. But here also deeper thought may well bid us pass on to the contemplation of the Divine love, as doing that which the father in the parable could not do — as calling out repentance in the soul of the sinner himself, and giving him the new heart which cries, " I will arise and go to my Father."

Hence, no doubt, it is that our Lord so often grouped parables together in delivery (as in Matthew 25:1-46; Luke 15:1-32.); and that the Evangelists have, it would appear, occasionally grouped together parables not necessarily delivered at one time.[1] Each parable gives a true, but imperfect picture from its own point of view; and these images need to be combined, if the thing represented is to stand out in solid reality.[2] At times we have parables like the parable of the

Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the Pounds (Luke 19:12-27), actually complementary to each other, ----------

1 See (for example) the great group of parables inMatthew 13:1-58, drawing out the origin, the visible and invisible growth, the free gift and the anxious pursuit, and finally the imperfect condition, of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the parallel passages St. Mark gives three " Seed Parables," the Sower, the Seed growing secretly, and the Mustard Seed; St. Luke gives only the parable of the Sower, recording the Mustard Seed and the Leaven in a wholly different context.

2 How many errors (for example) would have been prevented in the interpretation of the parables of Matt. xxv. if it had been observed that the parable of the Ten Virgins, which brings out the devotional and contemplative side of Christian life, is linked, without even a break, with the parable of the Talents, which deals exclusively with the practical service of bringing out two distinct principles of probation and judgment, combined in the perfection of the great future reality. [1]

These examples have been chosen from the New Testament. For, although the same characteristics indeed exist in the parables of the Old Testament, they are there far less distinctly traceable, simply because in them this form of teaching is far less fully and harmoniously developed. It is, therefore, well that before examining them we should clearly understand and illustrate, by more striking as well as more familiar examples, the principle, the limitation, and the main value of parabolic teaching.

III. Proceeding to such examination of the larger and vaguer use of the word " Parable " in the Old ---------- our Master; and that both these, which relate to the responsibility of conscious discipleship, are followed immediately by the parable of the Sheep and Goats, which discloses the judgment of those who ignorantly serve, or ignorantly disobey, the Lord Jesus Christ. No one of these parables ought ever to have been taken, as disclosing to us the whole truth of man's discipline in life and of God's righteous judgment.

1 In the parable of the Pounds we have the principle of human equality before God and judgment according to works; for each servant starts with the same sum, and the rewards vary according to the various uses made of it. In the parable of the Talents we have the principle of human inequality and judgment according to opportunities; for all the servants start with different amounts of talents, and all are equally rewarded, who have made a proportionate use of the talents committed to their charge.

Testament, we shall find that its parables fall naturally into certain distinct classes.

{a) There is, first, the class of what we commonly know as parables, — that is, explicit narratives, intended to illustrate some general law of human life, and to bring it home in special application to the actual occasion. To this class belong, first, the parable of the highest and most perfect form, drawn, like our Lord's parables, from actual life; such as (for example) the parable of Nathan; next the fable, drawn from the realm of fancy, of which there is no instance in the New Testament, but of which the fable of Jotham in the Old Testament is a wellknown example; lastly, the allegory, closely akin to the true parable or fable, and, except that it bears upon its face a certain artificiality, and a constant significance of some implied meaning, hardly to be distinguished from them. Of this we have some splendid instances in the Book of Ezekiel. These, distinct as they are from each other,[1] are evidently varieties of one species; in which the true idea of the parable, as a teaching

by comparison, is most fully developed. In the New^ Testament it is this species in its first and highest variety which is almost exclusively employed; of the others, largely represented in the Old Testament, there are but slight traces.

---------- 1 See some interesting reflections on their distinctions in Trench on the Parables, introduction, sect. 1.

(J)) From the parable of explicit narrative we pass, next, to a vaguer use of the word " parable " in the Old Testament. It is applied to any expression of a hidden wisdom — whether by metaphor, or proverb, or riddle — into which the world at large can but imperfectly enter. Thus, in Psalms 49:4, the words, " I will incline my ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp "; and in Psalms 78:2, " I will open my mouth in a parable: I will declare dark sayings of old," introduce psalms which contain little or nothing of what we call parable, the one being directly didactic, the other simply historical. In the same sense, Ezekiel complains (Eze. 50:49), " Ah, Lord God! they say of me. Doth he not speak parables? " Those proverbs, in which the symbol only is expressed, and the comparison left to be understood, evidently approach to this class. Such are for example: " Where no oxen is, the crib is clean "; " A bird in the air shall carry the voice '*; " Where the tree falleth, there shall it lie." In one case (Mark 7:15) the figurative and antithetical saying of our Lord, " There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man," is expressly called a " parable." Here the original idea of comparison is at least latent, if not extinct; only the idea of the popular expression (necessarily partial) of a secret wisdom remains behind. In this class we may include some " dark sayings," not expressly termed parables in Scripture, such as the song of Lamech (Genesis 4:23-24), and the "riddle" of Samson (Judges 14:12).[1] It is a class, in which we trace in general only a rudimentary and implicit form of the comparison which marks the true parable. To this same class belong the symbolic actions or acted riddles of the prophets, especially the prophet Ezekiel; and with it may be connected the symbolic visions of prophecy, first found in the early Book of Amos, but most frequent and elaborate in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, the later prophets of the Captivity and the Restoration. All, like the spoken riddle, are intended to call out the question, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things mean?" In most cases the answer is explicitly given; in some it is left to be inferred by present thought or unfolded by future experience.

(c) There is, next, the class of what we generally call "Proverbs." The Hebrew word for "proverb" (Mashdl), which gives its name to the Book of Proverbs, is in fact, the same word which is used for " parable." [2] The idea of comparison, no doubt, lies ---------- [1] InEzekiel 17:2, the " riddle " is obviously used as synonymous with " parable."

[2] Of this connexion we have well-known indications in the New Testament. Thus, on the one hand, the proverb "Physician, heal thyself," is called (inLuke 4:23) a "parable" (see alsoMatthew 15:10-11,Matthew 15:15;Luke 5:36-37) on the other, our at the foundation of this application of the word.

This, as has been often remarked, is very clearly indicated by the well-known passage in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 26:7), " The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable [or proverb] in the mouth of fools." For the meaning clearly is that the proverb " halts "(as we say), that is, fails in the exactness of the comparison which links its two members together. In many proverbs, indeed, the metaphorical use of comparison is still clearly to be traced: " As a jewel of gold in a swine's

snout, so is a fair woman without decoration." " As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more." " Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out." " The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward parts of the belly." In fact, the proverb, which is almost always drawn from physical phenomena or obvious human actions, might often be unfolded into what we call a parable, or the parable compressed into a proverb.

Thus, for example, it is clear that the verse (Proverbs 2:4), "If thou seekest her (wisdom) as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure," contains in a compressed form the same idea, which our Lord ----------

Lord (inJohn 16:25) says, " I have spoken unto you in proverbs," with obvious allusion to His past teaching by parables, and especially to His teaching by paradox in the verses just preceding (John 16:16-19). unfolds in the parables of the " hid treasure " and the " pearl of great price." The principle of metaphor, in fact, underlies the great mass of proverbs, as it comes out explicitly in those which are most widely and popularly used. For in the well-known saying that a proverb is " the wisdom of many and the wit of one," it is implied that it draws out of common knowledge a hidden meaning, which only the keen sighted few can discern. By no means is this process so strikingly successful, as by the use of apt and forcible metaphor. But at the same time the idea of comparison often fades out of the proverb; leaving behind it, however, first, the form of parallelism or antithesis, in which comparison mostly clothes itself; and, next, the notion of something abstruse or enigmatical, discovered by the wisdom of the few, and embodied in such forms as may be, at least in part, understood by the many. This is the case with far the larger number of the proverbs of the Old Testament. Accordingly, here our modern usage has naturally substituted for the original word " parable " the wider and vaguer term of " proverb," — the popular saying (that is), or by-word of life.

(d) But the last sense of the word parable, departing farthest from the original type, is found in especial connexion with the phrase of "taking up his parable." This phrase is applied in Numbers 23:7, &c, &c, to the prophecies of Balaam; in Job 27:1-23, Job 29:1-25, to the final and deliberate utterances of the patriarch in his great controversy; in Isaiah 14:1-23 to a song of triumph over Babylon; and in Micah 2:4, and Habakkuk 2:6, to a solemn lamentation or remonstrance of the prophets. In Numbers 21:27, a song of triumph over Heshbon is ascribed to those " who speak in proverbs." In all cases, the utterance called a "parable" is one of set and almost elaborate form, figurative and poetical, marked in an extreme degree by the parallelism or antithesis, which is characteristic both of Hebrew poetry and of proverbial philosophy. In this use of the phrase, therefore, we seem to have a survival of the two peculiarities of the proverb, ordinarily so called, viz. the figurative method of teaching and the pointed form of parallelism or antithesis, implying comparison or contrast; but of what we generally understand either by parable or by proverb there is hardly an indication.

IV. It is interesting thus to trace the idea contained in the word " parable," as it gradually varies from its distinct and explicit form through vaguer phases, till it ultimately passes into direct and unmetaphorical teaching. The process is full of instruction, as bearing upon the history of language, and the connexions and developments of thought. To the student of Holy Scripture it has a still higher instructiveness, as showing that its formally parabolic teaching is no mere

ornament 01 excrescence, but inseparably connected with direct instruction in the things of God — growing out of the great principle of the unity of all law and being in Him, and adapting itself naturally to the processes, by which the human mind passes from the visible to the invisible, from the concrete to the abstract.

It has also a further interest in the contrast between this vague and variable use of the parable in the Old Testament, and the almost exclusive use of one type, and that the highest, in the New Testament. As by a Divine use of the law of evolution, the parable in Our Lord's hands throws off all lower forms, and survives only in the highest. It does net deign to clothe itself in the garb of fable or allegory, because it will only deal with analogies belonging, not to the cloudland of fancy, but to the solid ground of fact, which are, accordingly, the creations of the mind of God rather than of man. It ascends also from the lower uses belonging to the world of humanity, to the higher purpose of illustrating the ways of God, and the unity which binds together His dealings with the life, bodily, mental, and spiritual, of man. Of the parables, therefore, of the Old Testament, as of the other elements of its revelation, it is true that *' the Law," i.e.^ the older covenant, "made nothing perfect," but was simply " the schoolmaster," having charge of the boyhood of humanity, in order to bring it to the perfect teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, in virtue of that very imperfection, they have, as has already been suggested, a peculiar instructiveness of their own. Just as in the more rudimentary forms of being we see so clearly the connexions of the various species that they seem almost to melt into each other, so in the less perfect developments of the ancient parable we may perhaps trace — 'better than in the more perfect beauty of the parable of the New Testament — the true nature, both of the general principle running through it, and of the gradations by which it passes into plain and unmetaphorical teaching. The subject is a large one — too large for exhaustive treatment in a single volume. But it may well be dealt with in its various parts in different degrees of fulness. Thus it will be well to dwell in some detail on the various forms of the first and highest species of parable, especially as suggesting at many points comparison with the parables of the New Testament. "The parable in the form of symbol," written or acted, occupies a considerable place in the Old Testament, and needs perhaps more elucidation than for ordinary readers it has generally received. " The parable in the form of proverb "may be treated only in general outline, bringing out simply the main characteristics of the proverbial teaching of Holy Scripture. The " parables " of the fourth class cannot be grouped together; each must be examined separately, as forming a prominent and graphic example of Old Testament teaching. The design to be kept in view throughout the whole investigation is, primarily, to bring out the great principle of parabolic teaching— the unity underlying variety, on which all Scripture interpretation largely depends; and secondarily, to throw light on some of the obscurer passages of the Old Testament, which are apt to be but superficially glanced at, if not entirely passed by.

02. Chapter 2

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER II. THE PARABLE AS A NARRATIVE FROM REAL LIFE.

I. The parable of Nathan.— II. The parable of the widow of Tekoah. — III. The parable of "one of the sons of the prophets." — IV. The parable of the Lord’s vineyard in I Isaiah.— V. The parables of the sluggard and the "poor” wise man." THE parable in that highest form, to which, looking to the teaching by parables of our Lord Himself, we most commonly apply the name, is but scantily represented in the Old Testament. One chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Matthew 13:1-58) contains more parables of this type than can be found in all the older Scriptures put together. This is the more remarkable, when we consider that of figurative teaching of other kinds — of metaphor, of type, of proverb, of riddle, of symbolic vision, even of fable — these older Scriptures present a rich abundance. But the parable, as a narrative taken from real life, embodying in some simple form the great principles of human nature and God’s dealings with it, has been raised by our Lord’s teaching from the rudimentary condition, in which we find it in the Old Testament, and stamped peculiarly as His own. In whatever degree of perfection it appears, it differs from the fable in not being drawn from the realm of fancy. It differs from the allegory in this — that, having a solid meaning of its own, it does not imperiously demand some attempt at interpretation from all, thoughtless and thoughtful alike. But its chief lesson is a lesson of transcendent importance — that real history is at least as truly symbolical as fiction — that by God’s eye perfectly, and in measure by the eyes which He enlightens, the great laws of His providence and grace are seen to be represented in the simplest incident of the most homely life, as the whole heaven is mirrored in a single dewdrop- that, accordingly, the history written in Holy Scripture " for our learning " (since it is thus seen under the light of God’s inspiration), being a plain and literal history, is still, as St. Paul has taught us in two celebrated passages (1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Galatians 4:21-31), symbolical of truths which concern all humanity, even to the end of time.[1] In that lesson are involved the

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[1] It was the perverse neglect of this important truth, which was the fatal error of much ancient Mysticism. It is the same fallacy, which underlies much of the sceptical criticism of the present day. As soon as a story is seen, or fancied, to be symbolic, it is assumed to be unhistorical, or (in plain English) false; as soon as the name of a man is found to be significant, it is assumed that he is an abstraction or a myth. Whately’s " Historic doubts as to Napoleon Buonaparte," and other subsequent works of the same kind, have exposed with main principles of the right interpretation both of the Book of human life and the Book of Holy Scripture. Of the fully-developed parables belonging to this class, three, taken from the historical books, arc of the lower and narrower type, merely representing the action of men under images drawn from the same human action in its

simpler forms. The last, which belongs to the pages of the Evangelical Prophet accords most nearly with the higher idea of the Gospel parable, as illustrating by the ordinary action of the husbandman the dealing of God with the souls of His people. In all cases it may be noted that the interpretation of the parable is explicitly given. In the first three parables, addressed to an individual hearer, the object is simply to draw from him a judgment, intended for the imaginary case of the parable, but applicable to his own. The last approaches more closely to the character of an allegory, as suggesting from the first the hidden meaning, which is afterwards declared.

I. 2 Samuel 12:1-15. "And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him. There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds : but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up : and it grew up together

---------- unanswerable force and clearness this fallacy; yet it still remains popular — a true " idol of the School. with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own morsel, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. " And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is worthy to die : and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do that which is evil in his sight? thou hast smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

Every student of Holy Scripture must recognise in the occasion of the famous parable of Nathan the turning-point of David’s life. Up to that time he had continually advanced in glory and prosperity, " in favour with God and man." His last crowning victory (2 Samuel 10:1-19) over the great Ammonite and Syrian confederacy had just established his empire over the surrounding nations; he had received, not long before, the glorious promise (2 Samuel 5:1-25) "of a kingdom to be established for ever," known hereafter as sealing " the sure mercies of David." But the unclouded sun of prosperity had suddenly ripened in him the besetting temptations, to which his ardent, impassioned, and energetic nature was peculiarly liable, but which he had hitherto kept under by the grace of God. According to the old proverb, Corniptio optimi pessiina, his noble character, sinning against light and grace, had fallen into an unexampled depth of wickedness. In his crime itself, hideous as it was, we may indeed recognise a type of crime of which Eastern despotism offers but too many examples. To the eye of the ordinary historian of his reign, it might

have seemed but a little thing, hardly to be noticed in comparison with the larger interests of military and social advance, and the political changes, which were transforming the little kingdom of Israel into a great empire. But the sacred history, written under the inspiration of God, and therefore from the point of view of His moral government, shows us in it, and in the punishment which it brought with it, the very crisis of David's life. From that time onward, a dark cloud passed over the brightness of his glory: his domestic happiness was shattered; rebellion shook his throne, and drove him for a time into exile; his character lost, as it would seem, the boldness and confidence in God's favour, which had hitherto been its strength, and conscience made a coward of the man who had known no fear.

There is something especially striking in the whole tone of the sacred narrative at this point. It records (2 Samuel 11:1-27) simply and without one word of comment the horrible story of David's adultery with Bathsheba; the base attempt to cover it, foiled by a point of military honour in the brave Uriah; the treacherous slaughter of that faithful servant by the sword of the children of Ammon; and, at last, the miserable success won by this series of crimes, when, after a formal mourning for her murdered husband, David took the adulteress to be his wife. Then there is a solemn pause, before the historian adds, with an emphasis terrible in its quiet simplicity, "the thing which David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan unto David." There is a sublime irony in the record of the parable of Nathan, appealing by its pathetic beauty to the natural indignation against wrong, still lingering in the sinner's heart, and drawing forth his unconscious self-condemnation; till at last the awful, " Thou art the man," falls on him, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. If, in the words of the Scripture itself, the sin of David has indeed "given occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme," yet the word of God recording it has spoken in trumpet tones of warning to the sinner, and has had its Divine message, at once of chastisement and of pardon, to the penitent.

There is also something striking in God's choice of a messenger. Nathan had been the bearer to David of God's great promise (2 Samuel 7:1-29); here he is the awful minister of rebuke and punishment. On other occasions he appears as David's servant — now as the chronicler of the reigns of David and Solomon (2 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29) — now as the courtier and statesman, obeying the king's least command (1 Kings 1:10-45) here he speaks in the authority of the Divine mission, and his conscience-stricken master quails before his word. In the Vulgate he is represented as prefacing his parable with the words, Responde mihi judicium — appealing to the king as a judge, and then in God's Name pronouncing judgment upon him. Like Elijah before Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth — like St. Ambrose before Theodosius after the massacre at Thessalonica, — he discharges here the noblest function of the Prophet, as the guardian of God's righteous law, and the avenger of innocent blood. The story of the parable is told with exquisite simplicity and beauty. The ewe lamb of the poor man is to him far more than the many flocks and herds to the rich man. It has a personality, as the darling of the house, the playmate of the children, cherished with an almost fatherly love, and (with a kind of foreshadowing of the interpretation of the parable) becoming "to him even as a daughter."

Again, in the conduct of the rich m an there is this touch of peculiar baseness, that he robs his poor neighbour in order to show apparent generosity to the traveller in the ready hospitality of the East — much as Ananias and Sapphira " lied to the Holy Ghost," in order to obtain the credit of free Christian beneficence (Acts 5:1-9).

It is apparently this last touch, which calls out the wrath of David — interrupting, as it seems, the speaker before he can ask for judgment upon the rich man. At first sight there is a strange anti-climax in the king's words, "The man who hath done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold." But it looks as though the former sentence was the ebullition of his rightful indignation, estimating not the legal, but the moral, aspect of the cruel injustice done; while the latter, carrying out the express ordinance of the law (Exodus 12:1), implies the sudden recollection that, after all, the king was but the minister of the law, and might perhaps have no right to do more than vindicate it by the appointed penalty. There are cruelties which no legal punishment can avenge. To the law the poor man's lamb was but as any other lamb; and the outrage on his affections could be valued by no legal estimate. It is notable that in the sentence on David himself, the penalty of death is suggested in the very words, " Thou shalt not die": and it is also declared that his sin shall be visited by the penalty of even a heavier suffering of the same kind of wrong as that which he had done — in the pollution of the royal house, and in the devastation of it by the sword. The interpretation of the parable is concentrated in the words, "Thou art the man," unveiling to the awakened conscience of David the true nature of his sin, as known and condemned before God. In the unfolding of these words which follows, it is to be noted how, as usual in Holy Scripture, evil is regarded exclusively as sin; the consciousness of the crime against man is lost in the consideration that it is a "despising of the word of the Lord." Only in the truth, which is implied in this view of evil, can human morality have its right basis and its strong inspiration. The vice which disgraces and pollutes self, and the crime which outrages and destroys man, are both sins against "the image of God" in man (comp. Genesis 9:6), and thus (so to speak) sins not only against the Law, but against the Person, of God. So David at once acknowledges in his reply. He can find no words of confession except the brief, pregnant acknowledgment, "I have sinned against the Lord" — unfolded in the great Psalm of his penitence (Psalms 51:1-19), which looks throughout to God and to God alone. "Against Thee only have I sinned, and done evil in Thy sight" In that consciousness — more than in the touching sorrow over his dying child, and in the horror of the hideous fulfilment of the sentence, " I will take thy wives before thine eyes and give them to thy neighbour," by the outrage of Absalom (2 Samuel 16:21-22) — lay the real punishment of David's sin. From this parable there are three lessons — the first critical, the second moral, the third spiritual — which it may be worth while to draw out.

(a.) The first is conveyed by the light thrown upon the true scope of correspondence between the type and the antitype in all teaching by parable. On the one hand, it must be clear to every one that many of the details of this parabolic narrative are inapplicable to the actual history of David's sin, and are merely introduced to give life and colouring to the narrative. Yet, if this parable were interpreted with the excessive minuteness of application, which has been conspicuous in some interpretations of the parables of the New Testament, we should have had to ask, " Who, or what, is represented by the traveller who came to the rich man?" and either to find or to make some faint resemblances, which might give plausibility to an artificial and fantastic answer. On the other hand, it is equally clear that the narrative fails to express with any pretence to completeness the worst features of David's sin. There is no word in it of foulness, of treachery, or of murder. The parable is content to indicate in a comparatively simple form the principle of a rapacious selfishness, from which sprang in the actual history that threefold development of sin. Yet how often has a Scriptural parable been taken to express with perfect completeness the whole idea which it shadows out, and gravely argued upon as a full exposition of the absolute truth! It may, indeed, be observed that

in Nathan’s parable these characteristics, both of redundance and defect in the narrative, are necessarily brought into unusual prominence; for it was the object of the prophet to lead David to an impartiality of judgment, which a premature suspicion of the drift of the parable might have impaired. But, nevertheless, they belong to the idea of parable as such. As has been already pointed out, no type can perfectly correspond to an antitype; and, if it did, being as complex as the antitype, it would be useless for its essential purpose, of leading from the plain and simple to the obscure and intricate. It would be well if these considerations had always been kept in mind, as in respect of parabolic interpretation, so also in the kindred work of interpreting those metaphorical expressions, by which the great mysteries of the Gospel are truly, but from the nature of the case imperfectly, set forth to us. Half the theological errors which have vexed the Church have risen from pressing a metaphor too far, or insisting on regarding it as perfectly expressive of the whole mysterious truth.

(b) The second lesson is a moral lesson, teaching the close connexion of the two forms of covetousness (πλεονεξ■α) — the covetousness of avarice, of which the narrative itself speaks, and the covetousness of lust, which was actually exemplified in David. It is possibly characteristic of the position of woman in the ancient world, that the analogy of the parable suggests no other consideration than the thought of the wrong done to the husband, by the taking from him that which he loves. Of the wrong done to and by the partner of David’s guilt there is no mention. The very phrase used of the lamb, " It was to him as a daughter," while in itself a delicate shadow of approach to the likeness of the thing signified, yet is one which could hardly be used except under the view of woman as an inferior being, belonging to " the hardness of men’s hearts " in those ancient days. But this does not touch the main lesson (so often suggested by the context, in which the word " covetousness " is used in the New Testament), that there is one root, both of licentiousness and of avarice — the latter of which so often replaces in the coldness of advanced age the former sin, more characteristic of the hot blood of youth. That root is lust or concupiscence — the temper of indulged and uncontrolled desire — not in itself sin, but " having in itself the nature of sin" [rationem peccati). The whole spiritual tragedy is described by St. James (James 1:15), in words which might be an inspired comment on the sin of David. "When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The indications of that temper in David are perhaps seen in the polygamy, of which he and his son Solomon are the first conspicuous types. Under the unresisted temptation of Bathsheba’s beauty it burst out, and, once indulged, it forced (so to speak) the subsequent moves of the unhappy sinner in the onward career of sin. Taking to itself two other tendencies in him — to deceit, such as he showed to Ahimelech or to Achish (1 Samuel 21:2, 1 Samuel 27:10-12, 1 Samuel 29:6-9), and to that fierceness of anger against all that barred his way, which flamed out in his rage against Nabal (1 Samuel 25:13) . — it hurried him on blindfold to a dark extreme of treachery and murder, from which, when his eyes were opened, he recoiled in deep self-loathing and horror. Yet in itself, as the parable suggests, it is the same sin, which showed itself in a mean and trivial form in the hardhearted selfishness of the rich man, sparing his own abundance, and serving himself out of the poor man*^s single treasure. In the spiritual, as in the physical, sphere, it is the same law of God which is obeyed (or resisted), both in great and in little things.

(c) These lessons belong to the parable itself. But there is also a spiritual lesson to be learnt from the concluding verse of the history — the immediate answer of mercy to the brief expression of

penitence which broke David’s awestruck silence: “I have sinned against the Lord." How much intensity was concentrated in that brief confession we may learn from that most touching Psalm (Psalms 51:1-19), by old and constant tradition ascribed to the hour of David’s repentance, which sets forth all the gradations of the spiritual experience of the true penitent — passing from the simple cry (Psalms 51:1-4) for pardon in the utter self-abasement of sin, to the consciousness of the contrast within, between the inborn sinfulness of man and the higher life of sanctification, which by God’s gift can overcome it (Psalms 51:5-8), and finally breaking out, first into the prayer for spiritual renewal, then into a vow of future praise and sacrifice (Psalms 51:9-18). How truly that repentance grasped the true idea of evil as sin against the Lord, forgetting for the time his own self-degradation and the crime against Uriah, we have already seen. In this, as there is the only adequate conception of the black horror of evil, so also is there that hope of cleansing and renewal, which distinguishes repentance from mere shame and remorse. It is to this clear apprehension of the true and ultimate character of evil, that there comes the immediate promise of forgiveness — " The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die " — not the less welcomed by the penitent soul, because accompanied by the denunciation of a well-deserved punishment, both as a chastisement to the repentant sinner himself, and as a manifestation of God’s wrath against sin, lest “His enemies should blaspheme." In this utterance we read the true principle of God’s dealing with the penitent in righteousness and love. Just because his sin is forgiven, therefore it is to be punished. The righteous law of retribution can never be put aside. Our "sin will find us out " in its inevitable consequences — touching not ourselves only, but also those whose life is bound up with ours — whether the consequences of outward disgrace and sorrow, or the worse consequences of the bondage and pollution which sin brings upon the soul within. But to the impenitent and hardened sinner these consequences are simply earnests of God’s vengeance, bringing with them " a fearful looking-for of judgment to come "; to the penitent they are the chastisement of God’s mercy, sent in love to teach deeper repentance and faith in Him, and to aid in the purification of the soul, even to " the princely heart of innocence" given by the Holy Spirit. Such were they to David. From that hour, as has been said, the fair flower of his prosperity began to fade, smitten like the innocent child of his sin. There was a heavier punishment still in the deadly fruit of his example, reproduced in the revolting sins of Amnon and Absalom. There was the severest of punishments — the loss of strength, elasticity, bravery, and kingliness of soul, which the after-history shows but too plainly. But these things could be borne patiently and even gladly. They did not impair the fulness of God’s mercy. He had God’s forgiveness, and the hope of the renewed sanctification for which he prayed. On these he, and those who have been like him in sin and repentance, could rest and be satisfied.

II. 2 Samuel 14:4-14. — "And when the woman of Tekoa spake to the king she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king. And the king said unto her. What ailcth thee? And she answered, Of a truth I am a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and killed him. And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him for the life of his brother whom he slew, and so destroy the heir also : thus shall they quench my coal which is left, and shall leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the face of the earth.

"And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. And the woman of Tekoa said unto the king. My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless. And the king said, Whosoever saith aught unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the Lord thy God, that the avenger of blood destroy not any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said. As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth.

"Then the woman said. Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak a word unto my lord the king. And he said. Say on. And the woman said. Wherefore then hast thou devised such a thing against the people of God ? for in speaking this word the king is as one which is guilty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished one. For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God take away life, but deviseth means, that he that is banished be not an outcast from him." The parable of the wise woman of Tekoah resembles the parable of Nathan in this— that, by asking David's judgment on an imaginary question of crime and penalty, it leads him to pronounce sentence unconsciously on his own conduct. It is, however, not only infinitely inferior in beauty, but destitute of all spiritual instructiveness to us. The antitype in it is, we may remark, all but identical with the type; in nothing, except the station of the actors, does the one rise above the other. The moral drawn is defective in at least one important consideration; for it takes no cognisance of the duty of the king to his crown and to his people, which, as usual, restrains his liberty of forgiveness within narrower limits than the less responsible action of a private man. It bears throughout the impress of "the wisdom," that is, the cunning and superficial cleverness, of its author, the mere tool of Joab. The occasion of the parable brings before us one stage in the gradual working out of the judgment pronounced by Nathan on the great sin of David. Amnon, his first-born, had followed the hideous example of one part of that sin, by deliberate and incestuous outrage on his half-sister, Tamar. David, though "very wroth," takes no measure to punish the offender. The Septuagint version of 2 Samuel 13:21, adds, "he did not vex the spirit of Amnon his son, because he loved him, because he was his first-born." Excessive paternal affection (such as he afterwards showed towards Absalom) — united, perhaps, with some uneasy consciousness of his own guilt — draws him aside from his kingly duty. Absalom, the full brother of Tamar, and so, in default of David, her natural avenger, takes the law into his own hands, and follows the other part of David's evil example, by treacherously inveigling Amnon to his house, and there murdering him, in defiance both of natural relationship and the sacredness of hospitality. After this crime he flees into banishment for three years. In his absence we read that the soul of the kine yearned after him. "His soul longed to go forth unto Absalom." " For " (it is added) " he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing that he was dead," — much as when he said of his dead child, " Now that he is dead, wherefore should I fast." Can I bring him back again t " The image of the living son has effaced the memory of the dead : perhaps the idea that Absalom's crime was but a rough kind of justice, rendered necessary by David's own laxity, pleads in his favour. Joab, his faithful and unscrupulous servant, perceives that the king's heart is towards Absalom, and sends a "wise woman of Tekoah" to help him by this parable to a conclusion almost foregone already in his own mind. The parable itself has some historical interest and much subtlety. The question proposed bears on the institution of the God or Avenger of Blood. The recognition of the right and duty of vengeance for bloodshed belonged to the ancient custom of the East generally, as, indeed, it is still found in various forms in half-barbarous races; probably it was a rough but not inefficient means, in days of unsettled government, of guarding the sacredness of

human life. In accordance with the spirit of all ancient law, it regarded the individual, neither in himself, nor as a member of the whole community, but as an integral part of the family, to which, as represented in the nearest of kin, belonged the right and duty of avenging his death. The Mosaic Law, in this case as in others, dealing with an imperfect condition of society, confined itself to regulating, controlling, and purifying the institution, which it was not yet time to supersede. For, in the first place, it drew a clear distinction (see Numbers 35:16-25; Deuteronomy 19:4-13) between deliberate murder and accidental or unpremeditated homicide, thus rising from cognisance of the mere fact of bloodshed to the consideration of the moral character of the crime. In the next place, it limited the spread of the blood-feud, by enacting that it should touch only the homicide himself, and should not extend to his children (Deuteronomy 24:16). In the third place, for the lighter crime it provided the cities of refuge (Num. 25:23), imposing, indeed, the mild penalty of a temporary exile there on those judged guiltless of wilful murder, but otherwise staying the hand of the Avenger of Blood.

It is clear, moreover, from the parable that, when the settled government of the kingdom arose, the king had the power to judge the cause on its merits, and, if he thought fit, to supersede the ancient right and duty of the Avenger of Blood. In so doing, he was held to take upon himself (see 5:9) " the iniquity," if without grave cause he suffered the bloodshed to go unpunished. For “blood," said the Law,” defiled the land," and the land could not be cleansed of the blood that was shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it (see Numbers 35:33, and comp. Genesis 9:6). But, if he would take that responsibility, and really look to the merits of the case, he had a right to abrogate the rough ancient method of wild justice, and to order that not a “hair of the head of the blood-shedder should fall to the earth."

Now the argument of this parable turns entirely aside from the higher aspect of the question, and regards the question of the slaying of the bloodshedder wholly from the point of view of the family. The one consideration dwelt upon is, that if he were slain, an institution meant to guard the existence of a family would be used to extinguish it, " to destroy the heir," " to quench the coal which was left," and to " leave neither name nor remainder on the earth." Of the punishment of the criminal, as such, according to the degree of his guilt, there is no word. Yet clearly to the king this should have constituted of right the one supreme consideration. In the first instance, David seems to have some feeling of this; for he simply assumes the responsibility which he had a right to take upon him, and promises to sit in judgment on the question — " Go to thy house, and I will give charge concerning thee." But the woman, unsatisfied, pleads still for a decision in favour of her surviving son, praying that, if he be spared, " the iniquity” of unavenged blood may " rest on her and her house," and that " the king and his throne may be guiltless." The plea is clearly unsound: for the responsibility of the king, if he assumed the task of judgment, could not be transferred. But it tells on David’s heart by the cry of apparent parental love, which finds an echo there; and he promises her, as again he had a right to promise, immediate protection. “Whosoever saith aught unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more." Still, however, ultimate judgment is suspended; and, therefore, the petitioner ventures on another adjuration by God, which draws out the final promise, " As the Lord liveth, there shall not a hair of thy son’s head fall to the ground." In this promise — antecedent to all such investigation as the law expressly ordered, before it could be rightly decided whether the hand of the avenger should be stayed — the kingly sense of justice is at last overborne by the impulse of a heart sensitive, even to

weakness, to the pleading of family affection, and at the very time pre-occupied with the yearning to forgive a blood-shedder, so near and dear to it.

It is clear from the application of the parable that the cunning speaker sees, and presumes upon, the secret wish of the father's heart concerning Absalom. There is a chartered audacity in her rebuke of the king, as guilty by his own sentence, not only against the offender, but against the whole " people of God," in leaving the unnatural murderer under the mild penalty of banishment — a penalty, moreover, exactly corresponding to that which was ordained by the law, even for accidental homicide. There is an even greater audacity in comparing the unpremeditated crime of the parable with the wilful and treacherous murder of which Absalom (with whatever excuse of foul provocation) had been guilty. For such a crime was expressly excluded by the law from pardon; it was even said of one who "came presumptuously on his neighbour to slay him with guile," " Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die " (Exodus 21:14). Nor can we fail to see that the plea that what is done cannot be undone, "We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground," and the appeal to the law, " God does not take away life, but devises means that the banished may not be altogether expelled from Him" (2 Samuel 14:14, marg. reading), are ventured upon by the woman in confidence that the feelings of the judge are already enlisted on her side — " comforted concerning Amnon, seeing that he was dead," and longing to " bring back his banished." There is, to our ears, a ring of conscious or unconscious irony in her address to the king, "as an angel of God to discern the good and bad." For in the whole narrative of David's dealings with Absalom, justice is overborne by an exaggeration of parental affection almost to idolatry, and a weakness utterly unworthy of the bold and righteous convictions of his better days. In this case we note that the king immediately discerns not only the purpose, but the true authorship, of the parable; and unhesitatingly yields to the desire of Joab. It is true that for two years he still keeps the guilty son at a distance, till his cool audacity forces once more the Intercession of Joab. But the half-measure, as usual, gives way. The crime is fully condoned, and Absalom restored to the princely position, of which he makes traitorous use. The parable obviously contains no depth of meaning, no moral or spiritual lesson. It is simply a cunning device for an Immediate purpose; in that purpose it succeeds only too well.

III. 1 Kings 20:38 to end. — " So the prophet departed and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with his headband over his eyes. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king : and he said. Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said. Keep this man : if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it. And he hasted, and took the headband away from his eyes; and the king of Israel discerned him that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus salth the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria." This parable resembles the two preceding parables as drawing out from a king a judgment which condemns himself. It belongs to the time when Ahab-— clearly, in spite of his spiritual weakness and wickedness, a brave warrior and not unprosperous king — had passed triumphantly, under direct prophetic guidance, through a great national crisis. Twice he had, like David in old times, defeated a formidable Syrian confederacy of

kings, under the supreme rule of the king of Damascus. Israel had been once more the instrument of the power of God against a presumptuous idolatry. In the flush of victory he had, without consulting the prophetic advice through which he had actually triumphed, let Benhadad go, only exacting a promise — apparently never fulfilled (see 1 Kings 22:1) — of cession of cities and acknowledgment of fealty. It was a step recklessly unwise and fatal; and it is rebuked in this parable, spoken by one of the "sons of the prophets." The speaker is with much probability identified by Josephus with Micaiah, the son of Imlah, of whom Ahab afterwards says, " I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1 Kings 22:8). The parable itself needs little explanation. It is clearly implied that the man who gives charge to the supposed soldier is a man in authority, who had a right to use his service, and make him answerable for the prisoner or his ransom. Hence the application to the Lord Himself, as the true leader of Israel, whose soldier Ahab professed to be, and who had a right to direct through His prophet how the victory, which was His, should be used. Even in itself a false and reckless magnanimity to a national enemy may be a crime. But, as in the sparing of Agag by Saul against express command, or the hasty league with Gibeon without " inquiring of the Lord," it is here represented as a presumption against the true King of Israel. There are times when (to use the words of Ps. 136.) God " smites kings and slays mighty kings," just because " His mercy endureth for ever." ’ To spare an oppressive and tyrannical empire, put into our power, may be to resist His righteous vengeance, and sin against His high purposes for the 2 blessing of all families of the earth. The parable must have almost told its own story, even without the express interpretation given. That Ahab’s character was an impulsive and impressible character is evident from the whole of his history; that he felt how it had betrayed him in this case to culpable weakness is seen by his reception of the prophetic rebuke, " heavy and displeased " in sullen anger,[1] but with no word of defence or exculpation. In this case, again, the type and the antitype are all ----------

[1] If the prophet was really Micaiah, the king punished his rebuke by long imprisonment (see1 Kings 22:9,1 Kings 22:13,1 Kings 22:26-27). but coincident. The carelessness of the private soldier, and the neglect of the kingly duty by Ahab, are in essence of the same nature. The judgment must have been anticipated, as soon as the prophetic character of the speaker was known. How signally it was fulfilled is seen in the subsequent history. The day of Ahab’s fall at Ramoth-Gilead marked the turning of the tide of conquest. Literally he paid the penalty on that day by his own life and the slaughter of his people. From that time, till the great revival of Israelitish power under Joash and Jeroboam II., Syria was the scourge and the tyrant of Israel. The parable stands out still as a warning, especially to those who have the responsibilities of authority, that there are times when severity is true mercy, and when a hasty, ostentatious magnanimity may be worse than folly. They are times which have special need of " taking counsel of the Lord.”

IV. Isaiah 5:1-7. Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill : and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a wine-press therein : and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. " And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard : I will take away the hedge

thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down : and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor hoed; but there shall come up briers and thorns : I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. " For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the I house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant : and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." In passing to the parable of Isaiah, we rise at once into a higher region. The object of our contemplation here is the dealing of God with His people, illustrated by the image of the cultivation of one of those vineyards, which were the chief glory of Judah, clothing with fruitfulness and beauty the terraces of her now desolate hills (see Genesis 49:11-12). The parable itself is called " a Song," and it breathes the spirit of one of the most beautiful of the Psalms of Asaph (Psalms 80:1-19). But the two treatments of the one subject are converse to each other. The Psalmist pleads with God by His past mercies against His present wrath. He describes the tender care with which the "vine brought out of Egypt was planted," with "room made ready for it," and depth of root given, "till it filled the land, sending out its branches unto the sea, and its boughs to the great river." He asks why all this should be vain — why it should be exposed to rapine and havoc, and at last "burned with fire, and cut down." The Prophet similarly dwells on God’s tender care of His vineyard, but it is to ask in the name of God — the " well-beloved"[1] of His Jewish Church — why, after all had been done for it, it should bring forth wild grapes ? The vineyard, we may remark, supplies our Lord with the groundwork of two of His parables (Matthew 20:1; Matthew 21:33). But, in both cases, the leading idea is wholly different from that of the Psalmist and Prophet; it turns upon the duty of the fellow-working of man with God in the cultivation of the vineyard. The parabolic saying from His lips, which corresponds most closely to the idea, both of this passage and the 80th Psalm, is the celebrated saying, " I am the True Vine, and my Father is the husbandman " (John 15:1). By the position which it occupies in the book, this parable appears to be one of the earliest utterances of Isaiah, at the close of the reign of Uzziah or in the reign of his successor Jotham . These two reigns had seen in the kingdom of Judah a singular revival

[1] It is noted by Dr. Kay, that this phrase, so familiar in the Song of Solomon, is not found elsewhere, except in this passage. of temporal prosperity, corresponding to a similar, perhaps an even greater, revival under Joash and Jeroboam II. in the kingdom of Israel. God had once more given to His vineyard all the external helps and blessings, which could minister to its fruitfulness. But the whole tenour of the prophetic writings belonging to that age shows that there had been no true moral and spiritual revival — that, under an outward semblance of religion, the canker of a splendid worldliness was eating out the heart of the nobles and the people. There was the appearance, not the reality, of the spiritual fruit, which the great vinedresser desired, and had a right to demand. He had given it the fence and the tower of protection against havoc and robbery. He had blessed it with a soil of fruitfulness, and the inner life of His covenanted blessing. He " looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." The song itself appears, by the change alike of style and person, to end with the second verse. The next three verses are an appeal by the Lord to the consciences of the people themselves, for a judgment between Him and His vineyard — in words which remind us of " the controversy of the Lord with Israel" in Hosea (Hosea 4:1, Hosea 12:2), and the more solemn and tender pleading with Israel in that same controversy, which we find in Micah (Micah 6:1-9). The appeal needs not — perhaps cannot receive — an answer. The sentence of unwilling judgment is pronounced. But both the appeal and the sentence preserve the imagery of the song, and pass in the fifth and sixth verses into the same

form of poetic symbolism, except that in the words, " I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it," it unveils the Divine Person of " the Well-Beloved."

Then comes the solemn application in the seventh verse. The complaint against the vineyard is that it brings [forth "wild grapes " — grapes which have no sweetness, and are incapable of ripening into perfection — like " the degenerate plant of the strange vine" spoken of by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2:21). In the original Hebrew of this application there is a subtle appropriateness in the fact that the opposed words, "judgment " and " oppression," " righteousness " and " a cry," are nearly identical with each other in sound and spelling — thus, it would seem, indicating (what in our Version is lost) that these evil fruits, like the wild grapes of the parable, and the tares in the wellknown parable of our Lord (Matthew 13:24-30), simulate the appearance of the good fruit.

How true was this charge against the age, to which Isaiah was witnessing, we have already seen. The penalty was to be first the removal of the misused blessings; and then — a far heavier punishment — the abandonment of the vineyard to the spiritual fruitlessness, which had chosen for itself It came first in the downfall of all strength and glory, and in the reckless abandonment to various kinds of false worships and idolatries of the days of Ahaz. It came finally and utterly in the yet more disastrous days of the great Captivity .

It is also to be noted here, as, indeed, in the general tone of the prophetic utterances of this age and the age preceding, that the sins which draw down the condemnation of the Lord are not solely, or even principally, the sins of religious corruption and apostasy, but rather the sins of luxury and uncleanness, oppression and cruelty and bloodshed.[1] So in the first chapter Isaiah exhorts those who bring vain oblations, " Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:16-17). So Micah describes the true service of the Lord, " to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God " (Micah 6:8). So Jeremiah declares of the men of his day, " They are waxen fat; they shine . . . they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless . . . and the right of the needy do they not judge"; and asks, " Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord; shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this ? " (Jeremiah 5:28-29) For in the union of religion and morality lies the strength of both. If they be separated religion becomes superstition, and morality passes into a dead system or a noble dream.

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[1] Note how exactly this same principle is reproduced in the denunciation of St. James (6:1-6), breathing the spirit of the ancient prophesy. In this parable, therefore, we approach to the form and spirit of the parables of our Lord. But in its construction it is looser and less complete, verging on mere metaphor and allegory. Beautiful as it is it still suggests the conclusion that this type of the parable — the most perfect and instructive of all — belongs especially to the New Testament, and is virtually the new creation of the Great Teacher Himself

V. In connexion with these distinct examples of the true parable, it may be well briefly to glance at two less-known passages, which certainly embody the idea parabolic, though in less fully developed form. One occurs in the Book of Proverbs, at the close of the first collection of its proverbial maxims. It is a poetical expansion into explicit narrative of many a biting proverb on the sluggard and his folly.

Proverbs 24:30 to the end. — " I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I beheld, and considered well : I saw, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep : so shall thy poverty come as a robber; and thy want as an armed man." The picture is graphic, and has been often visibly represented in painting. As in all parables, its literal meaning in the material sphere has its close analogy in the spiritual. In both the lesson is read, which is so terribly enforced by our Lord in His great triad of parables (Matthew 25:1-46), spoken to His disciples on the eve of the Passion, that, if positive sin slays its thousands, sheer indolent neglect slays its tens of thousands; and that, accordingly, heaviest condemnation falls on those, who had the opportunity of work for God, and simply " did it not." Every point in the illustration of this great principle in the parable is close and subtle in its appropriateness. In both the inner and the outer life, the very luxuriance of Nature's forces, intended to subserve the work of human energy, runs riot by neglect, till it overbears and masters human indolence. What should bear fruit, material or spiritual, yields only the " thorns and nettles " of what is worse than fruitlessness; and the rank growth breaks down the very wall, which was intended to be the protection of the good seed. The wilful sleep of apathy lasts on; its " little slumber" extends indefinitely; till at last it is broken suddenly by the onset of " the robber " and " the armed man " of disgraceful failure, flagrant sin, hopeless disaster. As in other cases, no abstract description, however strongly worded, could tell with half the power of this graphic picture of the concrete.[1] ----------

1 There is a similar parable, drawn out with singular vividness and fulness of detail, of the fall of youthful inexperience under the wiles of the temptress to lust (Proverbs 7:6-24). The other passage comes from the Book of Ecclesiastes — a vivid illustration of its dismal burden of the " vanity " even of the spiritual gifts of this life; in which " the race is not always given to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; nor yet bread to the wise . . . nor favour to men of skill."

Ecclesiastes 9:13-16. — "I have also seen wisdom under the sun on this wise, and it seemed great unto me : there was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it : now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength : nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." The narrative may be of fact — of some historical I experience like that of Archimedes at Syracuse — or it maybe an imaginary story. In either case, it is made a parable at once of the prevalence of wisdom over material strength, and of its fruitlessness, if it depends simply on the harvest of man's gratitude. Like the whole teaching of the gloomy writer of Ecclesiastes, it conveys but half the truth, and that the more superficial half. The world is not always " ignorant of its true benefactors." The wisdom of the poor man is not always despised, or himself forgotten even by men. Time tries and establishes reputations. But, were it otherwise, there still remains the truth, which Milton has so nobly expressed : —

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil, Nor in the glistering foil Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies; But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes, And perfect witness of all-judging Jove : As He pronounces lastly on each deed. Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed." The time will come, soon or late, in this world or the next, when the " praise of men " will follow that higher " praise of God "; and the cross of apparent failure will be seen to be the throne

of triumph and kingship over men.

03. Chapter 3

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER III. THE PARABLE AS FABLE.

I. The fable of Jotham.— II. The fable of Joash. THE Fable — the delight of children and childlike minds, and accordingly the ornament of the earlier stages of all literatures — conveys to us a simpler and less perfect form of teaching than the true Parable. It is simpler, because it arrests the attention by its very strangeness and occasional grotesqueness of treatment; because it forces the sense of a hidden meaning on the most careless mind, and (like the ancient Greek tragedy) puts on the actors masks, on which the features are so prominently marked, as to tell at once the story they are intended to tell. It is less perfect, because the analogy on which it depends is less complete and less solid. It rests, indeed, to some extent, on the same principle which underlies the true Parable — the belief in unity of law pervading all the various phases of God's Providence. But, instead of being content with analogy in this respect between the lower and higher kingdom of Nature, it fancifully assumes identity; instead of tracing (for example) in animal instinct a rudimentary likeness to human reason and conscience, it attributes to the animals, or even to the trees, the actual ideas and moral impulses and responsibilities of men. The natural result is, that its scope is almost always limited to the lower spheres of human life, in which man rises comparatively little above the animal creation; and even in these so often provokes a smile by a sense of incongruity, that the sense of the ludicrous has been sometimes defined as of the essence of the fable.

Accordingly, it is fit only to convey the most obvious lessons, lying on the very surface of experience and thought; and its simplicity is the simplicity of crudeness rather than the simplicity of mature perfection. For its own purpose it is used in all ancient literature, but is especially a favourite vehicle of the wisdom of the East. The true Fable is but scantily used in Holy Scripture; in the mouth of the Prophet it is apt to melt into the more serious form of Allegory: we see without surprise that it has no place in the teaching of the Great Master, who delighted to speak in parable.

It would have failed, indeed, of the object which He Himself declared (Matthew 13:13-16) that He sought in parabolic teaching — to distinguish between those who would simply hear without thought and understanding, listening as to some pleasant tale without inquiry into its meaning, and those who, having ears, were ready both to hear and to understand. For, as has been said already, the fable forces from the most thoughtless the half-impatient question, " Wilt thou not tell us what these things mean? " But, even were this not so, we feel that this form of parable has nothing of that higher simplicity of depth and perfection, which is necessarily the characteristic of a doctrine which is to be final; nor does it accord with the deep, though serene, gravity of the teaching, which has to look into and through the most solemn realities of time and eternity. Of the Fable itself (properly so called) we have but two specimens in Holy Scripture.

I. Judges 9:7-16, Judges 9:19-20.—" And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them. Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them. Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees 1 And the trees said to the fig tree. Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them. Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said unto the vine. Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees. If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore, if ye have dealt truly and uprightly, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands;... then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech." The fable of Jotham belongs to one of the most striking epochs in the history of the Judges. Gideon's career had just exemplified in its noblest form the true mission and character of the Judge, as a deliverer and ruler, raised up by the call, and anointed by the Spirit, of the Lord. But his establishment of his city as an unauthorised sanctuary, rivalling the glory of Shiloh in the land of the proud and hostile tribe of Ephraim, and perhaps the assumption of some royal state (marked by the polygamy noted in Judges 8:30), had already suggested to the Israelites the first beginnings of that aspiration after an established royalty, which finally led to the demand of the kingdom in the days of Samuel. Of this aspiration the ambition of Abimelech took base advantage through the help of his own kindred in Shechem. Shechem was, indeed, a chief city within the territory of Ephraim; and it is possible that he appealed to the Ephraimite jealousy of the house of Gideon. But it seems, also, not improbable that his mother belonged to the Canaanite race, still allowed to remain in Ephraim, and that his usurpation represents an uprising of that race, gathering strength from the apostasy of Israel to the native idolatry of Baal-berith (Judges 8:33), and making the idol temple their rallying-point. The usurpation is sealed by the murder of all the sons of Gideon except Jotham, who escapes and hides himself. Suddenly he appears again among the people. It was (says Josephus) at a festival, when the Israelites were gathered outside the city on the slope of Gerizim — perhaps it might be at the coronation festival — under the " oak of the pillar (or garrison) in Shechem."

He stands above the people on the rocky summit, looking down on the city some 800 feet below, speaks his word of rebuke and reproach, and then vanishes again. The fable itself of " the trees going forth to anoint a king," is one of those, which tell the chief gist of their story in their very first words, and attract the attention of the hearers by gradually working up to a foreseen conclusion. As in all forms of parable, it fails, indeed, in complete correspondence to all the features of the antitype. But the anointing of a king of their own choice, as distinct from a Judge called by the word of the Lord, was the thing then necessarily uppermost in the minds of the men of Israel. That they were the trees, and that Abimelech was the chosen king of the forest, must have struck them at once. As they listened, the successive rejection of the sovereignty by one tree after another —

each symbolical of some special excellence — led up most naturally to the contrast with the acceptance of it by the worthless bramble, without a single break or effort of thought. The subjoined interpretation could hardly have been needed as an explanation to the understanding, however naturally it followed as an outpouring of heart to heart.

Simple, however, as the general idea is, the details are filled in with a delicate appropriateness. The good trees chosen are the vine and fig-tree, emphatically the emblems of fruitfulness and plenty, to sit under which is the privilege of peace (as in 1 Kings 4:25; 2 Kings 18:31); and the olive-tree, joined (though less frequently) with them as the glory of the land of Israel (see, for example, Habakkuk 3:17).

Each tree has its characteristic — the olive-tree its richness, the fig-tree its sweetness, and the vine its invigorating power. Association with the anointing of the king naturally suggests the placing of the olive first. Its fatness is that with which " they honour God and man,"< — God in the mingling of oil with the meat-offering (see Leviticus 2:1, Leviticus 2:4-7,Leviticus 4:15); man in the use of oil for anointing, both in ordinary Hfe (see Deuteronomy 28:40; Rth 3:3; Micah 6:15; Matthew 6:17; Luke 7:46), and in consecration to the sacred offices of priest, prophet, and king. The fig-tree comes next in its " sweetness and its good fruit," used evidently not only for luxury, but for food. Lastly, the vine is spoken of as " cheering God and man," — a phrase properly, of course, applicable to man only, but extended (as in the case of the olive) because of the use of wine in the appointed drink-offerings (see Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 15:7-10). That they represent Gideon and perhaps his legitimate sons is obvious; but it would probably be over-refinement to suppose that they involved any individual representation. The characteristic qualities of the trees simply bring out the three qualities of richness, sweetness, and energy, which belong to nobleness of human character. The " bramble " (the " thorn " of Psalms 58:9) is supposed to be the " box-thorn " (the Lycium Europaeum or Afrum), common in the East. It is chosen, of course, partly for its barren uselessness, partly for its power to tear and wound, as the type of the baseborn and cruel Abimelech; but its combustible nature (which makes the " crackling of thorns " a proverb for rapid and transient ebullition, as in Psalms 58:9, Psalms 118:12; Ecclesiastes 7:6) is also appropriate to the " coming forth " and spread of " the fire," which is the emblem of the destruction to come. The arrogance of the usurper is touched with a biting irony in the terms of the bramble's acceptance: " If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow." It will be observed that the origin of the fire, which is " to come out "both from the bramble and the trees over which it rules, is undetermined in the fable. The description in the history — " The Lord sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem " (comp. 1 Samuel 16:14-23) suggests the idea of an origination without hand of man (as by the friction of the dry branches under the wind of heaven), beginning as a little spark, rapidly increasing and spreading, till it seizes even " the cedars of Lebanon " themselves. The whole picture, therefore, while, as fable, it is necessarily fantastic in general conception, is singularly and beautifully true to the life in its details.

Thus, as has been already said, the meaning, in part anticipated almost from the beginning, grows line by line on the minds of the hearers, and prepares them to receive the stern, indignant application. That application, indeed, goes somewhat beyond the idea of the fable. In the fable, all that is conveyed in the words of the bramble is the enforcement of the truth, that, when allegiance is once pledged, even to an unworthy object, loyalty to it will be safety, disloyalty will be mutual

destruction. But the application extends the words “in truth” (v. 15) to include the condition of righteousness and gratitude not to Abimelech, but to Jerubbaal and his house; on this larger condition it rests the question, whether Israel shall rejoice in Abimelech and he in Israel, or whether “ fire shall come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem, and fire come out from the men of Shechem and devour Abimelech.” Still, this imperfection of correspondence would be easily passed over in the minds of the hearers. The future disloyalty of Abimelech’s accomplices in the unhallowed bond, just cemented by blood, would be felt as the natural offspring of the older disloyalty to the claims of the house of Jerubbaal on account of their father’s service; and the mutual destruction of the future be traced back to the original crime. As Jotham’s voice uttered the application, bold in its denunciation of ingratitude and cruelty, yet with a pathetic undertone of pleading running through it, the consciences of his hearers must have recognised its appropriateness, and foreboded the fulfilment which was so soon to come. Possibly it may have helped to fulfil its own prophecy. The words, which denounced cruelty and ingratitude, may have already begun to avenge them.

2 Kings 14:9-10. — “And Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying. The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying. Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trod down the thistle. Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory thereof, and abide at home; for why shouldst thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? “ The second fable is spoken by Joash, the king of Israel, who, according to Elisha’s dying prophecy (2 Kings 13:14-19), was allowed to deliver Israel from bondage to the kingdom of Syria, and to inaugurate the rise of an era of external glory and prosperity, out of what had seemed to be the beginning of national destruction. The kingdom of Judah had passed into the same condition of vassalage to Syria at the close of the reign of its king Joash; it had now begun to revive under Amaziah, and had already incurred the anger of the kingdom of Israel by rejection, under prophetic command, of a large Israelitish force hired for the war against Edom. In the flush of victory, achieved without that aid, Amaziah wantonly, as it seems by the brief historic record, braves the superior force of Israel, “ Come, let us look one another in the face.” The fable, which is the contemptuous answer to this rash challenge, is simplicity itself The “ thistle “ (not a thorn-tree, but a thorny weed of some kind) is again contrasted with the cedar of Lebanon; but here not so much in respect of barren prickliness, as of its aspiring lowness and weakness, rearing its head stiffly, only to be trodden down. The most curious point \w this apologue is the apparent want of close appropriateness to the occasion, in respect of the demand, “ Give thy daughter to my son to wife,” which has little likeness to the challenge to battle, “ Come, let us look one another in the face.” There is probably here a reference to some unrecorded demand, the refusal of which gave occasion to that challenge. The intermarriage of the royal houses of Israel and Judah in the time of Ahab and Jehosaphat — fatal as its effect had been on the latter kingdom — may have been contemplated again from the same motives of political and commerical expediency. But it is, of course, possible that this want of perfection in application indicates that the apologue was one in proverbial use, merely adapted for the special occasion. A similar want of perfect appropriateness appears when we consider that this special adaptation might have seemed also to require that the destruction of the presumptuous thistle should come from the offended cedar itself. For the rest (even without the application of verse 10), the apologue is too plain to need explanation. Its threat was soon to be terribly fulfilled in the defeat of Amaziah at Beth-shemesh, the capture of

Jerusalem, the dismantling of its fortifications, and the spoiling of its treasures.

04. Chapter 4

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER IV. THE PARABLE AS ALLEGORY.

Characteristics of the allegory. — Reference to the Song of Songs. — The allegories of Ezekiel: — I. The allegory of the vine. II. The allegory of the adulterous wife. III. The allegory of Oholah and Oholibah. IV. The allegory of the eagles and the vine. V. The allegory of the younglions. VI. The second allegory of the vine. VII. The allegory of the cauldron. VIII. The allegories relating to Pharaoh.

WHILE the Fable Is thus scantily represented in Scripture — perhaps as unworthy of the grave dignity of tone which pervades even its simplest and homeliest parts — the cognate form of Allegory claims a not inconsiderable place of prominence. It is best represented in the Book of Ezekiel — in those parables, which were so distinguishing a feature of his prophecy, that they called out the angry taunts of his hearers (Ez. 20:49).

If, indeed, we were to follow the guidance of the old traditional interpretation of the Song of Songs, we should find in it the chief type of this form of Parable — a long and elaborate allegory, in which is shadowed out that mystical relation of God to His covenanted people, which has been perfected in the union of Christ with His Church. But it seems to be fairly established by a consensus of modern criticism that the poem (for such it is) is a half-lyric, half-dramatic expression of a real story of pure earthly love — consecrated, so to speak, by its inclusion in the canon of that Holy Scripture, which, by its comprehension of all the elements of human thought and life, exercises universal power over the humanity of all times and places. The style, indeed, of the whole poem is highly figurative — full of picturesque metaphors, which have become household words, and have reproduced themselves again and again in modern literature. Out of the merely sensuous beauty of description, characteristic of early Oriental poetry, suggestions of higher spiritual ideas through these metaphors gleam constantly on modern thought. Even beyond these, in virtue of the essential sacredness of marriage as a type of the mystical union of Christ with His spouse, the Church, there must emerge from time to time pregnant thoughts and expressions, suggestive of the higher spiritual meanings into which ancient interpreters resolved them altogether. Such suggestion, as we may see from St. Paul’s treatment of human relationships in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:22, Ephesians 6:10), is natural in all Holy Scripture, as viewing all things from the high spiritual standpoint. In some sense, therefore, the story of actual fact may be held to be a parable of a higher spiritual reality. But this cannot be said to be its essential character — any more than the story of Sarah and Hagar can be esteemed a parable, because St. Paul draws from it (Galatians 4:24-31) a typical symbolism. Certainly, it is only by a forced interpretation — which would never have been dreamt of, except for a mistaken reluctance to admit into the Sacred Canon a simple utterance of passionate earthly love — that it has been by so many ancient

authorities considered as a pure allegory, and wrought out accordingly into the most remote and mystic details of significance.

Setting this aside, we find, as has been said, the fullest development of the allegory in the “ parables “of Ezekiel.

These parables are in some respects like the fables already noticed, generally because they belong to the realm of fancy, and especially because they frequently ascribe to the lower orders of creation thoughts and actions which are properly human. But they differ from the simpler type of the fables, and assume the character of the allegory, not only as being far more highly, and even poetically, elaborated, but as presenting the type and antitype closely and obviously interwoven with each other; so that many details are in the type plainly artificial — destroying the touch of nature which gives quaintness and humour to the fable — because they properly belong to the antitype alone. The use of these parables by Ezekiel is one phase of the markedly figurative character of his whole prophecy — most strikingly exemplified in the symbolic visions and symbolic actions, by which a large even a principal, part of his revelation is conveyed; but exemplified also in these symbolic utterances which (with one exception) appear to belong to a single period of his ministry. It has been thought, not improbably, that the prominence of this symbolic teaching in the prophets of the Captivity may have been suggested by the gigantic symbolic imagery, amidst which they lived in the plains of Babylon and which could not but impress strongly the imagination both of the teachers, and of those whom they had to teach.

These parables — as might be expected, in view both of the late age of Ezekiel and the general character of his style — exchange the archaic simplicity of the true fable for a studied completeness of treatment, in which every detail is carefully wrought out, and a sustained beauty of style, not incisive or brilliant, but quietly harmonious in all its parts; so that the meaning is not forced upon the hearer by the quaintness of the whole conception, but grows upon him step by step, as the picture is gradually drawn out. Still inferior in impressiveness to the true parable, this form of allegory is so far like it, that it rather suggests, than forcibly demands, inquiry into the hidden lesson underlying the whole. The whole series of these allegories seems to be assigned to the sixth and seventh years of the Captivity of Jeremiah, in which the prophet himself had been carried away, about six years (see Jeremiah 33:21) before the final overthrow of Jerusalem. At that time the voice of Jeremiah in the land of Israel, and of Ezekiel, answering it from beside the river Chebar, were bidden to tell the same mournful and disheartening message — to command the Israelites to accept subjugation under the victorious Chaldean power, as a chastisement ordained of God, and by submission to lighten it as much as possible. Thus the captives of the first Captivity were to build houses and settle in the land of Babylon; they were to “ seek the peace of the city, and pray to the Lord for it “: for “ in the peace thereof they should find peace “ (Jeremiah 29:7). The remnant of the people under Zedekiah in their native land were to keep the oath of allegiance, sworn in the name of the Lord to their conqueror, and so to avoid the utter destruction otherwise sure to fall upon them. It was naturally a sad, unwelcome message — deeply painful to those who uttered it in the consciousness that they were held to be traitors to the hope of Israel — utterly distasteful to the sanguine patriotism, which still clung to the memory of old glories, and refused to believe that they could have passed away. But it was faithfully repeated again and again in many forms, as in the pathetic sorrow of Jeremiah, so the mystic solemnity of Ezekiel. In this section of his prophecy it appears in many forms of allegory.

Ezekiel 15:1-8. — “And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is the vine tree more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold it is cast into the fire for fuel: the fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned; is it profitable for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned, shall it yet be meet for any work? Therefore thus saith the Lord God: As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord God.” This first example is a simple one — little more, indeed, than an expansion of familiar metaphor, such as that used in Psalms 58:8-18: “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt.” It comes also very near to the more explicit form of the parable, already considered, in Isaiah 5:1-30. But, simple as it is, it has to us a peculiar interest in this — that it may well have been in the mind of the Great Teacher Himself, when, on the eve of His Passion, He expressed to His Apostles their vital relation to Himself in the words, “ I am the true Vine, ye are the branches.” The idea was, indeed, visibly embodied in the golden Vine represented on the gate of the Temple, which, it is thought, may have been before the eyes of His hearers, when those words were spoken, on the way from the supper-chamber to Gethsemane. The representation of Judah by the vine was probably suggested by the physical features and the characteristic produce of the country itself, as in the words of the blessing of Jacob, which describes Judah as “binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes “(Genesis 49:11). But it has always been noted that there is a special appropriateness in the representation of the chosen people of God (as of humanity itself gathered up in Christ) by the emblem of the vine, because the whole value of the plant and its branches depends on the indwelling life. In connexion with that life they bear the sweetest and most precious fruit; cut off from it, they have no value as timber, like the limbs of many other trees, but are simply withered branches, fit at best for firewood. “Shall wood be taken from it,” asks the prophet, “ to make any work? “ Will men even “take a pin from it to hang any vessel thereon “? “ If a man,” says our Lord, “ abide not in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” The allegory, as wrought out by Ezekiel, contains evident allusions to the recent history of the kingdom. In the figure it is said of the vine-branch, first that “the fire devoureth both ends of it”; then that “the midst of it” — the charred remnant— “is burned.” In the interpretation we read of “the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” “ they have gone forth “(marginal reading) “ from the fire, but the fire shall devour them.” The original burning is clearly the first taking of the city by Nebuchadnezzar, followed by the captivity of Jeconiah. The last and final destruction is the impending captivity of the poor remnant of former greatness, left for a time in vassalage under Zedekiah. The true inner life of the covenant had decayed and died out. So long as it was in its divine vigour, no fire of earthly kindling could touch it. Now that the tree was dry, it had no power to withstand the flame. By a destruction, slow or rapid, but always sure, it withered away.

II.’ From this simple parable we pass, in the next chapter (c. 16.), and in c. 23, which is clearly connected with it, to two allegories, bearing strong likeness to each other, both working out, with startling and almost painful vividness of detail, that familiar metaphor of Holy Scripture, in which

the peculiar relation of the Lord to His chosen people Is compared to the relation of marriage, and the spiritual sins of idolatry and apostasy are accordingly represented by the sensual sins of adultery and fornication. This metaphor Is something more than metaphor. From the deeper teaching of the New Testament we learn that it is no arbitrary assimilation of things naturally unconnected with one another; for that the sacredness of the marriage tie itself depends on its being a shadow of that relation of God to the humanity made in His Image, which is brought out in perfection by the Incarnation of the Godhead in our nature. It will follow that the sensuous temper, giving way to the natural craving for something visible and material, on which to rest our spiritual affections, and so leading to various forms of idolatry, has an essential affinity to the unrestrained indulgence of sensual appetite, out of which springs unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. The connexion of the grosser idol-worships with licensed and chartered impurity is a terrible comment on this relationship of idolatry to sensual uncleanness.[1] The consecration of purity, as “holiness,” by the sense of the spiritual communion of the soul with God, Is a similar enforcement of the essential likeness between conjugal fidelity and spiritual faith.

[1] See the catalogue of the sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:20-21, where “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,” are followed immediately by “ idolatry “ and “ witchcraft.”

Ezekiel 16:1-63. — “ Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, and say, Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem: Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was thy father, and thy mother was an Hittite. * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, * * * * * * * to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, for that thy person was abhorred, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee weltering in thy blood, I said unto thee. Though thou art in thy blood, live; yea, I said unto thee, Though thou art in thy blood, live. I caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou didst increase and wax great, and thou attainedst to excellent ornament; thy breasts were fashioned, and thine hair was grown; yet thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with sealskin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a ring upon thy nose, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper unto royal estate. And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect, through my majesty which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. But thou didst trust [in thy beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy whoredoms on every one that passed by; his it was. And thou didst take of thy garments, and madest for thee high places decked with divers colours, and playedst the harlot upon them: the like things shall not come, neither shall it h^ so. Thou didst also take thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest for thee images of men, and didst play the harlot with them; and thou tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them, and didst set mine oil and mine incense before them. My bread

also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou didst even set it before them for a sweet savour, and thus it was; saith the Lord God.

Moreover, thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Were thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children, and delivered them up, in causing them to pass through the fire unto them? And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast weltering in thy blood. And it is come to pass after all thy wickedness (woe, woe unto thee! saith the Lord God) that thou hast built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee a lofty place in every street. Thou hast built thy lofty place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty an abomination, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredom. Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians, thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast multiplied thy whoredom, to provoke me to anger. Behold, therefore, I have stretched out my hand over thee, and have diminished thine ordinary food^ and delivered thee unto the will of them that hate thee, the daughters of the Philistines, which are ashamed of thy lewd way. Thou hast played the harlot also with the Assyria^s, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet thou wast not satisfied. Thou hast moreover multiplied thy whoredom in the land of Canaan, unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things, * * * * * in that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thy lofty place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire. A wife that committeth adultery! that taketh strangers instead of her husband! * * * * * * *

“Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord God, Because thy filthiness was poured out, * * * * * and because of all the idols of thy abominations, and for the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; therefore behold, I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them against thee on every side. * * * * * And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will bring upon thee the blood of fury and jealousy. I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and break down thy lofty places; and they shall strip thee of thy clothes, and take thy fair jewels: and they shall leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up an assembly against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women; and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou shalt also give no hire any more. So will I satisfy my fury upon thee, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry.

Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, but hast fretted me in all these things; therefore behold, I also will bring thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord God: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations.

“Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying. As is the mother, so is her daughter. Thou art thy mother’s daughter, that loatheth her husband and her children; and thou art the sister of thy sisters, which loathed their husbands and their children: your mother was an Hittite, and your father an Amorite. And thine elder sister is Samaria, that dwelleth

at thy left hand, she and her daughters: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet hast thou not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations; but, as if that were a very little thingy thou wast more corrupt than they in all thy ways. As I live, saith the Lord God, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom; pride, fulness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good. Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters by all thine abominations which thou hast done. Thou also, bear thine own shame, in that thou hast given judgment for thy sisters; through thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they, they are more righteous than thou: yea, be thou also confounded, and bear thy shame, in that thou hast justified thy sisters. And I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them: that thou mayest bear thine own shame, and mayest be shamed because of all that thou hast done, in that thou art a comfort unto them. And thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, and thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate. For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy pride; before thy wickedness was discovered, as at the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria, and of all that arc round about her, the daughters of the Philistines, which do despite unto thee round about. Thou hast borne thy lewdness and thine abominations, saith the Lord. For thus saith the Lord God: I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then shalt thou remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder sisters and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame; when I have forgiven thee all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God."

Ezekiel 16:1-63 is one long pleading of the Lord with His people. The remnant of Israel, still retaining its national existence after the fall of the Northern Kingdom under the power of Assyria, is impersonated in Jerusalem itself, the old heathen city of the Jebusites,[1] which had become the holy city of the Lord. Its exaltation to that spiritual dignity from heathen degradation is represented first (in Ezekiel 16:4-6) by the figure of the adoption and cherishing of an exposed and neglected infant; and next (in Ezekiel 16:7-14) by the taking to marriage of the infant, now grown into beauty, but still desolate and bare. She is covered (comp. Rth 3:9) with the skirt of the king's mantle; she is purified with the marriage purification; she is clothed with broidered work and fine linen and silk; she is decked, as a bride, with jewels of gold and silver; she is fed with " fine flour, and honey, and oil." [2] So she flourishes in royal dignity and beauty, and her renown "goes out among the heathen," as perfect in the gift of superhuman " majesty," " which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God."[3]

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[1] InEzekiel 16:3it is said, “ Thy father was an Amorite and thy mother a Hittite.” InNumbers 13:29, we read that “the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwelt in the mountain “; and inJoshua 10:6, the kings of Jerusalem and Hebron and the neighbouring cities are called “ all the kings of the Amorites.” It is clear from the history, that the Hittites and the Amorites were the great tribes; in these the lessei tribe of the Jebusites is apparently absorbed.

[2] Each feature in the description is drawn from the actual ceremonial of royal marriage. The best illustration is from the great Marriage Psalm of the Sons of Korah (Psalms 45:9-15).

[3] This majesty is the marriage garment — the gift of the great King — clothing the bride in a beauty above that of earth. The whole picture clearly represents the palmy times of Israel in the days of David and Sofomon, when Jerusalem sat as a queen among the nations, flourishing not only in plenty and wealth, in power and splendour, but in the higher spiritual beauty of faith and wisdom and holiness. Suddenly out of the misery and subjection of the time of the later Judges, Israel had become a victorious empire; she had been exalted by the blessing of God to a royalty of a higher kind than that of the great heathen empires because resting on the moral strength of wisdom and goodness, and acknowledging itself as great only in the “ majesty of the Lord.” Of all the magnificence of Jerusalem, the crown and centre was the splendour of the Temple; on fidelity to that in-dwelling Presence, which the Temple visibly enshrined, depended all the prosperity, which was the wonder of the world. The glory of the earthly Jerusalem was thus a fit type of the transcendent glory of “ the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” — “ having the glory of God, and her light was like unto a stone most precious,” — “ arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints “ (Revelation 21:2, Revelation 21:11; Revelation 20:8).

Then (in Ezekiel 16:15-22) there passes a deep shadow over the brightness of the picture. The apostasy, as in the later days of Solomon, to the manifold idolatries of Canaan (1 Kings 11:1-8) is described as a harlotry — the horrible perversion to evil of the gifts of beauty and wealth which God had bestowed upon His bride. The garments of her splendour deck the high places of idolatry; the silver and gold are formed into idols in “ the likeness of corruptible man “; the oil and frankincense, the fine flour and honey, are lavished upon the heathen altars, even the children whom God gave her are “ passed through the fire,” and sacrificed to the devouring idol (comp. Ps. 104:36-39). The descent was, indeed, a sudden descent from high spirituality of religion to the lowest depths of a foul Nature-worship in many discordant forms, polluted with nameless abominations; it is rightly compared to the infatuated lasciviousness, which leaves the marriage-bed of a king for the grossest fornication. In the type, as in the antitype, it is the deadly yet natural fruit of a carnal, worldly idolatry of wealth and splendour and power — God’s good gifts abused and perverted to evil, because regarded, not as manifestations of Him to the soul, but as in themselves sufficient satisfactions for all the needs of humanity. From this forgetfulness of God to gross superstition is, as history teaches, but a step.

Yet the picture of this unfaithfulness is not yet complete. With a terrible emphasis of condemnation (“Woe, woe unto thee, saith the Lord God”) Israel is described as plunging recklessly and wantonly into foreign idolatries — “building a high Place”[1] of shame “ at every head of the street “ — going (so to speak) out of her way to introduce all kinds of strange worships, side by side with the native idolatries, which had already polluted the land. These native idolatries — lingering, perhaps, even

through the days of Samuel and Saul and David, by fatal inheritance from the apostasies of the days of the Judges — had been (1 Kings 11:1-8) formally taken up, and recognised by the erection of temples, in the old age of Solomon, through the influence of his many wives — probably, in the first instance, as self-chosen phases of worship of Deity under many forms. From these the great apostasy to the Phoenician Baal-worship in the days of Ahab seems to have emerged as chief, united with the worship of " the grove," i.e.^ the Asherah, of which we read so often in earlier times. To this were now added the false worships of the great empires around.

First, the idolatry of the Egyptians (characteristically described as " great of flesh " in their sensual luxury), of which the introduction by Jeroboam of the golden calves was the fatal beginning, and from which no subsequent king of Israel, not even Jehu, the extirpator of Baal-worship, ever departed (2 Kings 10:29).

Next, the Assyrian worship, of which we first read in the days of Ahaz, when he, having become the

[1] The Hebrew is "an arched place" — a phrase used (like the Latin fornix) for a place of open prostitution {see marginal reading). vassal of Tiglath Pileser, brought from his interview with the Assyrian king at Damascus the pattern of an idolatrous altar, to be erected for worship in the very house of the Lord (2 Kings 16:10-18). Extirpated by Hezekiah, it formed, no doubt, an element of the various and heterogeneous idolatries into which Manasseh rushed so recklessly. (In Ezekiel 23:6-12, this idolatry is described as introduced first in the kingdom of Israel, and borrowed from them by the kingdom of Judah.) Lastly, the kindred but distinct worship of the Babylonian (or Chaldean) idols (comp. Ezekiel 16:14-18), which, no doubt, came in when the Babylonian empire rose on the ruins of the Assyrian, and became the conquering power in the later days of Jerusalem. With a singular bitterness of reproach, this apostasy of the chosen people is represented as like the adultery of a false wife rather than the fornication of a harlot, in being gratuitous and more than gratuitous, not receiving, but giving the hire of shame (Ezekiel 16:30-34). It was a part of the tribute poured out before the feet of the conquering oppressor, perhaps in vain hope of conciliation, but in itself given unasked, and in fact meeting with no reward. Nothing is more terribly striking than the rebound, after the restorations of Hezekiah or Josiah, into a wild recklessness of strange and inconsistent worships. Well may it be compared to the outrages of a Messalina against a royal spouse. The lofty spirituality of the^ worship of the Invisible Jehovah was a yoke to this idolatrous craving for the visible and tangible, as the tie of marriage to the fleshly spirit of lasciviousness.

Then comes (Ezekiel 16:35-43) the message of judgment, still drawn in metaphor from the penalty of Mosaic Law and Eastern usage on adultery and shedding of blood. That judgment is represented, as wrought on Israel, not only before the eyes but by the hands of the heathen nations, with whose idolatries she had polluted herself So it was to be in fact. From Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, the chief blows of destruction actually came, and the tribes of the land itself, whose idolatries Israel had adopted, such as Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Philistia, took the opportunity of rising against her in her hour of trouble. The picture is vividly drawn. The adulteress is exposed in shame before the eyes alike of her lovers and of those whom she has hated; the high place of her harlotry is broken down; she is stripped of her jewels and her gorgeous clothing; then, exposed in her naked helplessness she is stoned, and pierced with the sword; and her very house is burned,

that no memorial of her may be left. Not till this utter destruction is accomplished “ shall the Lord’s anger rest, and His jealousy depart.” How terribly the reality corresponded in every point to the figure the Book of Lamentations testifies. The discrowned “daughter of Zion” was indeed thrown down from her high estate before the eyes of the heathen; her polluted Temple and high places laid in ruins, her treasures spoiled, her people slaughtered or dragged into captivity, her Holy City burnt and razed to the ground. “ Behold [she cries], and see whether there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger.” But “ there is none to comfort.” “ All that pass by clap their hands: they hiss and wag the head “; “ they say. We have swallowed her up.”

“ The Lord hath cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger” (Lamentations 1:12, Lamentations 1:17; Lamentations 2:1).

Yet even now the bitterness of reproach is not exhausted (Ezekiel 16:44-59). Jerusalem, fallen from her holiness as the city of the Lord, is taunted by her enemies (in the words of the proverb, “ As is the mother, so is the daughter”) as being spiritually worthy of her heathen origin. She is bidden to look from the height of Moriah on Samaria, the city of the apostate kingdom, on the one hand, and on Sodom, the accursed city of nameless abominations, on the other, and to recognise both these, which she had despised, as her true sisters in sin and ruin. Nay, as she had sinned against special light and grace, she is warned that even the sensuality of Sodom and the unfaithfulness of Samaria were not equal in flagrancy of abomination to that wilful sin. She had judged them; she had thought Sodom not worthy “ to be mentioned by her mouth.” Now by her greater wickedness she had “ justified her sisters “; even the daughters of Syria and the daughters of the Philistines had learnt to despise her. Not till the hated Samaria and the loathed Sodom were restored to their high estate should Jerusalem be brought back from her captivity. Yet (Ezekiel 16:60-63) there should be restoration from the inexhaustible mercy of God. “ I will remember (saith the Lord) my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth; and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.” In that covenant — “ not thy covenant “ of old, but a greater and more enduring covenant — there should be room even for heathen Sodom and apostate Samaria, as her daughters. The pride of Judah shall be changed into humility; that “ thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.” It is the same promise of the new covenant of forgiveness of iniquity, which Jeremiah was even then uttering in the old land, but from a different point of view (Jeremiah 31:31). There it is the spirituality of the covenant, written on the heart (as contrasted with the letter of the Law written on stone) which is dwelt upon; here its universality, breaking down the exclusive pride of Israel, and calling in the heathenism — gross in sin and misguided in idolatry — which it had despised. In both, after the long, dreary sadness of continual sin and punishment, there is the dawn of the great day of the Messiah.

III. Ezekiel 23:1-49. — “The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Son of Man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: and they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: * * * * * * And the names of them were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister: and they became mine, and they bare sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah. And Oholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours, which were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses. And she

bestowed her whoredoms upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them: and on whomsoever she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself. Neither hath she left her whoredoms since the days of Egypt; * * * * * * Wherefore I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and her they slew with the sword; and she became a byword among women: for they executed judgments upon her. And her sister Oholibah saw this, yet was she more corrupt in her doting than she, and in her whoredoms, which were more than the whoredoms of her sister.

She doted upon the Assyrians, governors and rulers, her neighbours, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men. And I saw that she was defiled; they both took one way. And she increased her whoredoms; for she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion, girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look upon, after the likeness of the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their nativity. And as soon as she saw them she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea. * * * * * * * So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: then my soul was alienated from her, like as my soul was alienated from my sister. Yet she multiplied her whoredoms remembering the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt. And she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses. * * * * * “Therefore, O Oholibah, thus saith the Lord God:

Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy soul is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: desirable young men, governors and rulers all of them, princes and men of renown, all of them riding upon horses. And they shall come against thee with weapons, chariots, and wagons, and with an assembly of peoples; they shall set themselves against thee with buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will commit the judgment unto them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments. And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal with thee in fury; they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy residue shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire. They shall also strip thee of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels. Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more. For thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy soul is alienated: and they shall deal with thee in hatred, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: * * * * * These things shall be done unto thee, for that thou hast gone a whoring; after the heathen, and because thou art polluted with their idols. Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into thy hand. Thus saith the Lord God: Thou shalt drink of thy sister’s cup, which is deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much. Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria. Thou shalt even drink it and drain it out, and thou shalt gnaw the shreds thereof, and shalt tear thy breasts; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

“ The Lord said moreover unto me: Son of man, wilt thou judge Oholah and Oholibah? then declare unto them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery; and they have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass through the fire unto them to be devoured. Moreover this they have done unto me 1 they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house. And furthermore ye have sent for men that come from far: unto whom a messenger was sent, and, lo, they came; for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thine eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments; and satest upon a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, whereupon thou didst set mine incense and mine oil. And the voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with men of the common sort were brought drunkards from the wilderness; and they put bracelets upon the hands of them twain, and beautiful crowns upon their heads. Then said I of her that was old in adulteries. Now will they commit whoredoms with her, and she with them. And they went in unto her, as they go in unto an harlot: so went they in unto Oholah and unto Obolibah, the lewd women. And righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women that shed blood; because they arc adulteresses, and blood is in their hands. For thus saith the Lord God: I will bring up an assembly against them, and will give them to be tossed to and fro and spoiled. And the assembly shall stone them with stones, and despatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. The allegory of Ezekiel 23:1-49. — less vivid and powerful — traverses the same ground, except that it has nothing to correspond to the final promise. The one difference is that, as in Jeremiah 3:6-10 (of which, indeed, this chapter might seem to be a vivid expansion) there is a double impersonation of the chosen people in the two sisters Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem). Each runs the same career of unfaithfulness and degradation; but far worse — more varied in the blending of Assyrian, Egyptian, and Chaldean worship — more reckless in the eager and wanton invitation of idolatry and corruption — is the career of Oholibah; and on it accordingly the prophet pours out most fully the vials of reproach and judgment; scornfully describing the lust after the gorgeousness of the Assyrian horsemen, the splendour of the Chaldeans “ pourtrayed in vermilion,” as “ princes to look upon,” and the sensual lewdness of abominable sin in Egypt; painting in detail the gathering of “ all the Babylonians, nobles, and chiefs and princes,” and all the Assyrians with them, in vast and warlike company, in judgment against the guilty adulteress; and then the mutilation, the despoiling, the exposure in shameful nakedness, which are her sentence.

“ Thou shalt drink (saith the Lord) of thy sister’s cup, deep and large; thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation.” The prophet himself is called upon to pronounce judgment on Oholah and Oholibah for their sensual idolatry, their bloodshedding, their human sacrifices, their pollution of the worship of the Lord by admixture with it of heathenish rite and sacrifice. Still continuing the figure of the allegory, he reproaches them with the wanton passion for these heathen abominations, with their coarse indulgence and drunkenness; he denounces righteous judgment against them, under which (saith the Lord) “ lewdness shall cease out of the land,” “ and ye shall bear the sins of your idols, and ye shall know

that I am the Lord God."

IV. The next chapter brings out an allegory, perhaps less elaborate, but more imaginative and more beautiful. It is the allegory of the eagles of Babylon and Egypt, and the vine of Judah.

Ezekiel 16:1. — " And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; and say.

Thus saith the Lord God: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, full o{ feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedar: he cropped off the topmost of the young twigs thereof, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil; he placed at beside many waters; he set it as a willow-tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth twigs. There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and behold, this vine did bend its roots towards him, and shot forth its branches towards him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it. It was planted in a good soil by many waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God, Shall it prosper.^ shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it may wither; that all its fresh springing leaves may wither; even without great power or much people to pluck it up by the roots thereof? Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the beds where it grew.

"Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying. Say now to the rebellious house. Know ye not what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and brought them to him to Babylon; and he took of the seed royal, and made a covenant with him; he also brought him under an oath, and took away the mighty of the land that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand. But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? shall he break the covenant, and yet escape? As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, when they cast up mounts and built forts, to cut off many persons. For he hath despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand, and yet hath done all these things; he shall not escape. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, I will even bring it upon his own head. And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me. And all his fugitives in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward every wind: and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it.

" Thus saith the Lord God: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar and will set it; I will crop off from the topmost of his young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and

bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing: in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it." The allegory is wrought out with much brilliancy and subtlety of detail. The first great eagle is described, with a sweep of pinion and a splendour of plumage not attributed to the second, in order to denote the wider conquest and the richer magnificence of Babylon, as compared with Egypt. The contrast of the highest branch of the lofty cedar of Lebanon with the *' seed of the land,^^ planted like a willow-tree in the low, watery ground, to become " a spreading vine of low stature,^^ marks the contrast, elsewhere drawn, between the flower of the royal house and the people, carried away into the first captivity with Jeconiah — " all the princes and the mighty men of valour, and all the craftsmen and smiths'' (2 Kings 24:14) — and "the poorest of the land,'' who remained with Zedekiah, in what was now a mere satrapy of Babylon. The recovery of the land from utter desolation, on which Jeremiah so often dwells, and which he urges the people to retain by submission to the King of Babylon, is marked in the allegory by " the planting it in a good soil by great waters, that it might be a goodly vine." Even its being permitted to spread only along the ground — not on props, or from tree to tree — represents the provision that " the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up," and the determination that "its branches should turn towards him, and its roots "be under him" similarly represents the provision that "by keeping of his covenant it should stand."

Then (although the metaphor is here somewhat forced), the sudden " lifting itself up," the " shooting out its branches," that it might be watered by the eagle of Egypt — that, so watered, it might rise from its depressed condition to be, as of old, a " goodly vine," — gives a vivid picture of the vain, though natural and not ignoble, aspiration for independence to which now, as in Sennacherib's time, the trust in Egypt was but as a " bruised reed " (2 Kings 18:21). The destruction which this unhappy action draws down on the land is represented partly as the vengeance of the offended king, partly as the " withering by the east wind," under the blighting touch, that is, of the judgment of God.

There is a similar appropriateness of detail in the symbolical promise at the close. The Lord, like the great eagle of Babylon, carries off " the highest branch of the high cedar," "a tender twig"; yet He sets it not " in the land of traffic," " the city of merchants "— in the great plain (that is) of Babylon, where the captives of Judah were bought and sold — but "on a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel." It does not remain, as in the first case, barren and dead in the unfriendly soil, but it brings forth boughs and fruit, and becomes " a goodly cedar " (comp. Ps. 53:10), under which " shall dwell all fowl of every wing." It is exalted above the trees •of the wood by that special blessing of the Lord, which " brings down the high tree and exalts the low, dries up the green tree, and makes the dry tree to flourish." Every detail of the picture throughout is painted with singular perfection, far more elaborate and highly coloured than the simplicity of the ordinary fable. The meaning of the whole parable is fully and •emphatically explained, with a grave regretful severity, laying especial stress on the breach by rebellion of the covenant with Babylon, which is (saith the Lord) " my oath " and " my covenant "; and an exulting charge to hope and thankfulness in the promise of restoration by the hand of the Lord. The fulfilment of the prophecy of the sixteenth verse is recorded in 2 Kings 25:6-7: "They took the king and brought him up to the

king of Babylon at Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him," as a servant of the great king, who had (in the words of Ezekiel) "despised the oath and broken the covenant," sworn in the name of God (2 Chronicles 36:13) and therefore sacred before Him. " And they put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon." There was no great struggle, except a long defence of Jerusalem; it needed " no great power or many people to pluck up by the roots " the weakened kingdom. From this passage of Ezekiel and from Jeremiah 37:5-7 we learn — what is not told in the brief record of the historical books — that an Egyptian army did for a time raise the siege, but then retired to their own land without eventual succour. The destruction, which fell on the doomed city was "the net and snare " of God's judgment; in the captivity of Zedekiah in Babylon the Lord " would plead with him for his trespass." The ruin was all but complete; the " spreading vine " did " wither in all the leaves of its spring," although even then some remnant of its strength was left under Gedaliah, to rebel once more (in trust apparently still on Egypt), and to bring upon the land a final destruction. The closing promise clearly had its first fulfilment in the future restoration of Israel from Babylon, with, however, that further reference to the Messianic kingdom, which we find closely connected with the restoration in the prophets after the Captivity. The " tender twig " was to become a great tree, on which all the trees of the field should gaze with wonder, and under which the fowl of every wing should lodge. The very description reminds us of " the mustard seed " of our Lord's parable, to which " the kingdom of Heaven was like." It was at best inadequately fulfilled in the restoration of the exiles, when the newly-planted power of Israel was weak and struggling, of no bright spiritual glory, and of no account among the nations of the earth. Yet, just as those who wept over the diminished glory of the second temple were comforted with the promise that it should be greater than the glory of the first, so in all the prophecies of this imperfect restoration the mind is led on to the world-wide kingdom, of which the restoration from captivity was but an earnest. The " tender shoot " of verse 22 (comp. Is. hii. 2) is the " rod out of the stem of Jesse " (Isaiah 51:1), the " righteous Branch " (Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8) " planted in the mountain of the height of Israel "; that "all nations might flow unto it" (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1), humbled that He might be exalted (Php 2:9-10), dying that He might flourish and give life.

V. The next instance of allegorical treatment is in the nineteenth chapter of the same prophecy: —

Ezekiel 19:1-14. — " Moreover, take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say, What was thy mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps. And she brought up one of her whelps; he became a young lion: and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men. The nations also heard of him: he was taken in their pit: and they brought him with hooks unto the land of Egypt. Now when she saw that she had waited, and her hope was lost, then she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion. And he went up and down among the lions he became a young lion: and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men. And he knew their palaces, and laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and the fulness thereof, because of the noise of his roaring. Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces: and they spread their net over him; he was taken in their pit. And they put him in a cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strong holds, that his voice should no more be heard upon the mountains of Israel.

" Thy mother was like a vine, in thy blood, planted by the waters: she was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. And she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare

rule, and their stature was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of their branches. But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit: her strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them. And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And fire is gone out of the rods of her branches, it hath devoured her fruit, so that there is in her no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." The two allegories of this chapter are simpler, and freer from incongruous detail, but, perhaps, less striking than the allegory of the eagle and the vine. In the first (Ezekiel 19:1-9) each of the " princes," that is, the successive kings, of Israel, is represented under the familiar emblem of the " Lion of Judah." The mother lioness is described in words which recall the old prophecy of Jacob, "Judah is a lion's whelp...he couched as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up?" (Numbers 23:24; Numbers 24:9). In her mountain home she rears her whelps, and sends them forth when full grown in strength. The first whelp (cf 5:3) is clearly Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah. When all Jerusalem was startled by the fatal news of the fall of Josiah at Megiddo, the prelude to the utter ruin soon to come, we read (2 Kings 23:30) that " the people of the land took Jehoahaz," although younger than Jehoiakim (see vv. 31-36), "and anointed him and made him king." Probably he gave promise of a courage and energy, which might make him equal to the critical emergency, able to " catch the prey and devour men." But, after a short reign of three months, he was taken, like a lion " in the pit " and " sent in chains to the land of Egypt." Over him Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22:11-12) uttered the Song of Lamentation, " Weep not for the dead," (i.e. Josiah, see 2 Chronicles 35:25) neither bemoan him: "but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." The second whelp (cf 5:5) is apparently Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah. It is remarkable that Jehoiakim, set on the throne by the King of Egypt (perhaps already an Egyptian partisan), is passed over. His reign (see Jeremiah 22:13-17) was one of unrighteous tyranny over the people, of selfish magnificence at a time of national distress, and of covetous oppression and shedding of innocent blood. His character (see Jeremiah 35:1-19) was that of a bold, bad man, defiant of God's warning even when the people and the princes trembled before it. Possiblyhis whole reign was looked upon as a usurpation, while Jehoahaz survived in his captivity. But the young Jehoiachin succeeded, when after long waiting, Israel "saw that her hope was lost." Once more she placed her hope in him, as a young lion, " who had just learnt to " catch the prey and devour men." For three months he also reigned: and his reign was but an interlude between the death of his father, when bound in chains, ready to be carried to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:4) and the final subjugation by Nebuchadnezzer. But, even so, the short time was long enough to give scope for manifestation of a character of rapacity and cruelty, like that of his father. " He knew his palaces; he laid waste their cities, and the land was desolate and the fulness thereof." Then, " by the noise of his roaring, the nations set against him"; some act of rash defiance drew down the irresistible force of Babylon, crushing all opposition in a moment, and carrying him "in chains to the king of Babylon." With him went the first band of captives, the flower of the people. After a long imprisonment of six-and-thirty years, he was released by Evil-merodach, and set on a tributary throne at Babylon of some special distinction (2 Kings 25:27-30). But " his voice was heard no more on the mountains of Israel." He was (see Jeremiah 22:28-30) as a "despised broken idol "; he was to be written as "childless, a man that should not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed should prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Israel."! With him the glory of the Lion of Judah departed, and the land of Israel became a mere province of the great

Babylonian Empire.

VI. The second allegory of the Vine (vv. 10-14) evidently refers to the succeeding period, when the remnant of the people were left under Zedekiah, as a sworn servant of the king of Babylon, humbled and enslaved, but still safe, until his rebellion through “The comparison of the genealogies in Matthew 1:1-16, Luke 3:23-38, shows, that Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel, who appears as officially the son of Jeconiah, was really descended from Nathan, the son of David, and evidently adopted into the royal line. trust in Egypt drew down the final stroke of destruction. In the days of her prosperity Israel[1] is as a vine planted by the waters, and therefore fruitful and full of branches. The prophet describes first her royal might and empire; for she had “ strong rods ’’ (or shoots) “for the scepters” of her kings; next, her glory, “towering over the nations”; “ her stature was exalted among the clouds” (wrongly rendered in our Version “ thick boughs “); lastly, the multiplication of her people and her subjects; for “ she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches.” The picture is like that of the Psalmist (Psalms 58:8-11), “ Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt... thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shades of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.” Then comes the storm of ruin. In it the vine is “ plucked up in fury and cast to the ground “; the parching East wind dries up the fruit of her prosperity; “the strong rods “ of her royalty “ are broken and withered and cast into the fire” (comp. Ps. 58:16). Yet the

[1] The phrase, “ Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood” is difficult of interpretation. There is variation in the actual reading, as shown both by MSS. and by the ancient versions. The marginal interpretation is “ in thy likeness.” But, probably, the translation “in thy blood” (which is that of the Vulgate) is best, the sense being “ in thy life.” The sap is the blood of the vine; and it becomes the life-blood of the branches also. destruction is not yet utter. In her humiliation she is planted again, but now in “ the dry and thirsty ground of the wilderness.” The phrase is, of course, comparative. In 17:6, the vassal-kingdom is a vine “ of low stature “ indeed, but yet so far watered that it can put forth new shoots. It lives still, though in diminished strength and fruitfulness. But “ out of the rod of her branches,” the last scion of the royal house, there comes forth fire (as from the bramble in Jotham’s fable — Judges 9:15), and in that fire her fruit is devoured, and her royalty utterly destroyed. The reference is clearly to the infatuation of Zedekiah, rebelling against Babylon, in spite of prophetic entreaty and warning (Jeremiah 38:14-23), and thus destroying the last hope of national life. In both allegories the meaning is obvious throughout; phrases (as in vv. 4, 9) are used which bear the distinct impress of the antitype. Through both these runs a mournful strain of sorrow; each “ is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.” But, as usual in the Book of Ezekiel, there is a dominant tone of solemnity, almost stern in its stress on the infatuation and disobedience of the people, which stands out distinct from the tearful pathos of Jeremiah. As in his own domestic bereavement (see 24:16), so in the destruction of his country, he seems to be taught “ neither to mourn nor weep, nor to let his tears run down.” Rapt again and again into the vision of the Divine glory, he learns to look calmly, even in sorrow, on all that works out the counsel of God, and the laws of His righteousness.

VII. Ezekiel 24:1-14. — “Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying. Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this selfsame day: the king of Babylon drew close unto Jerusalem this selfsame day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, Set on the

caldron, set it on, and also pour water into it: gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock, and pile also the bones under it: make it boil well; yea, let the bones thereof be seethed in the midst of it.

“Wherefore thus saith the Lord God: Woe to the bloody city, to the caldron whose rust is therein, and whose rust is not gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece; no lot is fallen upon it. For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the bare rock; she poured it not upon the ground, to cover it with dust; that it might cause fury to come up to take vengeance, I have set her blood upon the bare rock that it should not be covered. Therefore thus saith the Lord God: Woe to the bloody city!

I also will make the pile great. Heap on the wood, make the fire hot, boil well the flesh, and make thick the broth, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that it may be hot, and the brass thereof may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, that the rust of it may be consumed. She hath wearied herself with toil: yet her great rust goeth not forth out of her; her rust goeth not forth by fire. In thy filthiness is lewdness, because I have purged thee and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have satisfied my fury upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord God.” The last “parable uttered unto the rebellious house “ belongs to” the tenth month, the tenth day of the month,” of the ninth year — the very time afterwards observed as a fast (Zechariah 8:19) — when the final siege of the city began (2 Kings 25:1). The key-note of it is found in the proverb, quoted in c. 11:3, as used by “ the men that devise mischief” in worldly self-confidence, “ the city is this caldron, we are the flesh “; in the meaning, cither that they are the choice pieces, for the sake of which the city exists, or that they will be unconsumed, even if the fire rage round the city. The prophet evidently takes up the proverb, and turns it against those who used it. In comparison with the elaborate allegories which precede it, this parable is very simple. The figure itself has two parts, separated from each other, but connected in idea.

First, the caldron, filled with “ every good piece” and with “ the choice bones,” is set on the fire; and that fire is fed (according to Eastern custom) with the larger bones themselves. Possibly in this last detail there is an allusion to the fact that it was the sin of Israel itself, which fed the flame of vengeance to consume it. Next, when the flesh has been boiled and devoured, the empty vessel is once more to be “ set upon the coals,” that “ the brass of it may burn, and the filthiness of it may be molten in it, and the rust of it may be consumed.” This last part of the parable is perhaps suggested by the method of purification by “ passing through the fire “ of anything before unclean, which was to be dedicated to the Lord (see Numbers 31:23). The application is similarly twofold, in each part opened with the stern words — the same which introduce Nahum’s denunciation of Nineveh (Nahum 3:1) — “ Woe to the bloody city! “; in each case also implying, as united with this blood-guiltiness, a temper of lewdness or “ filthiness.” Possibly in the desperate season of coming ruin, as at some time of earthquake or pestilence, the bonds of order began to fail, and the wild-beast fury of blood and lust to be let loose.

First, there comes vengeance on the people — this time indiscriminate and unsparing. “ Bring it out piece by piece; no lot” (for destroying or sparing) “has fallen upon it.” For their blood guiltiness

had been utterly shameless. “ Her blood is in the midst of her; she set it on the bare rock; she poured it not on the ground, to cover it with dust.” Therefore it should cry to God, that it “ might cause fury to come up to take vengeance.” How signally this was fulfilled may be seen in the record of the systematic destruction and captivity wrought out by Nebuzaradan at Jerusalem, after the capture of the fugitive Zedekiah; the chief of the captives brought to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, to be put to death in cold blood: the rest of the people, except the few left to till the land as serfs, carried away into captivity.

Next, the empty caldron — the desolated city itself — is to pass through, the fire as that which was too unclean to be preserved. It had been purged again and again; now the pollution was (so to speak) engrained in the very stones of the city and the temple, and could only be destroyed with them.

“ She hath wearied herself with labour,” or suffering, “ yet her rust goeth not out of her.” “ I have purged thee and thou wast not purged.” “ Thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more till I have satisfied my fury upon thee.” “ I will not go back, neither will I spare.” “According to thy doings shall they judge thee, saith the Lord.” This sentence also was carried out in literal exactness by the unconscious instruments of retribution. Nebuzaradan “ burned the house of the Lord, and the king’s house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burned he with fire.” For seventy years the burned ruins of Jerusalem lay desolate; not till then could the new city and temple rise again to be holy to the Lord.

Such are the chief “ parables of Ezekiel,” full of a grave poetic dignity and beauty, and wrought out with singular perfection of detail. Like the whole of his prophecy, they breathe the thoughtful spirit of the solitary thinker and writer, rather than the impassioned and pathetic pleading of the preacher; and they represent not so much the tearfulness of lamentation, as the calm, sad gravity which accepts for the time the inevitable chastisement, confessing it just, and only looks on to a distant future of restoration and blessing.

VIII. To the fuller description of these allegories, in which Ezekiel has symbolized the history of the Israel of his day, it may be well to add some brief notice of three other allegories of the same book, referring to the great heathen empires, of which Israel was then the battle-field. All belong to the portion of the book which contains “ the burdens of the nations.” All are addressed to the king of Egypt — the one great power still antagonistic to the conquering empire of Nebuchadnezzar, so fatally trusted by Israel, as a protection against the ruin threatening them from Assyria and Babylon. Here, as in other portions of their prophecy, Jeremiah in Israel, and Ezekiel in Babylonia, tell the same mournful tale. From both comes the prophecy of the coming fall of Egypt; from both the warning, often uttered in vain, against trusting to the broken reed of Egyptian alliance. In two of these allegories (c. xxix. and c. xxxii.), Pharaoh is compared to the great “dragon^ of the waters,” — clearly the huge crocodile of the Nile, the ^’ leviathan “ of the Book of Job, — strong in his scaly armour and his fierce brute force, delighting in the great river — at once the pride and the support of Egypt — and claiming it as created by himself and for himself.

Ezekiel 29:3-5. — “ Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself. And I will put hooks in thy jaws, and I will cause the fish of thy rivers to stick unto thy scales; and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, with all the fish

of thy rivers which stick unto thy scales. And I will leave thee thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers: thou shalt fall upon the open field; thou shalt not be brought

[1] The original word (tannim) seems to be applied to any great sea or river monster, from its first use inGenesis 1:21, throughout the various passages of the Old Testament in which it occurs. together, nor gathered: I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the earth and to the fowls of the heaven." The crocodile is caught (as was the custom in Egypt) by the "hook in his jaws"; all the lesser powers, like " the fishes sticking in his scales," are drawn out of the water to perish with him; he is slaughtered, and his flesh given for food to beasts and birds.

Then metaphor is dropped. The empire of Egypt is reproached, as in the taunt of Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:21), because it had been " a staff of reed to the house of Israel." " When they took hold of thee with the hand " (margin) " thou didst break and rend their shoulders, and, when they leaned on thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to shake." How well founded the reproach was, from the days of Hezekiah to the later times of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, the history but too plainly shows. The strong country of Judah was simply made an outpost of Egypt against the empires of the North — to be sacrificed at all times to its interests, and finally to be involved in its ruin. Finally is uttered the prophecy of its fall. " I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations." Even when the storm passes, their realm shall be but " a base kingdom "; it shall " no more rule over the nations," or be " the confidence of the house of Israel."

Similarly, but in fuller and stronger terms, is Pharaoh addressed in the second allegory.

Ezekiel 32:1-8. — "And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him. Thou wast likened unto a young lion of the nations: yet art thou as a dragon in the seas; and thou brakest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers. Thus saith the Lord God: I will spread out my net over thee with a company of many peoples; and they shall bring thee up in my net. And I will leave thee upon the land, I will cast thee forth upon the open field, and will cause all the fowls of the heaven to settle upon thee, and I will satisfy the beasts of the whole earth with thee. And I will lay thy flesh upon the mountains, and fill the valleys with thy height. I will also water with thy blood the land wherein thou swimmest, even to the mountains; and the watercourses shall be full of thee. And when I shall extinguish thee, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God." The past strength and conquering energy of Egypt are here more vividly described. The vastnes5 of its ruin, the rivers of blood which it will shed forth, the world-wide crash of its destruction, are terribly painted; and (as in so many prophetic utterances) over its fall the heavens are seen to be darkened, and the sun and moon give no light. The direct prophecy which follows is accordingly of fuller and more awful import. " The sword of the king of Babylon," " the swords of the mighty," and " the terrible of the nations " are all drawn against the doomed empire. Her allies perish with her, and "all the daughters of the nations," — Asshur, Elam, Meshech,Tubal,Edom, Zidon, — wail over the common ruin, past and future, under the devouring conquest of Babylon.

Ezekiel 32:18-21. — “Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down into the pit. Whom dost thou pass in beauty? go down, and be thou laid with the uncircumcised. They shall fall in the midst of them that are slain by the sword: she is delivered to the sword: draw her away and all her multitudes. The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell with them that help him: they are gone down, they He still, even the uncircumcised slain by the sword.” In the same context, addressed to the king of Egypt, stands the third allegory. It is a figurative description of the past greatness and fall of Assyria, held up as a prophetic warning to Pharaoh and his people. The metaphor, as in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:10-12), is the familiar metaphor of the great tree, cut down in its pride and given to utter destruction; but it is worked out with singular force and beauty of detail.

Ezekiel 31:3-17. — “Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and. his top was among the thick boughs. The waters nourished him, the deep made him to grow: her rivers ran round about her plantation; and she sent out her channels unto all the trees of the. field. Therefore his stature was exalted above all the trees of the field; and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long by reason of many waters, when he shot them forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by many waters. The cedars in the garden of God could not hide him: the fir-trees were not like his boughs, and the plane-trees were not as his branches; nor was any tree in the garden of God like unto him in his beauty. I made him fair by the multitude of his branches: so that all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him.

** Therefore thus said the Lord God: Because thou art exalted in stature, and he hath set his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height; I will even deliver him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the watercourses of the land; and all the peoples of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him. Upon his ruin all the fowls of the heaven shall dwell, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches: to the end that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves in their stature, neither set their top among the thick boughs, nor that their mighty ones stand up in their height, even all that drink water, for they are all delivered unto death, to the nether parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with them that go down to the pit.

“ Thus saith the Lord God: In the day when he went down to hell I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the rivers thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the nether parts of the earth. They also went down into hell with him unto them that be slain by the sword; yea, they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the nations.” The cedar of Lebanon, the one kind of great tree with which Palestine was familiar, and which the Psalmist calls so emphatically “ the tree of the Lord, which He had planted” (Psalms 104:16), is

taken as the type. Its height and far-.spreading branches, fed by the perennial waters of the mountains, its deep root and solid strength, its protecting shadow over the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, — all are clearly drawn from the life. But it is of an ideal greatness: it towers over all " the cedars of the garden of God "; the fir-trees and plane-trees are not even equal to its branches, and all the trees of Eden envy its surpassing glory. Then is brought in the moral element, which belongs only to the antitype.

It is because of this towering pride that the deep waters which feed it are dried up, and the crash of ruin comes, at once a retribution and a warning to all the other giants of the forest. Lastly, in one brief verse is made the application to Pharaoh and all his multitude, to the like strength and the like pride of Egypt. Of the fulfilment of this prophecy, and the parallel prophecy of Jeremiah, we have but scanty historical record. The Pharaoh of the time is undoubtedly Pharaoh Hopra the Apries of Herodotus, whose Egyptian informants here, as in other cases suppressed all tradition of disaster from foreign invasion, and represented the fall of the king as due to domestic rebellion under Amasis. But there appears little doubt that such invasion (expressly described by Josephus), did take place, and that after it the kingdom of Egypt, though for a time prosperous under Amasis, never recovered its glory, and was perhaps in theory under vassalage to Babylon, till the utter destruction of its greatness under Cambyses. In these utterances of Ezekiel we have fully sufficient exemplification of the Parable as allegory — full of beauty and solemnity, and truly suggestive of the fundamental idea of Analogy, underlying all parabolic teaching. But, compared with the true Parable, drawn from the common incidents and actors of real life, it seems to want solidity and natural vividness, and to appeal more to the imagination than to the heart.

05. Chapter 5

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER V. THE PARABLE AS SPOKEN OR ACTED RIDDLE.

I. The Song of Lamech.— II. The riddle of Samson. — III. The allegory of the Book of Ecclesiastes. — IV. The acted riddles of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, THE parable of fable or allegory leads, by a natural transition, to the “parable in the form of enigma or riddle,” conveyed either in word or in significant action. The object of the enigma, like the primary object of the true parable, is to arrest attention and to stimulate inquiry. Of its use for the attainment of this object we have a well-known example in the New Testament, where our Lord’s enigmatical saying — “ A little while and ye shall not see me; and again a little while and ye shall see me; because I go to the Father” — stirred in the disciples a half-bewildered questioning, which He himself was pleased to anticipate by explanation (John 16:16-24). Of another form of the same enigmatical teaching He was pleased to make use in the question, “If David called Christ Lord, how is He his Son? (Matthew 22:41-46) — a question which, if it had the effect, perhaps the intention, of silencing the insidious questions of His enemies, yet must have had also a positive suggestiveness to those who were ready to learn. But the machinery in the case of the riddle is less subtle and beautiful than in the true parable; it appeals wholly to the curious understanding, not to the heart. It is fit rather to arrest the thoughtless, than to discriminate between the thoughtless and the thoughtful hearer; it has more in it of wit than of wisdom. Moreover, the analogy on which it plays is not, as in the parable proper, a true analogy: it is the very characteristic of the riddle to give a semblance of congruity to ideas or things really incongruous; and upon this, indeed, turns the wit or humour of which the riddle is mostly intended to be the vehicle. It fails, therefore, altogether to reach the deeper meaning of the parable; it does not accord with the highest tone of teaching; it is appropriate only to the superficial, slighter, and more fanciful aspects of truth. Hence it occupies only a secondary place in Holy Scripture (though in early Eastern literature it plays a considerable part), as being better adapted to the minds of children, and those like children, than to the full-grown seriousness of manhood. In the Old Testament we find a few specimens, and only a few, of this form of parable, in no case occupying a prominent or important place.

It is, indeed, true that the word “riddle” (rendered in 1 Kings 10:1-29. I by the phrase “hard question “[1]) is not identical with the word ’’parable.” But it is paralleled closely with it in Ezekiel 17:2 (“ Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel”), and we find a corresponding connexion in Psalms 49:4; Psalms 58:2, between the parable and the “dark saying.” Nor does it seem doubtful that the taunt levelled against Ezekiel (Ezekiel 20:42) — *’Doth he not speak parables?” — refers generally to the “ dark sayings” of symbolical and mystical utterance of which his prophecy is full. Hence it seems reasonable to consider the riddle, especially as it is apt to wear a metaphorical shape, as connected with the general category of parabolic teaching. Of the spoken riddle it will be sufficient to take three specimens — the parable

of Lamech in the earliest history (Genesis 4:23-24), the riddle of Samson in the half-civilised time of the Judges (Judges 12:18), and a remarkable passage from Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 12:1-6), belonging to a far later age of Biblical literature.

I. The parable of Lamech has a strange and mysterious interest — coming to us as the sole fragment of the literature of that antediluvian world, of which, since it belongs not to our own dispensation, it has been judged sufficient to give us only the

[1] The Rabbinical literature delighted itself in inventing these “hard questions” of the Queen of Sheba, most of them quaint and puerile enough. scantiest glimpses in Holy Scripture. It assumes the antithetical form of Hebrew poetry; and, while it is free from all metaphorical imagery, is obviously couched designedly in enigmatical language. It is the more remarkable that it should have been preserved to us in the Scripture record, because it belongs not to the family “ which called itself by the name of the Lord,” but to the outcast race of Cain. On the general translation of this passage there is little but verbal discrepancy among the various interpreters. It runs thus in our Revised Version: —

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech; For I have slain a man for wounding me, And a young- man for bruising- me, If Cain shall be avenged seven-fold, Truly Lamech seventy and sexen-fold.” As to the meaning and tone of the passage there is more difference of opinion.

It is of course obvious that there is a distinct allusion to the terrible protection of Cain by the “mark” of God, branded upon his forehead (Genesis 4:15). Hence the passage must be interpreted as expressing on Lamech’s part, not (as some contend) a foreboding of punishment, but a certainty of security against vengeance, for the blood-shedding which he avows.

[1] The marginal reading has “ to my wounding... to my hurt”; but the version of the text has higher authority, and coheres better with the idea of the whole.

It seems at least highly probable, judging by the context, that this utterance is closely connected with the record of the discovery by Tubal Cain of the power of working in brass and iron — a power, which (as all history unfortunately bears witness) is instant])applied to the fabrication of weapons.[1] The old Rabbinical traditions (quoted by St. Jerome and others), working out these connexions into legendary inventions, told of a slaughter of Cain himself by Lamech, intentional or unintentional, wrought by the weapons supplied by Tubal Cain; and so certainly gave a peculiar force and vividness to the passage. But putting these aside, as not improbably invented for the occasion, the certain connexion with the curse on Cain, and the probable connexion with the invention of Tubal Cain, still remain. The sense, accordingly, seems to be something like this. We have first a boast on the part of Lamech, that he has slain men, in vengeance for any wound, or even any hurt, they might inflict on him— a bold assertion of the power and right of unlimited self-defence, more than requiting the assailant. We have, next, an expression of confidence, that, it Cain was protected by God’s threat of seven-fold

[1] It has been always remarked that the Scriptural record, unlike most ancient traditions, distinctly separates between the higher moral and spiritual civilisation, and the lower mechanical and aesthetic civilisation, attributing the latter to the rare of Cain. vengeance on his slayer, Lamech

shall be protected seventy and seven-fold. Some will have it that this protection is viewed as simply due to the righteousness of his act, as one of pure self-defence. But the allusion to some protection infinitely better than the awful curse of the Lord, certainly seems to savour more of ''the Titanic arrogance" which others ascribe to it — the arrogance of one who, like the robber spoken of by Job (Job 12:6}, " carries his god in his right hand," and worships the newly-invented sword as the only deity worth regarding. So interpreted, the utterance comes to us from the dim past of the ancient world, as the first of many utterances of human pride, using its discoveries for conflict and vengeance, delighting in conscious strength, and by a virtual idolatry making its own power the only god.

It accords only too well with the whole picture of the ancient world, gradually darkening " till the Flood came and took them all away."

II. Judges 14:5-20. — "Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnah, and came to the vineyards of Timnah: and, behold a young lion roared against him. And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done. And he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. And after a while he returned to take her> and he turned aside to sec the carcase of the Hon; and, behold, there was a swarm of bees in the body of the Hon, and honey. And he took it into his hands, and went on, eating as he went, and he came to his fatlier and mother, and gave unto them, and they did eat: but he told them not that he had taken the honey out of the body of the lion. And his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do. And it came to pass, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him. And Samson said unto them. Let me now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of raiment: but if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of raiment. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, And out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days declare the riddle. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to impoverish us? is it not so? And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell thee? And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she pressed him sore: and she told the riddle to the children of her people. And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, Ye had not found out my riddle. And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and smote thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave the changes of raiment unto them that declared the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house. But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he had used as his friend." The riddle of Samson, put forth to the heathen guests at his marriage with a Philistine maiden, belongs to the half-barbaric times of the Judges, and accords well in tone with the reckless sportiveness of the character of its utterer. It is literally a

riddle in the modern sense of the word, of which the reader holds, in the incident just recorded, a key unknown to those who heard the riddle. In the riddle itself, in the answer of the Philistines, and in Samson's rejoinder, we trace throughout the figurative character which belongs to the idea of a parable. It has in it a certain bright ingenuity.

"He said unto them, Out of the cater came forth meat;

Out of the strong came forth sweetness.''

"And they said unto him, What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion? "

"And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, Ye had not found out my riddle," The whole story, indeed, has a picturesque vividness about it. It is a characteristic introduction to the history of that strangest of all the appointed deliverers of the people of God — relying on the lowest form of strength, of gigantic bodily prowess, and using it with an exulting recklessness, which the Nazaritic vow (we may suppose) was intended to •chasten. This spirit, indeed, shows itself throughout the history of Samson, but nowhere more plainly than in this the opening scene. In fact, the riddle, like the history in which it is contained, stands alone in Holy Scripture. It is the single representative of that large class of enigmatical sayings — at once the •exercises and the toys of intellectual ingenuity — with which we become familiar in Eastern literature and tradition. It gives a bright and lifelike interest to the narrative; but it yields no further instruction.

III. Great is the change, when we pass from the wild sportiveness of Samson to the mature sadness of the writer of Ecclesiastes, and from the crude simplicity of the ancient riddle to the highly elaborate and imaginative passage (Ecclesiastes 12:1-8) which closes that later book. It is a passage descriptive of the approach of old age, and the senile decay which ends in death. The description is wrought out with a remarkable subtlety and variety of metaphor, and a not less remarkable pathetic beauty. In many points of detail the meaning of the original is doubtful; but the general line of thought is not hard to trace.

It opens with the exhortation: — Ecclesiastes 12:1-2. — "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; or even the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain." The time of old age is here first described as a time of dimness and gloom, both physical and mental — dimness in the loss of power to enjoy- either the warm sunshine and the light of day, or the quieter and softer beauty of the moon and stars — gloom in the gathering of thick clouds of apprehension on the firmament of life, even after the bursting of the storms of adversity, which should have dispersed them once for all. Such day's must be to the natural man " days of evil," — years out of which all pleasure has died. In the Old Testament (as we see in the Psalms and the Book of Job, as well as in the Book of Ecclesiastes), if there is certainly some light on the horizon in the gradual realisation of another life, yet it is but dim in comparison with the " life and immortality brought to light " in the New Testament.

Hence the gloominess of such a passage as this, the utterance of a man who had sought happiness everywhere — in the individual and social life, in the sensuous and spiritual spheres of experience — and found all to be " vanity of vanities," both in itself and in the sense of the sure approach of death. Still it has this redeeming feature, that it turns this sense of transitoriness of life, not to the epicurean preference, " Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," but to the higher

counsel of consecration to the Creator of the bright days of youth, which He has given as the short flower of life.

Next we have a description of the human body as a house or tent, in which all the various organs and faculties, personified as the inmates of the house, are marked as passing under different phases of decay. [1] “When the keepers of the house (the hands) shall tremble, When the strong bearers (the legs) shall bow themselves; When the grinders (the teeth) shall rest from work.

Because they are few;

1 The translation here varies (especially in the last line) from that of our Revised Version. It agrees substantially with that given by Prof. Cheyne in his interesting book Job and Solomon When they who look out of the windows (the eyes) shall be darkened; [1] When the doors towards the street (the lips) shall close, While the sound of grinding within (by the teeth) is low, When it (the voice) shall rise into the twittering of the sparrow; [2] When all the singers (the tones of voice) shall be brought low.” The metaphor, it will be observed, is wrought out in singular perfection of detail, reminding us of the allegories of advanced modern literature, while yet there is but little impression of artificiality, and therefore no loss of beauty. In the next section the metaphor is partly laid aside, and partly changed.

“When he shall be afraid of that which is high, And terrors shall be in the way,

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[1] There is a subtlety in the original here, making the “guardians” and the “bearers” masculine, and the “grinders’’ and the “lookers out of the windows” (seeJudges 5:28) feminine, the slaves and the ladies of the house.

[2] On this line there is difference of interpretation. Most versions (like our own) give a translation (“ he shall rise up •at the voice of a bird”) which is unintelligible except on the supposition of a complete change of metaphor, and even on that supposition difficult. The idea, mostly held to be suggested by this version, is an allusion to the forced wakefulness of old age at the first dawn and song of birds. The translation in the text preserves the continuity of the metaphor, and agrees well with the whole context. The idea is of the “childish treble “ of old age, in which the musical tones of “ the big manly voice “are lost, “ piping and whistling in its sound.” The “ closing of the lips when the sound of the grinding is low,” seems to be the falling in of the mouth when the teeth have been lost. When the almond-tree shall bloom, When the locust shall become torpid, When the caper-berry shall burst” (or “fail”). The first distich seems to descend to prose, describing simply the weakness which shrinks from the heights, once easily surmounted, and the senile timidity, which dreads perils even in the beaten path. In the next three lines, on the contrary, the metaphor becomes more subtle. The almond-tree, with its white blossoms blooming out before the leaves come and in the cold season, is the type of the hoary head of wintry age. The locust, becoming torpid before it dies, marks the stiffening of youthful agility. The bursting of the pod of the caper-berry is the type of the throwing off the vesture of the flesh.[1] We have here a subtle and beautiful gradation of thought. The whitening hair marks the drying-up of the juices of the body; the growing torpidity the gradual decay of muscular energy; and then the breaking up of the vesture of the flesh prepares us for the

[1] In some versions metaphor is dropped here with some gain of coherency, but great loss of beauty. They render thus: —

“When the almond” (dainty food) “shall be despised”;

“When the locust” (used for common food) “shall be distasteful,”

“When the caper-berry” (used to provoke appetite) “shall fail.” This rendering of the last line is adopted by some who accept in the other two lines the rendering and the interpretation of the text. idea of death, plainly wrought out in the next verse: —

“Because man goeth to his long home, And the mourners go about the streets.”

Lastly, the parable passes on to that which is beyond death —

“ As soon as the silver chain gives way, And the golden vessel (hanging from it) is shattered. Or the pitcher over the spring is broken, Or the wheel (for raising water) at the well split asunder.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, And the spirit shall return to God who gave it.” The first couplet tells us how the silver chain, hanging from the ceiling of the room, or the top of the tent, and sustaining the golden lamp in which burns the oil of life, suddenly gives way, shattering the one and spilling the other; and so describes the •extinction of the light of life. The next rather describes the cessation of both the easier and the harder work of life — the breaking of the pitcher, by which the water of the spring is so easily made useful, and of the wheel by which the water is drawn with exer-

[1] Commentators quote in illustration a Talmudic passage (Shabbath, pp. 1516, 1526), the answer of an old man to one who urged him to attend the school: —

“The mountain is snow” (my head is white), “The hoar frosts surround me “ (my beard and whiskers are hoary), “The dogs do not bark” (my voice has lost its tones), “The millers do not grind “ (my teeth have failed). tion from below.[1] The last, dropping all metaphor, declares that when the light of life is thus quenched, and its work cut short, the body shall pass as “dust to dust,” and the spirit return to God who gave it. The writer has answered for himself his own former question (Ecclesiastes 3:21), “Who knoweth the spirit of a man, whether it goeth upward? “ In entire accordance with the conception running through so many of the Psalms, and brought out again and again in the Book of Job, there is here a strongly grasped conviction of a future in Sheol, the world unseen— shadowy, indeed, and vague, but still a real existence, and one in which the soul is in some way able to return to God.

“This whole passage stands alone in Holy Scripture in its perfection and subtlety as a symbolic allegory, couched in enigmatic form, which has passed in many of its expressions into much modern literature. It forms a natural and most beautiful close of the deeply reflective and imaginative book of Ecclesiastes.

There is in it a pensiveness, which is not despondency, and it stands out in singular contrast with the

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[1] Professor Cheyne (Job and Solomon) preserves still in these verses the original tone of metaphor, referring to the organs of the body.

“When the silver string “ (the tongue) “ be loosed,”

“And the golden bowl “ (the head) “ break”;

“And the pitcher “ (the heart) “be shivered at the fountain”;

“And the windlass “ (the breathing apparatus) “ break into the pit.” straightforward simplicity of the epilogue, in which^ weary of thought and knowledge and study of books and life, the writer comes back to the “ beginning of wisdom,” learnt in his childish days: “ Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

IV. The treatment of this branch of the subject would not be complete without some passing reference to the “acted riddles” — the symbolical actions, mostly strange and startling, by which the prophets were bidden to arrest the attention of the people, to call out the inquiry, “ Wilt thou not tell us what these things mean? “ and then to declare plainly the message of the Lord. It is obvious that these furnish simply another form of the same kind of teaching, addressed not to the ear but to the eye.

They belong, indeed, in essence to a large and fundamental method of teaching. The use of the symbolism of visible action in general has a far reaching and almost universal scope. As necessarily underlying all ritual ceremony, both of sacrifice and of worship, it finds a full and elaborate exemplification in the whole Levitical ritual; in relation to which it was wrought out by later Jewish imagination into a strange fantastic minuteness of detail. Thus, to take but two examples, the whole ritual of the Passover, if it is commemorative, is also plainly symbolic; and as such, eminently fit to draw out the traditional inquiry, “What mean ye by this service? “and even more evident and striking is the symbolism of the ritual of the Great Day of Atonement, in the sacrifice of the one goat, and in the dismissal of the other (the “ scapegoat “y to bear away the burden of the sins of the people, solemnly confessed over it To work out this symbolism of ritual would be to examine and describe the whole of the Mosaic ritual itself So, again, the various “ signs “ given to or by the prophets from time to time— the rending of the altar at Bethel, and the pouring out of the ashes (1 Kings 13:3-5), the retreat of the shadow upon the sun-dial of Ahaz (2 Kings 20:8-11), and the like,— are in all cases not merely evidences of the reality of prophetic mission, but symbols also of the truth conveyed in the prophetic utterance. In fact, the connexion of visible symbol with spoken word is so frequent as to be almost invariable. It appeals to human nature at all times, especially in the earlier ages of the world. But we may confine our attention now to the deli berate use of symbolic action (to be interpreted hereafter in word) as a distinct part of the prophetic utterance. Of this we have many instances in the Old Testament, to which it will be sufficient briefly to refer.

Thus, in the book of Isaiah, we may note the symbolic action of the prophet (Isaiah 20:2-4) walking for three years among the people “naked and barefoot,” to foreshadow the shameful captivity of Egypt and Ethiopia. Such naked enthusiasts are not uncommon in the East. But the character and dignity of Isaiah were such as to render this wild appearance startling and exceptional, and therefore fit to serve the purpose of an acted parable. In the Book of Jeremiah we have more frequent instances of this form of teaching. In c. xiii. we read of the hiding of the linen girdle in a

hole of the rock near the Euphrates, till it was “ marred and good for nothing,” — a homely symbol of the marring in those plains of Babylon of the pride of the people of Israel, once made to cleave to the Lord, as a girdle to the loins, but now outcast through sin and idolatry. In c. xviii. we have the more famous parable, which has passed into a proverb, of the vessel marred on the wheel of the potter, and, by a touch of his hand, silently and swiftly changed to another form, — the type of the apparent mutability of the purpose of God, for good or for evil, according to the change, for good or evil, of the “vessels of His wrath or mercy.” From this we pass to the simple symbolism of the breaking of the potter’s vessel by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 19:1-2) before the ancients of the people and the priests in the valley of Tophet, the scene of the vile and cruel idolatries of Judah; and the declaration, which they might have easily anticipated, “ Even so will I break this people and this city, so that it cannot be made whole again.”

Once more, we find an example of the same symbolic teaching (Jeremiah 27:2-3) in the making of yokes, and sending them to the kings of Edom, Moab, Amnion, Tyre, and Zidon, when their ambassadors came to Zedekiah to form an inauspicious league against the great king of Assyria; and in the replacing the yoke of wood, broken by Hananiah the false prophet by a heavier yoke of iron (Ezekiel 28:10-14). But it is in the book of Ezekiel, the great prophet of symbolic vision, that there occur naturally far more frequent and more elaborate specimens of symbolic action. In their minute and prosaic detail, they stand in singular contrast with the highly poetic character of the allegories and the mysterious grandeur of the visions of the same prophetic book. The portraying of the beleaguered city of Jerusalem on a tile, the laying the iron pan to enclose it with ’^ a wall of iron,” the alternate lying on the right and the left sides, the gathering in the materials for bread, the eating defiled bread, and drinking water by measure, the burning, the cutting, and the scattering of the hair (except a few hairs still kepi) from his head and beard, — all are interpreted as graphically representing to the people in vivid symbolism the severity of the coming siege, the famine-stricken sufferings of the people, and the slaughter and the dispersion in which all should end (c. iv. v.). Again, the bringing forth of his household stuff by day, and the breaking through the wall. to carry out the rest with veiled head in the darkening” twilight, are made types of a future spoiling, captivity, and dispersion, and draw out the puzzled inquiry. What doest thou? to be followed by prediction in stern and sorrowful plainness of speech (Ezekiel 12:3-12). A more striking instance still is found in the pathetic scene, in which, when in his wife’s death “ the desire of his eyes is taken from him with a stroke,” he is forbidden to weep, or to show the outward signs of mourning; till the astonished people ask what these things can mean, and receive the awful prediction of that tearless wretchedness, in which they, worn out with suffering, shall see hereafter the loss of those dearer to them than their own souls (Ezekiel 24:15-25) Lastly, the union of the staff inscribed “ For Judah,” and the staff “ For Israel “ (following the grand vision of the resurrection of the dry bones) is made to symbolize to the people the future gathering in one kingdom of God, of the last dispersion of Israel in Assyria, and of Judah in Babylon (Ezekiel 37:15-26; when “ David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd “; when God “ will make a covenant of peace with them, and His Tabernacle shall be with them.” But of all instances of symbolic action the most solemn and startling is found in that well-known passage, in which the experience of Hosea is made a life-long symbol of the dispensation of God to His people (Hosea 1:1-11, Hosea 2:1-23, Hosea 3:1-5.). Whatever view we take of the whole passage — whether we consider it to be (as it certainly seems to be) a plain record of actual occurrence, or whether (to avoid what may appear to us strange and repulsive) we explain it as a prophetic vision or apologue — it is in either case

the most striking of these acted parables. The prophet takes to wife Gomar, one who had fallen, or was to fall, into unfaithfulness, but who was loved still; she bears him children of ill-omened names: Jezreel [1] Lo-ruhamah (“ Uncompassionated “), Lo-ammi (“ Not my people”). Then again she falls away to adultery; yet still in loving patience he buys her back from her self-chosen slavery of shame, not now to conjugal honour, but to a life of widowhood and repentance. The whole is made (see cc. 2:3:4-5) a mournful symbol of the espousing by the Lord of the chosen nation, called from its ancient idolatry, of the renewed falling away, in spite of warning and entreaty, into sin and consequent captivity, and of the restoration by His mercy, but to a shorn glory and discrowned widowhood. The prophet, who was to be to Israel, as Jeremiah to Judah, the prophet of woe, is taught by his own experience the yearning of undying love even to the

[1] The name Jezreel (“The Lord will sow”) is in itself of good omen, and in that view is alluded to inHosea 2:22-23; but its connexion with “the blood of Jezreel” (the blood-guiltiness of Ahab, and the terrible vengeance upon it) changes its aspect for evil. sinner, the sorrow of even righteous retribution, and the gleam of a sure and certain hope of final restoration.

All these are instances of the acted enigma, used far more often than the spoken riddle to convey God’s teaching to the people, but virtually the same in idea and principle, and accordingly not even here employed for the highest or deepest form of that teaching. To us, indeed, accustomed to the full light of spiritual manhood, the very use of this method of illustration may seem to involve something of childishness. But to Oriental habits of mind, and to the greater simplicity of earlier days, it was far otherwise. If it fell below the solemnity and depth of direct prophetic utterance, yet it served its purpose, of catching the imagination, and so impressing itself upon the memory.

06. Chapter 6

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER VI. THE PARABLE OF SYMBOLIC VISION. The destruction of symbolical and apocalyptic visions: — I. The symbolic visions of Amos. IL The visions of the dry bones and the Temple in Ezekiel. III. The symbolic visions of Daniel. IV. The symbolic visions of Zechariah. FROM the consideration of the parable in allegory and riddle, and of the parable of symbolic action, we pass on naturally to some notice of the parable of symbolic vision — like the former in its obvious suggestion of deeper meaning — like the latter in presenting that suggestion, not to the ear, but to the eye. The general subject of prophetic revelation by means of visions is a large one, singularly rich in both poetic and philosophical interest. If, indeed, we had to consider all forms of such revelation, as distinct from the plainer and more direct revelation by the “Word of the Lord,” and to deal with the subject as a whole with any thoroughness of detail, it would be sufficient to occupy a volume instead of a chapter. But if we look at it simply in connexion with the general principle of parabolic teaching, we can greatly narrow the largeness of our consideration.

It is quite possible to distinguish between visions which we ma}’ call parabolic, as direct!}-symbolizing man’s action and God’s dealing with him, and visions merely apocalyptic, in which the unspeakable majesty of God simply unfolds itself to man, so far as he is capable of conceiving it — clothing themselves in the imagery or visible grandeur and sublimity, but at the same time obviously implying through these a transcendent supernatural and mysterious reality. The two kinds of vision are, indeed, naturally connected.

They melt not unfrequently into one another; and may, perhaps, be considered as embodying the same fundamental principle. Still the distinction indicated above may be substantially drawn. It is clearly with the former class only that we are directly” concerned; and the latter need only be noticed so far as is rendered necessary by the connexion noted above. With one exception, it may be observed that the revelation through visions belongs to the prophets of the later ages of prophecy. After the simple rustic visions of the herd man -prophet Ames, — perhaps the earliest representative of the written prophecy of the Old Testament, — we find no record of prophetic visions, until the era of the captivity in the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and the period after the return in the book of Zechariah, the son of Iddo. It can hardly be accidental that this was exactly the time when the imagination of the captive prophets of Israel must have been deeply impressed by the magnificent and colossal imagery of the palaces and temples of Babylon, which modern discovery has exhumed before the eyes of our own age. In some cases we have distinct traces of its effect on the special imagery of the visions themselves; in all, we may fairly suppose that it was allowed to suggest the special phase, under which the inspiration of God was to act upon the soul of the prophet. In all cases of the distinctly symbolic visions the interpretation and enforcement are expressly given. The visions, therefore, served (it would seem) simply the purpose of quasi-pictorial illustration, — intended, first, to arrest the attention, and then to tell on the

imagination, and so impress themselves on the memory of the prophet and his hearers. They present in this respect an obvious similarity to those parables of our Lord of which He has been pleased to give through His disciples an interpretation to the world and which, nevertheless, exercise by their very parabolic form, a peculiar and undying influence over the imagination and thought of Christendom.

I. The visions of Amos, — which, though they do not open the book as we have it now, may, perhaps, from their connexion with the story of his calling, be taken as the first and simplest revelation to his yet untaught soul, — are of a characteristic homeliness and simplicity. He prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam II. — a time of singular restoration of temporal prosperity, unaccompanied apparently by any spiritual revival; and he foresaw the coming destruction at the hands of the Assyrian power, by a process gradual, not without some intermissions of respite, but moving on to only too complete an end. This foresight expresses itself in four simple visions.

Amos 7:1-10. — “Thus the Lord God shewed me, and, behold, he formed locusts in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth: and lo, it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings. And it came to pass that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small. The Lord repented concerning this, It shall not be, saith the Lord.

“Thus the Lord God shewed me: and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire; and it devoured the great deep, and would have eaten up the land. Then I said, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee, how shall Jacob stand? for he is small. The Lord repented concerning this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God.

“Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb-line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more: and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

Amos 8:1-3. — “ Thus the Lord God shewed me, and behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them any more. And the songs of the temple shall be bowlings in that day, saith the Lord God: the dead bodies shall oe many: in every place shall they cast them forth with silence.” In the first two of these rustic visions the prophet is brought back to what he had doubtless often seen — the swoop of the cloud of locusts on the aftermath, which, “ after the king’s mowings “ of royal tribute, was the hope of the husbandman — the devouring ravage of the fire, ready to eat up the land, which is often spoken of by the prophets, in juxtaposition with the scourge of the locusts. Against both he cries out to God for the helpless littleness of Israel, and twice the judgment is stayed, “ It shall not be, saith the Lord.” The respite (we must suppose) was granted for repentance. Unhappily, it was granted in vain to the princes and people, besotted with luxury and pride, whom Amos so vividly describes and denounces in his whole prophecy. The next two visions are clearly parallel to each other, although between them is inserted the story of Amos’s call. Both tell of utter ruin; the plumb-line set in the midst of Israel marks the completeness and certainty of the doom of destruction; the

basket of summer fruit, to be eaten as soon as gathered, tells of the rapid fulfilment of that doom. The application is drawn out with the graphic power of a terrible simplicity. It dwells on the desolation of the holy places, the sword drawn against the royal house, the songs of the palace turned to yells of anguish, the dead bodies cast out in the silence of a despair too deep for mourning. The completeness of its fulfilment by the hand of Shalmaneser we may almost picture to ourselves by a glance at the ruthless cruelties of Assyrian conquest, as depicted on the monuments now before our eyes.

II. The change of tone is infinite, from the simplicity of Amos to the sublime and mysterious grandeur of the visions of Ezekiel, only equalled or exceeded I in the Apocalypse of the New Testament. We have had to note already the symbolic and figurative character of Ezekiel's teaching in his wealth of allegory. Yet even this has less forcibly impressed itself on Christian thought as characteristic of his prophecy, than the revelation of his great visions. As a rule, however, it would seem that these visions are to be considered as rather Apocalyptic than symbolic — revelations of God in visible and awful majesty, rather than illustrated parables of His dispensation to man. Such is (for example) the great opening vision at the river Chebar of the glory of the Lord — the four mysterious cherubim upholding the crystal firmament and the throne, on which sat " the likeness as of a man," and from which came as to Israel the charge of prophetic mission (cc. i.-iii.). Such, again, is the second vision of the same Divine Presence, bearing the prophet to the Temple at Jerusalem, to see there Its manifold degradations by the worship of graven and painted idols on the walls, and of the sun In heaven, to hear the charge of Divine vengeance on all who had not the mark of the Lord on their foreheads, and to behold the departure from the polluted Temple of the glory of the Lord, which he had seen in Chebar (cc. viii.-x.). These visions, of infinite solemnity and mystery, are symbolic only so far as this, — that all descriptions in human language of the Majesty of God can only symbolise the ineffable reality. But they can hardly be said to have a proper place among " the parables of the Old Testament." The first really symbolic vision with which we have direct concern is the celebrated vision (in C. xxxvil.) of the "dry bones," long whitening in the valley — the charnel-house of some great slaughter of the past — and now restored to life.

Ezekiel 37:1-14. — "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones • and he caused mc to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy over these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and co\^er you with skin, and put breath in you, and }'e shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold an earthquake, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And I beheld, and lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me.

Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind. Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up

upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say. Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut of. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, and caused you to come up out of your graves, O my people. And I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land, and ye shall know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

It would be superfluous to comment on the sublimity of a picture, which has passed into a proverb, and has reproduced itself in a thousand forms of human thought and metaphor. Nor is there anything to explain in the perfect simplicity of the interpretation, making the vision simply a parable of the coming revival of Israel out of the grave of national destruction, after the long, terrible dryness of the seventy years' captivity. But it may be well to note the singular accuracy, underlying this splendid description of the process of spiritual revival, whether in a nation or in a Church. First, after the long and apparently hopeless desolation, the " thundering and earthquake " of some approaching revolution; next, the stirring of individual energies in separation, and the drawing together of those thus awakened to motion; then, the uniting of all in " the sinews and flesh " of that bodily organisation which makes each group a whole.

Yet in none of these is as yet the breath of true spiritual revival: the renewed organisation is perfect, yet as to the higher life it is dead still. But, at last, at the call of the prophet there comes " the breath of God " — a Pentecostal gift of the Spirit. Then, and not till then, is the revival accomplished: and " they live and stand on their feet, an exceeding great army," instinct with the indwelling life of God Himself The description is plainly illustrated in the actual course of its fulfilment by the restoration of Israel. As the seventy years drew to an end, there must have been, amidst signs of approaching change and revolution, stirrings of hope and energy in those, who, like Daniel, knew from "the books" of the approaching close of the captivity. In the restoration itself we see from the Book of Ezra how instinctively the relics of the people drew together in their old tribes and families, and how, once in their own land, they carefully revived all the civil and religious organisations of days gone by. Yet the inner spirit of true revival was not in these, but in the anointing by the Spirit of the Lord of the leaders and the people, and through this gift the renewal of spiritual life, witnessed and diffused by Haggai and Zechariah; the long interruptions, the weary delays, the obvious defects of the restoration, came from the imperfect reception of that inspiration; perhaps it may be said that for want of even such full outpouring of the higher life as had been known of old, and the tendency, already showing Itself, towards the substitution of the Law for the Spirit — the germ of a future Pharisaism — the restored people actually failed to be, as fully as they might have been, a great living army of God. But the prophecy is not simply " of private interpretation." Its fundamental idea has fulfilled itself again and again in the history of the past and the experience of the present. Every true revival must have in it something more than busy individualities and completeness of new organisations. It must live by the life of some great spiritual principle, pervading, in various methods and degrees, the whole body of human society. Such life-giving impulse a national revival may to some extent find in the ardour of loyalty, the passion for freedom, the glow of patriotism, the spirit of a wide and fervent philanthropy, the hunger and thirst after righteousness — all of which are (so to speak) the fainter breathings of the

Spirit of God. But the true spiritual life, which has so often been felt as underlying the greatest national revivals, and which is the conscious inspiration of all revivals of the Church of God, is the known breathing, the direct Presence, of the Spirit of God, as the Spirit of Holiness, of Truth, of Love. Where this is, there is, in spite of individual failures and defective organisation, the revival of real spiritual life. Where this is not, all individual stirrings, all imposing organisations, are in vain; there may be a semblance of revival but all still is or soon will be dead.

There has, indeed, been a natural, almost irresistible, impulse to extend the application of the Parable from the many revivals of earth to the final " regeneration," of which these are but typical — the Resurrection of the Great Day, when the earth and the sea shall " give up their dead." It has supplied the imagery of many descriptions of that indescribable mysterious reality. It has suggested some answers to the bewildered or ironical inquiry, " How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? "But it is clear that this further application, if not simply a play of Christian imagination, must rest merely on the general principle of typical application to the perfect Kingdom of Christ, and that it can claim here no hint of such further meaning in the original passage itself. This grand vision presents no difficulty of interpretation, either as to general method, or in detail.

It is far otherwise with the second great symbolic vision of Ezekiel, the elaborate and detailed picture of the future Temple, with which the book closes (cc. xl.-xlviii,). That this vision is symbolic cannot be seriously questioned. It was, indeed, suggested by some of the older interpreters, that it literally preserved, with a view to the future restoration, the true design of Solomon's Temple, expanded, perhaps, and glorified by the larger ideas of the prophet himself; and that only the feebleness and timidity of the restored exiles prevented its full accomplishment. But this interpretation cannot be maintained, on a thoughtful consideration of the details of the description— as absolutely incapable of any literal realisation, as the picture of the dimensions and details of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, — and (perhaps even more obviously) in view of the significant discrepancies of Ezekiel's ritual from that of the Levitical law, and the plainly symbolic description, in c. xlvii, of the living waters flowing forth from the Temple. The other cognate idea — that the description is simply predictive, and waits for a literal fulfilment in the future, — is not only liable to the same objections, but is moreover burdened with special difficulties of its own.

Putting these aside, we must conclude that in spite of what seems to us a strange and prosaic minuteness of detail, the vision is to be taken as mainly symbolic. It has indeed so far a simply predictive value, that it brings out the certainty of a restored temple, of which " the glory should be greater than the glory of the former house "; but beyond this it must be regarded as symbolic of the completeness, the symmetry, the mysterious greatness, of the inner spiritual life of Israel, of which the temple was always the visible shrine — through these shadowing out something of the outline of its perfection in the kingdom of the Messiah.

It will be sufficient here to indicate some of the leading points of this symbolism. The description of the Temple (cc. xl.-xliii.) preserves, in respect of the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies, the old literal dimensions and furniture of Solomon's Temple — in themselves adapted from those of the ancient Tabernacle — which had acquired a prescriptive sacredness. The position of the tribes of the future (cc. xlvii, xlviii.) retains similarly, though with much variation, something of the actual

order of the ancient settlement — only omitting the land on the eastern side of the Jordan, which had become heathenised, and so “ unclean.” Many of the details of the law and ritual of the Temple are drawn from the Levitical code; although here also with characteristic variations, which the actual restoration never dreamt of adopting. The image of the living waters flowing out from the Temple is clearly suggested by the actual stream of Siloam.

Like the vision of the New Jerusalem in the Apocalypse, but with infinitely more of closeness and minuteness of detail, the whole description takes as its basis the familiar reality of the ancient Temple, now laid in ruins. But through this, and often strangely interwoven with it, there shines the significance of a symbolic treatment. As in a dream, the ancient memories reproduce themselves in grander and more mysterious forms.

Thus — not to enter on the difficult question of the mystic significance of numbers, which holds so important a place in all the Apocalyptic visions of Holy Scripture — the prominence of symmetry, as indicative of perfection, impresses itself at once and forcibly on the mind. Like the Holy City of the Apocalypse, “all lies four square.” The Temple and its Courts form a square of 500 cubits; the Temple precincts a square of 3,000 cubits; the sacred territory of “ the Oblation,” assigned to the priests, the Levites, and the Holy City a square of 25,000 reeds (each of six cubits), or something over 40 miles.[1] The walls of the Temple (again like the city of the Apocalypse) are equal in breadth and height. The arrangement of the tribes sacrifices history to a general symmetry, of which it is difficult to trace the guiding principle. The portion (c. xlv.) of the prince (to which, so far as we know, there was no historical counterpart whatever) flanks the territory of Oblation equally on either side. Everywhere we have the same presentation of a symmetry — to modern thought perhaps somewhat artificial — as marking an ideal perfection, in contrast with the irregularities and the contradictory influences of earth.

Closely connected with this is the continual presentation of a completeness of law and order, developing to a higher perfection the elaborate organ-

[1] It will be seen at once how impossible is the literal adoption of these dimensions, and how utter their incompatibility with historical and geographical reality. isatlon ol the Levitical code itself. The detailed exactitude of the measurement of every dimension, the definition of every detail — all which to us seems prosaic and artificial — serve this purpose throughout as truly as even the purification from all pollution and unfaithfulness, with which (see c. xliii. 10-12) it is expressly connected. The “ law of the house “ is at once the safeguard against evil and the expression of higher resolution. The rigid exclusion of the aliens, “uncircumcised in heart and in flesh,-” from the service of the sanctuary — the careful organisation of the life and conduct of the priests — the exact regulations, in some points new, of the ritual and sacrifice, even to the order in which prince and people shall approach and leave the Temple — all embody the same idea. So, perhaps even more strikingly, the apportionment to the prince of a definite land of possession (flanking on either side the territory of the priests and Levites and the city), and of definite offerings from the people, and the laying upon him the duty of provision of the national sacrifices, are declared to be the Divine order of witness and provision against “the violence and spoil and the exactions” of the past, for the “execution^-’ in the future “of judgment and justice.^^ The assignment to the tribes in a new order of accurately-defined territories, stretching in parallel divisions from sea to sea, is another expression of the same idea. A perfect law, willingly and unerringly obeyed, is the image

of the perfect life of the Covenant. It is not, perhaps, our ideal; for the Gospel teaches us to substitute for it " the glorious liberty of the children of God,^' expressing itself in free and varied development of service, above and beyond law. But it is the true, although less perfect symbol of this Divine reality, in which the one will of God fulfils itself by many hands, and in many ways.

Again, in the description of the ritual of the Temple of the vision (xlv. 18 — xlvi. 16), it is difficult not to infer some symbolical meaning attaching to the variations, — surely conscious and deliberate, — from the order of the Levitical system. There is the appointment of a new dedicatory and propitiatory sacrifice for the Temple and for the errors of its worshippers, on the first day and the seventh day of the first month: there is a notice of tv/o of the great feasts, — the Passover of religious consecration, the Tabernacles of glad thanksgiving for temporal and national blessings; while of the Feast of Weeks, traditionally connected with the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and of the great sin-offering of the Day of Atonement, there is a singular omission. The regularly recurring sacrifices — the daily sacrifice, the sacrifices of the Sabbath and the new moon, — are noticed with especial stress, and invested with a fuller solemnity. The prominence given to " the prince " — in whom Rabbinical interpretation recognized the Messiah — and the absence of all mention of the High Priest, while they correspond strikingly with the record of Solomon's consecration, yet come out with marked significance in contrast with the later history. All things seem to suggest the conviction that the vision symbolically shadows forth a higher condition of the worship of the covenanted people, under a completed atonement and a fulfilled law, and in the unveiled presence of the King of Israel, — again reminding us, though in but faint and imperfect approximation to the full reality, of the vision of the Holy City and people of God in the Apocalypse of the New Testament. But of all the phases of this last vision of Ezekiel, the most obvious, and at the same time the highest, strain of symbolic meaning is found in the famous picture (c. xlvii.), which has its parallel in the Apocalyptic vision of the elder Zechariah (Zech. xiv. 8), of the living waters, a better Siloam, issuing out of the Sanctuary of God. The keynote of spiritual meaning is struck at once in the conception of the stream from under the Temple of God, as widening and deepening at once, while it flows on to bless and fertilise the world, — at the first thousand cubits " reaching to the ankles," at the next " to the knees," at the third " to the loins," at the last, " water to swim in, a river that could not be passed through." In the same higher symbolism the living waters are seen, mingling a diviner stream with the sacred Jordan, till the combined rivers flow on to the Dead Sea, — the sea of barrenness and lifelessness; and so " the waters are healed," and swarm with renewed life, the barrenness lingering only in the stagnant marshes outside their life-giving flow; and " on this side and on that, there grows every tree for meat, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail; it shall bring forth new fruit every month... and the fruit thereof shall be for meat and the leaf for healing" (comp. Revelation 22:2). What can describe more vividly the power of the stream of new life from the presence of God, mingling with the waters of the ancient covenant — deepening continually age after age, as the flow spreads over the world, till that vast flood becomes fathomless in its depth — pouring into the Dead Sea of a blighted and barren humanity the quickening power which makes it teem with fresh and manifold life, — flowing on to water a new Paradise, rich with supernatural fruits, at once the medicine of sin and the sustenance of an undying spirit? To the prophet's hearers the symbol must have come home, not only with a cheering promise of Israel's revival, but with a foreshadowing of the Messianic life. To us there breathe from it at once the spirit of thankfulness for the partial realisation of the promise in the new kingdom of Christ on earth, and the aspiration of a sure and certain hope for that fuller

realisation of His Kingdom in Heaven, which St. John saw in vision at Patmos.

Thus this last symbolic vision of the Temple brings home at least three spiritual ideas — the absolute perfection, the Divine Order, the inexhaustible and boundless life, of the true kingdom of God. In so many respects parallel to St. John's vision of the new Jerusalem, it has this marked and characteristic difference — that to the Jewish prophet-priest the Divine reality could be symbolised only in a new and grander temple; on the Apostle there dawned the higher conception, "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof."

These two great symbolic visions, in two very different styles, yield the highest exemplification of this form of teaching. Both have brought home their spiritual lessons, and have stamped them ineffaceably on the religious thought and imagination of the future.

IV. In the next series of the symbolic visions — the famous visions of the book of Daniel — we enter upon a wholly different region. The visions are not perhaps of higher grandeur than those of Ezekiel, but they are of larger scope. They pass beyond the history of Israel, and the future of the religious life and worship of the Temple, to shadow forth, in their higher phases, the grandeur of successive world-wide empires, and the diviner majesty of a universal Kingdom of God. In this respect it is obvious that they are strongly characteristic of the era, at which the national life of Israel was for a time absorbed in the universal Empire of Babylon; hardly less characteristic of the mind of the man, who, as the chosen councillor of Nebuchadnezzar and of Darius the Mede, was brought close to the centre of this imperial power, and in some degree was commissioned to wield it. That they, more distinctly even than the visions of Ezekiel, borrow their very imagery from the colossal figures of the palaces and temples before the eyes of the prophet, must be clear to any one who contemplates even those relics of Babylonian magnificence which time has left us. Grand as they are, they are not so much mysterious in the true sense of the word as obscure in some points of their application. In each case, as before, the meaning of the vision is explained, by Daniel himself to the king, or by an angel's voice to the prophet. But in the case of two visions evidently referring to the same reality, the explanation still leaves much difficulty, and so admits of much variety of historical interpretation. Of the four symbolic visions of the book of Daniel, two are dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, interpreted by the prophet; two are visions revealed to the prophet himself, for which he has to seek interpretation from heaven. Of these, however, it is tolerably clear that the dream of the Image and the vision of the four beasts refer to the same reality, and so must be considered in connexion and as mutually interpreting each other. The dream of the image — one of the colossal figures, seated in an impassive majesty, with which we are now familiar, and of which probably the golden image of c. iii. was only a splendid specimen — presents in itself but little difficulty. All the points of the description, — the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the feet mingled of iron and clay, — are in themselves perfectly clear, and receive a simple explanation as successive exhibitions of world-wide empire, which to the king seem naturally to diminish in preciousness and beauty. The " stone cut out without hands " stands out in plain contrast, not of degree, but of kind, with the merely artificial splendour, which it destroys "like the chaff of the summer threshing floors," and supersedes by a higher power, unique alike in its imperishable strength and its " filling of the whole earth "; and the interpretation of it, as of a kingdom, unlike all kingdoms of men — a true kingdom of heaven, universal on earth — is natural and obvious. Were it not for inevitable comparison with the vision of the Four Beasts, that which is called "the traditional interpretation," handed down from Christian antiquity, would

establish itself inevitably, as the only adequate interpretation, by its accordance with the broad, unquestioned facts of history; except, of course, in the minds of those who deny any supernatural reality of prophetic foresight, and who therefore, according to the date which they assign to the book, regulate the interpretation of what is to them simply a fulfilled history, claiming falsely and dishonestly to be prophetic prediction. As a matter of fact, there have been but four great Empires which could even claim universal sway over the civilised world of various ages — the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian which superseded it, the Greek Empire of Alexander, “having rule over the whole earth,” and the iron empire of Rome, which was undoubtedly in a special sense a destroying and pulverising force against all existing nationalities, and which in the very hour of its world-wide triumph began to indicate a mingled strength and weakness, and to verge to its long “ Decline and Fall.” Nor is it less the plain fact that in the days of the Fourth Empire there arose the new “ Kingdom of heaven,” unlike all other kingdoms in its origin and character; and this kingdom it was which (as the strongest and wisest Roman Emperors clearly saw) by its very nature could not but supersede, and, as to form, destroy the Empire itself and the civilisations which it inherited. It is plain also that it claims, and has hitherto fulfilled its claim, to be a kingdom “which shall never be destroyed,” but “ shall stand fast for ever.” Evidently the ancient interpretation, and it alone, accords with the symbolism of the vision, and with the actual facts of history.

But, it is all but impossible to disconnect this dream from the fuller and more vivid vision of the Four Beasts subsequently manifested to the prophet (c. vii.), or with its corresponding picture of Four successive Empires, and of the universal kingdom of the “ Son of Man.” In this vision the Empires present themselves not as part of one great continuity, but as successive and antagonistic powers, — not as differing merely in dead material, but as having each its characteristic form of living energy. The lion with eagle’s wings — the favourite emblem of Babylonian royalty — is here exalted into the higher attributes of humanity, as Nebuchadnezzar was changed by the knowledge of the true God. The bear not unfairly represents the fierceness and massive strength of the Persian conquest. The leopard with its four wings and four heads is the fit emblem of the more agile and graceful strength of the Greek Empire, with its four resulting monarchies. In the beast, unnamed because unnaturally strong and terrible, ruthless in its utter destructiveness of conquest, diverse from all others in its strength and permanence, it is impossible not to acknowledge the very image of the iron Empire of Rome. Nor can we fail to identify the spiritual kingdom of “ the stone cut out without hands,” with the sublime description of the Son of Man, brought near to the unspeakable and all-subduing glory of “ the Ancient of Days,” to be invested with dominion and glory and a kingdom, “ in which all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him,” “a dominion which is an everlasting dominion, and a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” Thus — only with infinitely greater force and beauty, — the revelation moves along the same lines, and the same interpretation must for the same reasons justify itself But there comes in here an apparently disturbing element, on the strength of which the old explanation is set aside, and the far less striking and convincing application to the Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek Empires adopted, by high authority. In vv. 7, 8, the Fourth Empire divides itself into the ten horns of ten kingdoms; and among these comes up a “ little horn, before whom there were three horns plucked up by the roots, and behold in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking proud things,” and the interpretation describes it as one “ diverse from the other kings “ (or kingdom), who “ shall speak words against the Most High, and wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change, times and laws,” until the appointed

hour of his judgment and destruction shall come. Now in c. viii. 9, from among the four horns of what is undoubtedly the Greek Empire, there comes forth “ a little horn, which waxes exceeding great, towards the south, and towards the east, and towards the glorious land,” “magnifying itself, even against the prince of the host,” taking away the daily sacrifice, and casting down the sanctuary. It is assumed, in spite of not inconsiderable variety of detail, that the two must be identified, and that, therefore, the Fourth Empire must be the Greek and not the Roman. The identification is tempting, but not irresistible; especially when we note that in a passage of the Apocalypse, evidently looking back to this (Revelation 13:1-10), the beast with ten horns (uniting the characteristics of bear and leopard and lion) is clearly Roman in meaning, and has one horn, which, like the “ little horn “ of this vision, is a blaspheming and persecuting power. May not the “ little horn “ be simply the natural description of a power, growing from small beginnings to an inflated audacity of vaunt and blasphemy? If so, the “ little horns “ of the two visions may well be not identical, but similar, manifestations of a proud, ungodly power, striving against the kingdom of God, and drawing down upon itself a righteous destruction.

Certainly the identification of the two can hardly be so certain, as to prevail decisively against the otherwise all but irresistible strength of the old interpretation of the whole vision, and force us to substitute another, weaker and poorer in itself, and beset with many difficulties of application. In the grandeur of those two parallel revelations, we may still fairly trace a comprehensive view of the whole future course of the world’s history, in its preparation, conscious or unconscious, for the eternal kingdom of Christ. The next symbolic vision, recorded in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar (c. iv.), while it is elaborate and full of beauty, presents no difficulty of interpretation. In itself the great tree of the dream is but a visible representation of one of the allegories of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 31:3-16), there referring to the great Assyrian monarchy in its pride and its fall. But the doom of “ the Watcher, the Holy One,”— a title borrowed by the king from the Babylonian mythology, and in Daniel’s interpretation made simply to represent the instrument of “ a decree of the Most High,” — bidding that the tree be cut down, and the stump left with a band of brass and iron, till seven times pass over it, is peculiar to the vision, and suits well with the special revelations of angelic ministration running through the whole of this book. The application of the vision — sadly but solemnly uttered by Daniel, not without vain warning to the king to avert or defer the doom by turning to righteousness and mercy — stands out with perfect clearness; and the narrative of its fulfilment in the sudden madness falling on the king in the hour of his greatest pride, while it is inexpressibly solemn, yet breathes the plainest simplicity of fact. It has become, in the truest sense, an acted parable, — a very proverb of pride abased, and humbled before “ the Most High, who liveth for ever and ever,” to whom “ all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing,” and “ all whose works are truth and his ways judgment.”

Hardly more difficult of interpretation is the last symbolic vision of “ the ram and the he-goat,” differing from that of the Four Beasts, which precedes it, in referring, not to the great world-wide revelation, but to the other subject, smaller and more closely connected with Israel, which alternates with it throughout the book. It is accordingly (so to speak) narrower and more prosaic in itself, and explained in all its details. In the slower and more deliberate conquest of the two-horned ram of the Medo-Persic Empire, — in the sudden swoop, “touching not the ground,” of the Grecian victory, before which the huge Persian Empire so rapidly collapsed, — the symbol corresponds in every point with the explanation. In the “ little horn “ growing out of one of the four horns of

Alexander's divided empire, to wax great against the stars of heaven and the sanctuary of the Lord, it would be obvious, even without the interpretation of verses 23-25, to recognize the reckless and cruel Antiochus Epiphanes, " the king of fierce countenance and understanding dark sentences," in his virulent persecution of Israel, " destroying the mighty men and the holy people," and in his singular overthrow, "broken without hand," by what seemed a hopeless resistance. The vision has evidently suggested some portions of the Apocalypse — the persecution of Antiochus being taken as typical of ungodly and anti-Christian power — but of its splendid primary meaning there is no shadow of doubt or obscurity. The splendid story of the heroic Maccabean struggle and victory is the best comment upon it.

IV. From these grand visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, we go back to a narrower and humbler strain in the numerous symbolic visions of Zechariah, the son of Iddo. They occupy the larger portion of what is believed to be the true book of the post-exilian prophet; [1] and are all directed to the one main purpose of his prophecy — the encouragement of the restored exiles, under their evident weakness and timidity, by the sense of God's presence with them, and by the promise of renewed national life in His covenant.

Zechariah 1:8-18. — "I saw in the night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him there were horses, red, sorrel, and white. Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be. And the man that stood among the myrtle trees, answered and said. These are they whom the Lord hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth. And they answered the angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle trees, and said. We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on

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[1] It is almost impossible not to trace in the later chapters (cc. ix.-xiv.) the work of at least one other and earlier hand.

Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words, eve7i comfortable words. So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. And I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction.

Therefore thus saith the Lord: I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem. Cry yet again, saying. Thus saith the Lord of hosts: My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem." This first vision is not so much significant in itself, as introductory of distinct promise. In it are seen a man on a red horse, " the angel of the Lord," and the horses behind him red, sorrel, and white, messengers " of the Lord " sent to walk to and fro on the earth. In the vision itself there is no further symbolism; but it is made to lead on to an intercession of the angel for Israel, and a declaration from the Lord of displeasure against the

carelessness of heathen triumph over His people, and of promise to them of His renewed Presence, full of prosperity and comfort to their past sorrow.

Zechariah 1:18-21. — “And I lifted up mine eyes and saw, and behold four horns. And I said unto the angel that talked with me, What be these? And he answered me. These are the horns which scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. And the Lord shewed me four smiths. Then said I, What come these to do 1 And he spake, saying. These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man did lift up his head: but these are come to fray them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.” The next vision tells its own story. It is simple and homely enough, — a vision of four horns of heathen power to vex Israel on every side, and of four smiths, messengers of the Lord, to fray and foil them.

Zechariah 2:1-6. — “And I lifted up mine eyes and saw, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me. To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein. For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her. Ho, ho, flee from the land of the north, saith the Lord: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the Lord.” Of the third vision, as of the first, the real force lies in the promise of which it is made the occasion. The vision itself is but of an angel, as in Ezekiel’s vision, going out to measure the city of the Lord. But his hand, it would seem, is arrested. The promise is given that Jerusalem shall spread, unwalled and free, to include multitudes, and that the Lord Himself shall be as a wall of fire around her; and it is followed by a full burst of supreme grace and blessing. “ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Sion: for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.” The scene of the next two visions, of wholly different character, is laid in the Temple.

Zechariah 3:1-10. — “And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; yea, the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying. Take the filthy garments from off him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with rich apparel. And I said. Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments and the angel of the Lord stood by. And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou also shalt judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will g\v(t thee a place of access among these that stand by.

Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou and thy fellows that sit before thee; for they are men which are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the Branch. For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; upon one stone are seven eyes, behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of Hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.” In this first vision Joshua, the high priest, is seen standing before the Lord, with the Accuser

(Satan) at his right hand, and in the filthy garments of shame. The Accuser is silenced by the Lord; the accused rescued ’’as a brand out of the fire”; the filthy garments changed for rich apparel and the mitre of dignity. The vision may involve some definite historical allusion. But its general symbolism is clear.

Joshua (Jesus, “the Lord the Saviour”), the great high priest of the Restoration, is the representative of “ the royal priesthood, the holy people,” as redeemed to the covenant of the Lord. The vision tells of him and them forgiven and clothed in dignity, and of the stone of the Temple, with the seven eyes of the Lord upon it, laid as a sure foundation. But the prophecy which applies it goes on beyond this immediate blessing to dwell on my “ servant the BRANCH, “ the true Divine Saviour, of whom Joshua is but a type.[1]

Zechariah 4:1-14. — “ And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have seen, and behold, a candlestick all of gold, with its bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; there are seven pipes to each of the lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof And I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be } And I said. No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying. This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings of Grace,

[1] The sense of the vision is illustrated by the symbolic act of chap. vi. 9-15,— the placing the crowns of silver and gold on the head of Joshua,— expressly is representing “ my servant the BRANCH,” who shall unite the throne of the ruler and the throne of the priest. grace, unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things t for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, even these seven, which are the eyes of the Lord; they run to and fro through the whole earth. Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered the second time, and said unto him. What be these two olive branches, which are beside the two golden spouts, that empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two sons of oil, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” In the second vision is seen the well-known great golden candlestick, with its seven lamps, but with two living olive trees, shedding oil into it on either side. In the candlestick is symbolized the light of Israel’s life; in the two olive trees, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two associated ministers of that life to Israel. But as the former vision brought out the exaltation of Joshua, so this latter vision emphasizes almost entirely the Divine blessing on the royalty of Zerubbabel, the ancestor and the type of the true Son of David. The plummet, with the seven eyes of the Lord upon it, is here in his hand. The blessing, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,” given to him, is in its fulness the characteristic blessing of the kingdom of Christ.

Zechariah 5:1-11. — “ Then again I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then said he unto me. This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole land: for every one that stealeth shall be purged out on the one side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be purged out on the other side according to it. I will cause it to go forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall abide in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof

“Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. And I said, What is it? And he said, This is the ephah that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance in all the land, (and behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead:) and this is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. And he said. This is Wickedness; and he cast her down into the midst of the ephah: and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, there came forth two women, and the wind was in their wings; now they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? And he said unto me. To build her an house in the land of Shinar, and when it is prepared, she shall be set there In her own place.”

Again the next two visions, somewhat obscurer in their symbolism, are linked together. A huge “flying roll” appears — written, no doubt, with lamentation and woe — and is interpreted to be the righteous curse of the Lord sweeping over the earth, and falling on the thief and the false swearer, to destroy them and their houses. An ephah with leaden lid is next seen, and placed in it a female form, the impersonation of wickedness, to be borne away by angelic messengers to the land of Shinar, its own congenial and appointed place. The meaning is perhaps less plain; but it seems to shadow forth the power of evil, punished In its exhibitions by God’s judgment, and in its root taken away from Israel by his gracious will.

Zechariah 6:1-9. — “ And again I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and behold, there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. In the first chariot were red horses; and in the second chariot black horses; and in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot grisled bay horses. Then I answered and said unto the angel that talked with me, what are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four winds of heaven, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. The chariot wherein are the black horses goeth forth toward the north country; and the white went forth after them; and the grisled went forth toward the south country. And the bay went forth, and sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth: and he said, Get you hence, walk to and fro through the earth. So they walked to and fro through the earth. Then cried he upon me, and spake unto me, saying. Behold, they that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit in the north country.” The last vision is the most difficult of all. In it four chariots come out from two mountains of brass drawn by red, white, black, and grisled bay horses. The black go to the north, and the white after them; the grisled to the south; and the bay are sent to walk to and fro on the earth. The four chariots are in some way identified with the four winds of heaven; and those who go towards the north are said to have “ quieted or satisfied the spirit of the Lord in the north country.” No key to the vision is given beyond this. The meaning remains obscure, except that we may see in these

chariots the messengers of God's judgment over the north (Babylon?), and the south (Egypt?), and over the length and breadth of the heathen world; and that thus the vision harmonizes with the general purpose of the whole book. The remnant of the chosen people, restored to their old land, yet stood there shorn of their old strength and glory, beset with enemies, and utterly prostrate under the great heathen Empire of Persia. They needed to see the arm of the Lord stretched out in protection for them, in judgment on their oppressors. It is precisely this which in various forms is symbolized in the visions of Zechariah. While they fall far short of the mystery and grandeur of the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, they equally meet the needs, and fulfil the purposes, of their time.

These symbolic visions, indeed, form a peculiar section of the subject, and, deeply interesting as they are, they embody but imperfectly the parabolic idea. They are like the parable in conveying spiritual truths through visible symbols, and like it, therefore, in their laying hold of minds, which mere abstract teaching might fail to reach. But they do not appear to bring out with clearness and completeness that idea on which the true parable rests, — the principle of an analogy running through all workings of the Providence of God, in virtue of which the lower and simpler forms of its manifestation, real in themselves, yet suggest and illustrate higher realities.

07. Chapter 7

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER VII. THE PARABLE AS PROVERB. The relation of the proverb to the idea of the parable. — The conception of the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God: — I. The poetical introduction to the Book of Proverbs, — the praise of the Divine Wisdom, and the personification of that Wisdom. The relation of this personification to the doctrine of the WORD; the connexion of the proverb with psalm and prophecy. II. The chief body of the Book as a collection of proverbs: their various classes — (a) proverbs of prudence, ip) proverbs of morality, {c) proverbs of religion. III. The proverbs of Job and Ecclesiastes. THE proverb, in contrast with other phases of parabolic teaching, may be considered as an implicit or undeveloped parable. It is constantly designated by the name of Parable {Maskal) in the Old Testament; and it has been already noted that the same connexion is occasionally marked in the New Testament also. For we find in Luke 4:23, that the proverb, “ Physician heal thyself,” is in the original cited as a “ parable”; and, on the other hand, in John 16:25, John 16:29, our Lord, contrasting His previous teaching, so often veiled in parable, with the fuller revelation promised in the future, describes it as a “ speaking in proverbs.” The reason of this connexion, as has been already explained, is, first, that the proverb frequently expresses, and still more frequently implies, metaphorical comparison and suggestion of general rule through individual examples, and, therefore, contains in implicit form what might easily be unfolded into the true parable; and next, that it almost invariably preserves the antithetical form, in which, either for comparison or for contrast, “one thing is set over against another.”

It may be added that it manifestly subserves two great practical objects of teaching by parables. On the one hand, it is by its very nature popular; its vivid and picturesque presentation of truth arrests the attention and kindles the imagination of the people at large. On the other hand, it is eminently suggestive of further thought; and therefore acts as a touchstone of distinction between the thinking and the unthinking. This proverbial class of parables is the most fully represented of all in the Old Testament. To say nothing of occasional specimens presenting themselves elsewhere (as in 1 Samuel 10:12; Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2), it forms the whole substance of the Book of Proverbs. It is occasionally exemplified in the Psalms, frequently in the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes. In the Book of Proverbs as a whole it should be mainly studied, and it will be evident on careful examination that we have presented to us in the poetical opening (cc. 1:-ix.), and in the more prosaic body of the book, two very different forms of this proverbial teaching. In their leading characteristic both are alike; for the key-note of both is struck in the first verses of the book, the desire “ to know wisdom and instruction, to discern the words of understanding.” But what, in the Scriptural sense of the word, is that wisdom, which, as Solomon’s dream implies, is God’s choicest gift, and which is the link between His special revelation to the prophets of Israel, and His general enlightenment of man as man “i It may be observed that “ wisdom,” as is seen in the crucial instance of the Wise Man himself 1 Kings 4:29), is expressly distinguished from ’’understanding,”

under which may be classed all intellectual gifts, and from the “ largeness of heart,” expanding into knowledge, manifold “ as the sand on the sea-shore.” Both understanding and knowledge subserve wisdom; neither is identical nor coextensive with it. The true idea of wisdom is singularly striking and profound.

Wisdom in man may be briefly described as the knowledge of the true work and purpose of life, for which God has sent him into the world. Wisdom in God, considered in the abstract, is the great purpose of His dispensation — the “ First Law Eternal “ (as Hooker expresses it) “ which God hath set down with Himself to do all things by.” But — in accordance not more with the true religion which sees all things ill God, than with the comprehensive philosophy which recognizes that the individual can be understood only in relation to the totality of the whole — Holy Scripture goes on to teach that this wisdom of man (this discovery, that is, of the true object of his life) is possible only through a knowledge, real but imperfect, of the higher wisdom of God, and a resolution to subordinate his will to it by endeavouring to be in it “ a fellow worker with God.”

It is of course clear that such knowledge can be but partial; that, if it is in part the result of deep and reverent thought, it must be, in still greater measure, the fruit of faith in God’s revelation of Himself; and, accordingly, that the action following upon it is at once the expression and the education of such faith.

Hence the ever-recurring declaration that “ the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”; the warning, “ Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding “; the acknowledgment that “the Lord alone giveth wisdom.”

Connected also with this same temper of faith and reverence is the frequent exhortation to respect the teaching of the father and the mother, as being God’s representatives and messengers to the child, who have some shadow of His authority, and have by long service entered more fully into His mind. The whole tone of the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, shrewd and vigorous as it is, is yet sober and reverent, grave even to the verge of sadness, and pervaded at once by a sense of mystery and a firm spirit of faith. It implies, moreover, that sense of the harmony of the higher actions of men, guided by God’s law, with the action of God Himself, which lies at the root of the parable as such. But it would appear that, of the two forms of this •^ proverbial “ teaching, the former tends mainly and continually to the contemplation and adoration of the Wisdom of God; while the latter is chiefly conversant with the embodiment in the form of maxim of the wisdom of man, viewed as in accordance with the higher Wisdom. At times they, naturally enough, melt into each other.

I. For the former element in the Book of Proverbs we look to cc. 1:-ix, which, although they contain some scattered examples of proverbs of the ordinary type, consist almost entirely of earnest exhortations to the love of wisdom, or lofty utterances of the personified Wisdom of God. These are couched, indeed, in language of strongly-marked antithetical character; but, even in this respect, they resemble more the antitheses of the Psalm than of the ordinary proverb, and in general style they are flowing and continuous, often glowing with high rhetorical and poetical beauty. Hence, although called by the name of “ Proverbs,” they rather approach, both in their metaphorical style and the frequent introduction of personification, to the parable in the form of allegory...

Such, for example, is that solemn and terrible utterance of the Divine Wisdom, speaking in tones of personal pleading and judgment, which closes the first chapter (Proverbs 1:20-33) '- —

“ Wisdom crieth aloud in the street; she uttereth her voice in the broad places; she crieth in the chief place of concourse; at the entering in of the gates, in the city she uttereth her words: “ How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorners delight them in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

“ Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh in the day of your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as a storm, and your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me diligently, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge; and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof

“Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them. And the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil.”

Such, again, is the almost impassioned proclamation of the infinite preciousness of wisdom, — of its glory as a Divine attribute, of its manifold fruits to man of peace and blessing, and of its natural rest in the Lord.

Proverbs 3:13-27. — “ Happy is the man that flndeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and none of the things thou canst desire are to be compared unto her.

Length of days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths were broken up, and the skies drop down the dew. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes, keep sound wisdom and discretion; so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh, for the Lord shall be thy confidence. And shall keep thy foot from being taken. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.”

Hardly inferior in force and beauty are the pleadings of parental wisdom and love with youth: — “ My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.” Everywhere it is implied that the reverence claimed is for God’s Word spoken by them. “If thou wilt receive my words, then thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” Above all, the intention is moral; the warning to youthful inexperience against the snares of the world and the flesh is the burden of the whole strain; and occasionally (as in Proverbs 7:6-23) it enforces itself by a graphic picture, almost approaching the explicit form of parable. But the grandest example of all

is the celebrated personification in the eighth chapter of the “ Wisdom of God,” ending with that splendid passage, in which (as afterwards wrought out in the Apocryphal books and by the school of Philo) we trace the anticipation of the doctrine of the “ Word of God,” destined hereafter to afford the fullest expression of the Christian mystery.

Proverbs 8:22-32. — “ The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: when he set a circle upon the face of the deep: when he made firm the skies above: when the fountains of the deep became strong: when he gave to the sea its bound, that the waters should not transgress his commandment: when he marked out the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as a master workman, and I was daily his delight. Rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in his habitable earth; and my delight was with the sons of men. Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me: for blessed are they that keep my ways.” Nor is this kind of proverb confined to the Book of Proverbs itself. We find a magnificent specimen of it in the Book of Job. The twenty-eighth chapter, occurring as a splendid digression from the general tenour of Job’s “parable,” dwells in its opening on the wonderful skill and daring of man, piercing the very bowels of the earth and forcing it to yield up its treasures. But the discovery of wisdom is beyond even that marvellous power.

Job 28:13-28. — “Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living-. The deep saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it: neither shall the exchange thereof be jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal: yea, the price of wisdom is above rubies The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom } and where is the place of understanding?

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and Death say, We have heard a rumour thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make a weight for the wind; yea, he meteth out the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then did he see it, and declare it: he established it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” The keynote of the whole passage is precisely the same as in the passage already quoted from the Book of Proverbs. Wisdom is precious beyond all preciousness; in nature, in organic life, in man, there is no power to reveal it. But it is the inner law of the creative Providence of God; and in the study and thoughtful acceptance of that law is the only glimpse of it which is given to man.

Similarly the closing “ parable “ of the Book of Ecclesiastes brings out the same idea, with a force, perhaps, emphasised by the contrast of the whole tone of that most modern book with the ancient simplicity and grandeur of the Book of Job. After the picture of a soul’s tragedy of varied

experience of “ vanity “ — after doubts and questionings, bewildered with the perplexities of life — the writer comes back to the simplicity of the old teaching, which he had learned as a child, and, as a man, had too long forgotten.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10;Ecclesiastes 12:1,Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. — “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for youth and the prime of life are vanity.” “ Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” “ This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

It may be added, that it is this element of the Scriptural Books which has evidently supplied the main conception of the Apocryphal Book of “ Wisdom “ acting on the mystical and allegorical genius of the Alexandrine school, to produce results, sometimes grand and beautiful, sometimes artificial and fantastic. This class of the parables of the Old Testament is one of singular interest and beauty. In respect of actual revelation, its chief importance lies in that representation of the personified “ Wisdom of God,”which combined with the plainer and stronger line of the Messianic promise to prepare the way for the manifestation of the Incarnate Son of God Himself In that preparation the two elements are complementary and corrective to each other. The picture of the Messiah, gradually drawn, touch by touch, in the prophecies of the Old Testament, is the picture of a true Son of Man— the seed of Abraham, the “ Shiloh “ of Judah, the Prophet of prophets, the Son of David— on whom are gradually accumulated attributes too great for man, and in whom, therefore, we come by degrees to see an Immanuel, “God with us.” The teaching here starts from the side of His humanity, and rises to a gradual conception of His Godhead. In the loftier and vaguer revelation •of the “ Wisdom of God “ it is far otherwise. It starts emphatically from God, of whom the “ Wisdom “ is always the manifestation — as in the creation, so in the government of the world — as in the outward sphere of man’s life, so in the inner sphere of his thought and devotion. But what is gradually unfolded here is the truth of distinct personality in the revealed “Wisdom of God,” thus manifested upon earth; which, through the imperfect manifestations of God in and to humanity, continually tends, although it never fully attains, to the conception of a full manifestation in a perfect Son of Man. Of these two forms of teaching, the former had certainly the chief power over the multitude; and we know how they were content to find in it, taken alone, the promise of a comparatively finite and earthly royalty, appropriate rather to the “Son of David” than to “David’s Lord.” The latter, perhaps, hardly extended far beyond the thoughtful precincts of the schools; and there (as in the case of Philo), after harmonizing itself with Platonic theories of a Logos, it halted between the notion of a mere abstract personification, and the belief in a true personal incarnation of God. But the combination of the two was necessary to prepare for that final and absolute revelation of Him, as at once “ the only begotten Son of the Father “ and the “ Word of God,” which speaks to all time from the inspired Prologue to the Gospel according to St. John.

Even independently of this profounder doctrinal significance, this form of the parable is singularly interesting, as constituting an intermediate link between the Sapiential or philosophical books of the Old Testament (of which the Book of Proverbs is the purest specimen), and the writings of the

Psalmists and the Prophets. It unites the inquiring and contemplative thoughtfulness of the former with the enthusiastic spiritual vision or aspiration of the latter. It still, indeed, preserves the supremacy of the enlightened understanding, conscious of itself even in its adoration of God; yet it harmonizes it with high moral purpose, and inspires it with the enthusiasm of devotion.

Whether, as in the passage quoted from the Book of Ecclesiastes, it embodies the final experience of a soul, worn and weary in the vain search after happiness, in itself and as apart from God, or, as in the opening of the Book of Proverbs, grasps from the beginning that knowledge of the purpose of life which “the Preacher” had thus vainly sought for — in either case it appeals to the soul, in which contemplation or inquiry rules, without unduly subordinating, the moral and spiritual elements of human nature. It expresses the presence of that faith which especially overflows “ unto knowledge,” but which, nevertheless, by its very nature, is “ made perfect by works” of action, and by the “ love” of devotion. In this aspect it presents a form of teaching almost unique in the Old Testament, although approached in the more contemplative passages of the psalm and prophecy: and so supplies one element of that completeness of variety and adaptation to all needs, which makes Holy Scripture a literature in itself Perhaps it may be thought in this to speak with especial force to an age of inquiry and speculation, such as our own.

II. This higher and more poetical element of the book serves as a grand introduction to the series of “proverbs “ of the more ordinary type, to which the greater part of the whole (chaps, 10-29.) is given up. We find here two collections of the “ Proverbs of Solomon,” of which the one comprises chaps, 10-24. and the latter (noted as having been “ copied -out by the men of Hezekiah”) chaps, 25-29.; with two appended chapters, each complete in itself, of the wisdom of Agur and “ King Lemuel.”[1] These ----------

[1] It is doubtful whether these are not symbolical names, Agur (according to St Jerome) is simply “ Collector “ (of proceeds), “ Lemuel “ is “ God’s own.” From whatever hand they •came, these two appendices of the book have each a peculiar stamp of its own. “The words of Agur” are marked by an ingenious and somewhat artificial grouping together of “ two things to be desired,” “three things which be wonderful,” “four things which the earth cannot bear,” and the like; and are full of a thoughtful reflectiveness, which rises to its highest exemplification of well-balanced wisdom in the celebrated prayer, “ Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with the food that is needful for me: lest I be full and deny Thee, or lest I be poor and steal.” The words of King Lemuel — “ the oracle which his mother taught him “ — after warning against lust and drunkenness and negligence of high duty, are almost entirely devoted to the famous description of the are “ proverbs,” commonly so called. They often preserve the original idea of the parable in strong; metaphorical form, or in comparisons drawn for man’s guidance from the animal world. Thus, “ A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters. As clouds and wind without rain, so is he that boasteth himself of his gifts falsely.” “ There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise, the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the lizard taketh hold with her hands, yet is she in kings* palaces. There be three things which are stately in their march, yea, four which are stately in going: the lion, which is mightiest among beasts, and

turneth not away for any; the greyhound; the he goat also; and the king, against whom there is na rising up” (Proverbs 25:11-14; Proverbs 30:24-31).

“ virtuous woman,” “ whose price is above rubies,” and “ whose children rise up and call her blessed,” — a Mashal, acrostic and artificial in form, but of singular fulness of thought and beauty. But more frequently this peculiarity is lost, and they become simply short, pungent, antithetical expressions, of “ the wisdom of many,” crystallised into hardness and brilliancy by “ the wit of one.” They are so far like the former class of proverbs, that they also claim to be the expressions of the true wisdom, cast into that mould of maxim or sententious saying so familiar to us in all ancient teaching, especially to the teaching of the East, — so appropriate to a time when knowledge had to be committed to memory, in forms best calculated to engrave themselves on the mind. It maybe remarked that, as the former element supplied the inspiration of the Alexandrine book of “ Wisdom,” so this latter element is worked out in the simpler and more prosaic teaching of the Palestinian book of “ Ecclesiasticus.”

It would be out of place here to enter upon any general examination of the force and weakness, the capacities and limitations, of the teaching of Proverbs generally.[1] It obviously contains truth only so far as It can be put into terse clearness and definiteness of form; It appeals, indeed, especially to the common sense of humanity, although it is tinged with the special colouring of age, and race, and country, and accordingly gives large, perhaps disproportionate, prominence to the homelier and more prudential aspects of life; it must be trenchant and [1] See on this subject Trench’s “Study of Proverbs.” decisive; and has to purchase these qualities by some narrowness and one-sidedness of teaching. All these peculiarities belong to proverbs as such, and attach accordingly, in some degree, even to the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament; but (as we shall see) its main characteristic tends to raise it continually above them. Nor would it be possible to examine even the Scriptural proverbs in detail. They have proved themselves an almost inexhaustible treasure for thought and speculation; they have accordingly been dwelt upon again and again, and have in many cases become household words. It will be sufficient here to glance at their general characteristics, and to indicate the classes into which they naturally fall. Their general scope is practical — teaching, directly or indirectly, what true wisdom bids a man do or abstain from doing. There are, indeed, proverbs which in themselves wear the aspect of what may be called “ proverbs of reflection,” — thoughtful speculations, unveiling the chief principles of human nature and life. Such (to take but a few instances) are the well-known maxims, “ The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy “ (Proverbs 14:10); “ Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12); “ Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness” (Proverbs 14:13); “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility “(Proverbs 18:12); “ A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food “(Proverbs 28:3); “ There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty” (Proverbs 11:24). Even these, it may be remarked, have indirectly a practical purpose. They aim at teaching a man to know his own heart and the hearts of others, that he may refuse the evil in both, and choose the good. But the proverbs in general are even more plainly and directly practical; they bear directly on the embodiment of wisdom in action; and we may discern in them three main varieties, corresponding to different views of the true

purpose of human life, as the service of self, of humanity, and of God.

{a) Thus we have in great abundance “ proverbs of prudence,” looking on the end of human life simply as it concerns a man’s own self — as being, in fact, identical with his own happiness and perfection.

Some of these proverbs may perhaps startle us (especially in contrast with the self-denial of the Gospel) by their apparently shrewd and worldly wisdom, careless, as it seems, of all interests but our own. Such proverbs, for example, are the following: — “ He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; and he that hateth suretyship is sure “(Proverbs 11:15); “The merciful man docth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh “(Proverbs 11:17); “A gift ill secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath” (Proverbs 21:14); “A fool’s wrath is presently known: but a prudent man concealeth shame” (Proverbs 12:16); “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding” (Proverbs 17:28).

Many, again, deal with the homelier virtues of patience, industry, caution, thrift, honesty, simply upon the prudential ground of their “best policy,” either as actually advancing external prosperity, or as securing happiness and contentment. “A soft answer turnethaway wrath: but grievous words stir up anger “(Proverbs 15:1); “ The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before there be quarrelling” (Proverbs 17:14); ’’ The slothful will not plow by reason of the winter; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing “ (Proverbs 20:4); “ Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be filled with bread “ (Proverbs 20:13).

Perhaps the most striking of these are the two following descriptions (graphic, and having a touch of satire) the one of the folly of drunkenness and the other of the ruinousness of sloth. Proverbs 23:29-35;

Proverbs 24:30-34. — “Who hath Woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions t who hath complaining t who hath wounds without cause.” who hath redness of eyes } They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek out mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it goeth down smoothly, at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange things, and thine heart shall utter froward things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of the mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not hurt; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake t I will seek it yet again.” “ I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

Then I beheld and considered well: I saw and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as a robber; and thy want as an armed man.”

Some, although they admit of a higher interpretation, yet at first sight seem to urge even virtue to see fellow-men on purely selfish grounds.

Proverbs 25:21-22; Proverbs 24:17-18. — “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.” “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he is overthrown, lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and he turn away His wrath from him.”

Others, again, are simply maxims of shrewd understanding of the more worldly aspects of life. “ It is nought, it is nought, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth “ (Proverbs 20:14); “ Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit “ (Proverbs 26:4, Proverbs 26:6).

Some show a similar shrewdness of insight into human nature, as such. “ A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city” (Proverbs 18:19); “He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother “ (Proverbs 18:24); “ As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith. Am not I in sport”? (Proverbs 26:18-19). In various forms these are all the utterances of a prudence, — grave, cautious, sometimes half-cynical, conscious, and even tolerant, of the lower elements of human nature, pursuing its own course, with little thought for good or evil of others, to its appointed end. Such proverbs are naturally, perhaps necessarily, prominent in the proverbial philosophy of the world generally. They have their place accordingly, although it is the lowest place, in the comprehensiveness of Holy Scripture, which depicts and appeals to human nature in all its parts. But it is only in the Book of Proverbs that they emerge into anything like prominence. Even at the best their tone, being merely prudential, seeking virtue rather for the sake of happiness than for its own sake, fails to rise to the full height of Scriptural morality. It belongs to the lower stages of the spiritual life. It has its chief value as showing that, even judged by the standard of unenthusiastic common sense, it will profit a man to have lost the whole world, if he gain his own soul; and it may carry the mind accordingly over the “ dead points “ of moral perplexity or despondency. But to raise it to a dominant principle of religious life would be to dwarf and degrade humanity to what is rightly called “ selfishness,” unworthy of true men, but especially unworthy of true Christians.

(b) But in the Book of Proverbs itself we fail not to find a higher strain of teaching, — represented in the nobler class of proverbs, which regard the true end of life as simply the service of righteousness and goodness, and forget in it the happiness, and even the perfection, of our own souls. They are proverbs of morality, not “ proverbs of prudence.” In some degree they recognise, as above all duty to self, the service of duty and love to our fellowmen; they magnify the relative virtues of truthfulness, unselfishness, humility, forgiveness, kindliness; they dwell, especially when they touch upon the life of the king, on the glory of doing some good in our generation. Thus: “ A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame (Proverbs 13:5); “ he that despiseth his neighbour sinneth; but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he” (Proverbs 14:21); “ Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people “ (Proverbs 14:34); “ By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked “ (Proverbs 11:11); “ Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right “ (Proverbs 16:8); “ Better is it to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Proverbs 16:19); “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith” (Proverbs 15:17); “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32); “A righteous man regardeth the

life of his beast; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel “ (Proverbs 12:10); “ Say not, I will do so to my neighbour as he has done to me: I will render to the man according to his work “(Proverbs 24:29).

These proverbs, though they are fewer in number, shine out with a brighter light amidst the proverbs of prudence. In them we not only move in a higher atmosphere, but catch anticipations of Gospel teaching. For, while the New Testament does not disdain, or allow us to put aside as needless, the motives of hope and fear, and the right love of self, yet it brings out in unquestioned dominance the hunger and thirst after righteousness for its own sake. It teaches that to “ bear one anotherls burdens” is “to fulfil the law of Jesus Christ “; that it is a part, though not the highest part, of the “ self-denial “ which He describes as the condition of following Him. But we have not yet found the true key of human life. The Book of Ecclesiastes, in its sad relation of the experiences of life, confesses that in the service of men, taken alone and in itself, there is “vanity and vexation of spirit.” In the golden rule itself, the “ love of our neighbour” is only the love of him “ as of ourselves “; there must be a higher principle, to which both must be subordinate, differing from both not in degree, but in kind; and that principle must be not mere enthusiasm for abstractions, but supreme love of a person.

{c) This idea is the one which so pervades the whole book as to impress on the Scriptural proverbs a characteristic stamp, distinguishing them from the proverbs of the world. It finds the one object of man’s life in the fear, the knowledge, and the love of God, approaching at least to the idea of doing all things, even the most trivial, “ to the glory of the Lord.” It is brought out explicitly in countless instances of the highest class of proverbs, looking up consciously to God. But it is not found in this class alone. Into it both the other classes melt insensibly; for the happiness which prudence seeks is looked upon as the gift of God to those who know Him, and the duties of truth, justice, and righteousness to man are reverenced, because sanctified by the will of God.

Thus, if honesty is to be enforced, we are told again and again in various words, “ A false balance is an abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is His delight” (Proverbs 11:1; Proverbs 16:11; Proverbs 20:10, Proverbs 20:23). “ The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord; but the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Proverbs 15:8). If cruelty to the poor is denounced, and mercy commended, it is because “ He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor” (Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 17:15); and because “ He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord” (Proverbs 19:17). If self-reflection is urged, it is because “ The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord” (Proverbs 20:27). If revenge is forbidden, we are warned, “ Say not thou, I will recompense evil, but wait upon the Lord, and He shall save thee.” It is, perhaps, in the earlier portion of the book already referred to that this supreme view of life is directly urged with prophetic force and impressiveness. But everywhere it emerges in separate proverbs under its various aspects. Again and again the opening maxim repeats itself, that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge “ and the “ instruction of wisdom “ (Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10). All is acknowledged as being in the hand of God’s gracious Providence. “The blessing of the Lord, it makcth rich; and He addeth no sorrow therewith “; “ The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the days of the wicked shall be shortened “ (Proverbs 10:22, Proverbs 10:27). Nay, that hand is recognised, overruHng even the great mystery of evil. “ The Lord hath made everything for its own end; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil “ (Proverbs 16:4). All is felt to be in His sight, and disposed by His wisdom; for “ the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping

watch upon the evil and upon the good “ (Proverbs 15:3); The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33); “A man’s goings are of the Lord; how, then, can man understand his way?” (Proverbs 20:24); “ Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding “ (Proverbs 3:5). Everywhere, indeed, the principle is recognised, which in the Law fills up every vista of thought and duty with the solemn words, *’ I am the LORD thy God.” “ The knowledge of God “ is the key of this life, as well as the next, because even now it is “ the life eternal.”

HI. To this examination of the proverb in the Book of Proverbs itself it may be well to add a brief reference to the other two books — Job and Ecclesiastes — in which proverbial philosophy is less fully, but still largely, represented. In each case the proverbs evidently catch the characteristic tone of the book itself. In the Book of Job, which — whatever be the date of its composition and inclusion in the Canon in its present form — undoubtedly contains in substance much of the ancient wisdom of the East, the proverbs occurring from time to time have indeed much in them of gravity and even gloominess, but yet breathe a certain spirit of freshness, with a touch of poetry, often graphic and picturesque in metaphor, drawn from the life of the desert. Many of them have passed into household words. “Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither” (Proverbs 1:7). “ Skin for skin; all that a man hath will he give for his life “ (Proverbs 2:4). “ Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards” (Proverbs 5:7) “ Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down. He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Proverbs 14:1-2). “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes “ (Proverbs 13:5-6). Some express in clear and forcible conciseness that sense of the mystery of God’s righteous government and man’s destiny, which is the pervading idea of the whole book. “ Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know?” (Proverbs 11:7-8). “Behold I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him (Proverbs 23:8). “As the cloud is condensed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more” (Proverbs 7:9).

“ As the waters fail from the sea, and the river decayeth and drieth up, so man lleth down and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake” (Proverbs 14:11-12). Others dwell on the infinite littleness and imperfection of man, and his utter incapacity to stand before the Divine judgment, which are again the staple of thought in the speeches both of Job and his friends. “ If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet wilt thou plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me “ (Pro. 9:30-31). “Behold even the moon hath no brightness, and the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man that is a worm! And the son of man, which is a worm! “ (Proverbs 25:5-6). In accordance with the lofty and solemn spirit of the book, they less often descend to the maxims of shrewdness and worldly wisdom; they deal with a simpler and less absorbing condition of human society; they belong mainly to the highest class of all, resting on a deep, though perhaps sombre, consciousness of God, fuller of awe than of the glad familiarity of His servants within the covenant of Israel. On the other hand, the later Book of Ecclesiastes, essentially modern in its tone, reproduces with characteristic difference the leading lines of proverbial philosophy, as they have been noted in the Book of Proverbs; and, indeed, shows in many passages traces of imitation or reminiscence of earlier proverbial sayings.

This is, indeed, but natural; for the whole tenour of the book is the record of an attempt to find the meaning of life, first in seeking one's own pleasure, culture,- perfection, then in the rule and service of humanity, and of the conclusion that both are vanity, and that " to fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty" and wisdom "of man." Freely interspersed in this autobiographical record of life's experience, and the despondent comments upon its vanity, which form so large a portion of this remarkable book, there occur many famous specimens of proverbial teaching, —mostly, however, marked with greater subtlety of thought than the older proverbs,— and (although we can trace in them the contradictions of the "two voices") marked also, on the whole, by a pensive sadness, half mournful, half cynical, but not hopeless, in the view taken both of human character and of human life. It is instructive, for example, to compare with Prov. xxii. i, « A good name is rather to be chosen than riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold," the corresponding passage in Ecclesiastes (Ecc vii. i), " A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death better than the day of one's birth."

These characteristics come out very strikingly in the following verses, so often quoted in our darker hours, which yet, except by a confirmed pessimist, must be held to contain only half the truth as to the experience of this life.

Ecclesiastes 7:2-6, Ecclesiastes 7:14. — " It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity. In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God hath even made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out any thing tJiat shall be after him." The gloominess of tone is naturally deepened by the doubt or despondency, which, at least at times, crosses the mind, in relation to any hope of the future, " To him that is joined to the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything." " Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest " (Ecclesiastes 9:4-5, Ecclesiastes 9:10). There is again in these proverbs not only a singular bitterness against a fool, especially a loquacious fool, but also a touch of that cynical contempt, which apathy calling itself good sense, feels for all extremes of energy, either for good or for evil In a life conceived to be thus unsatisfying and transitory.

Ecclesiastes 7:16-17. — "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? "

Another phase of the same thought is expressed in the famous declaration that all things are good in their season, and nothing good permanently and absolutely.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. — "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die: a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to seek, and a time to

lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace." The impression of this continual recurrence and alternation from life is illustrated by the keen poetic observation of natural phenomena, which has always been noted as characteristic of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1:5-7. — " The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again."

Yet, again, answering this, there flashes out a gleam of light in the conviction that, in spite of all, man's energy can count for something, by virtue of a mysterious purpose of God, fulfilling itself through all these changes.

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. — " Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, yea, even unto eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if a tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there shall it be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the work of God who doeth all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Nor can man be content to acquiesce in a ceaseless alternation of opposites; for he has capacities and aspirations beyond it for something fixed and eternal.

Ecclesiastes 3:10, II. — "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. He hath made every thing beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." And this higher conception of man's nature and destiny associates itself, — in accordance with the historical experience of all human thought, — with a deep-lying belief, troubled indeed, but yet on the whole unshaken, not only in a hand of God over life, but in a communion with Him, though it may be reserved and silent in worship.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2,Ecclesiastes 5:6-7. — " Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; for to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they know not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands. For thus it cometh to pass through the multitude of dreams and vanities and many words: but fear thou God." The proverbs, therefore, of Ecclesiastes are, as we might expect, simply concentrated specimens of the " wisdom " which runs through it, so strangely modern in its recognition of mystery and its sympathy with honest reserve and doubt, yet, in spite of isolated and passing utterances of bitterness, able at last to rest upon a God, deeply felt, if not always clearly seen, and in that rest to find repose for " vanity and vexation of spirit."

Such are some of the leading characteristics of this, perhaps the best known of all classes of “ the parables of the Old Testament.” In it, as has been said, we depart somewhat from that explicitly developed comparison, which we necessarily connect with the word “ parable.” But the same great idea still underlies this class also — the idea of the unity of all the laws of creation in the supreme Law of the Wisdom of God — fulfilling itself alike through physical force or brute instinct, and through the reason and will of man, and hence manifesting in all these various agencies fundamental similarities, which make each in some degree symbolical of the nature of the others. That idea manifests itself alike in the frequent picturesqueness of the proverbs of the people, and the more philosophic insight of the proverbs of the court or of the schools. Necessarily it rises to its supremest height, when we meditate upon it in the sanctuary of God’s known Presence.

08. Chapter 8

PARABLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER VIII. THE PARABLE OF FIGURATIVE PROPHECY. Its relation to the other forms of parable. — I. The parables of Balaam. — II. The parable of Job. — III. The song of Israel over the fall of the King of Babylon.

WE have now to examine that last use of the name “ parable,” which appears to be most remote from the original idea of the word. The name is applied to the prophecies of Balaam (seven times); to the final chapters of the discussion of the book of Job; and to the magnificent song of triumph over Babylon in Is. xiv. Yet all of these are direct utterances, not veiled, either in fable and allegory, or in proverb and symbol. Similarly in Numbers 21:27-30 poetical fragment is quoted from “ those who speak in proverbs,’’ — i.e, “parables,” — which is merely a song of triumph over Moab, of a highly antithetical and poetical character; and in Micah 2:4; Habakkuk 2:6, short antithetical utterances of lamentation or remonstrances are called “ parables.” The remnant (for it is little more) of the idea of the parable is probably to be found in the largely gnomic (or quasi-proverbial) character of the utterances themselves, the unusually marked elaboration of the parallelism, characteristic of all Hebrew poetry, and the lavish use of metaphor. Each, therefore, has to be studied separately, and in itself.

I. In referring first, to the prophecies of Balaam, it is not necessary to dwell upon the difficult questions, and the profound spiritual lessons, which belong to the history of the prophet himself — standing out, as it does, in vivid and detailed beauty amidst the brief annals of Israel in the wilderness, recorded to us, generally in a dry and bare simplicity, in the Book of Numbers. We are concerned with these only so far as they are expressed or implied in the four “ parables,” which he delivers to Balak — the first two after going to “ seek for enchantments “ — the last two (which are continuous) when, “ perceiving that it pleased God to bless Israel,” he puts aside all attempt at divination. They have some marked peculiarities of style. All are singularly full of meaning and poetical beauty; in all, and especially in the last, the spirit of the prophet, worldly and degraded as he had allowed it to become, rises to higher aspirations, singularly contradicted by his own life and death. But still, as is natural, their scope is in the main earthly. Numbers, victorious strength, outward prosperity, future empire of warlike conquest, — these form the substance of the prophecies of the future of Israel. Perhaps we are apt to read as to them more than they really contain of spiritual import. Their general drift is clear, although they present some difficulties of detail, both in version and explanation. In uttering the first (Numbers 33:7-10) the eye of Balaam ranges over “the utmost part of the people.” Accordingly,— after the repetition of the declaration that he cannot curse or defy, except at the bidding of the Lord,— the leading idea which expresses itself is the idea of their vast multitude, dwelling apart from the nations, in “ numbers numberless “ as the sand on the seashore.

Numbers 23:7-10.— “And he took up his parable, and said, — From Aram hath Balak brought me, The king of Moab from the mountains of the East Come, curse me Jacob, And come, defy Israel.

How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? And how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, And from the hills I behold him, Lo, it is a people that dwell alone, And shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number the fourth part of Israel?

Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my last end be like his!” The parable, as a whole, is as simple as it is forcible. The only point which needs explanation is the connexion with the context of the celebrated aspiration of the last couplet, — suddenly introducing the conception of the blessing of righteousness after the mere contemplation of multitude and strength. That connexion is probably to be found in the allusions made in the previous couplets to the separation of the people from all others, and the comparison of them to the “ dust “ or sand. It is hardly possible not to trace in these signs of some knowledge, in itself most probable, of the great promises to Abraham (Genesis 22:17) and to his descendants: “ I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.” These are the “ righteous ones.” To them is fulfilled, in special fulness, that general promise of offspring from generation to generation, which ancient faith believed to be given to all the righteous. “ Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great; and thine offspring as the grass of the field “ (Job 5:25); “ His seed shall be mighty upon earth; the generation of the upright shall be blessed “ (Psalms 112:2). Hence the aspiration of Balaam is that he may die as they died, full of years and honour, — their last hour lighted up by the promise of seed as the stars of heaven, — sure that the same blessing of God, under which they had lived, would deepen and widen out into the greatness of a magnificent future.[1]

[1] It is remarkable that the word which we (with most authorities) render as “ last end,” but which simply means “ that which is after,” is, in the Greek translation, actually rendered as “ seed “ or “ offspring.” “ May my seed be like his! “ The word etymologically admits of this rendering, and has it undoubtedly inPsalms 109:13;Amos 4:2;Jeremiah 31:17;Daniel 10:14.

Against this rendering here is the breach of absolute parallelism.

Grand as it is, that aspiration seems still to look primarily, if not wholly, to the present life. Probably we read our own meaning into it, as into other passages of the Old Testament, when we apply it to a death, which has the sure and certain hope of a resurrection and of a heaven. The extension of idea in regard to the patriarchs themselves is perfectly justifiable. It is expressly made in the celebrated eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews; it may be considered as gaining, at least, indirect sanction from Our Lord’s reasoning with the Sadducees, that the God of the covenant is “ the God, not of the dead, but of the living.” But it is an extension still; and we may well doubt whether it was likely to be present to such a mind as that of Balaam.

Yet even in its original sense it is impossible not to contrast this utterance with the actual “ last state “of Balaam, dying (Numbers 31:8) by the avenging sword of Israel, when (see Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14) he had, with fiendish ingenuity, made Israel draw down on themselves the curse which he could not pronounce, and, no doubt, received “ the wages of unrighteousness,” stained with the blood of the thousands who died in their sins.

It is the leading idea of this first parable which induces the strange suggestion of Balak, that the next prophecy shall be uttered from a place where Balaam shall “ see but the utmost part of them, and shall not see them all,” — that thus his soul may not be overpowered by the impressiveness of multitude. To this gross superstition Balaam characteristically panders by consent. Accordingly, in the very opening of the next parable, his unwilling tongue, mastered by the inspiration of God, is taught to rebuke it.

Numbers 23:18-20, “And he took up his parable, and said, —

Rise up, Balak, and hear:

Hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor;

God is not a man, that he should lie;

Neither the son of man, that he should repent:

Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Behold, I have received commandment to bless: And he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.”

It is here, again, impossible not to contrast this strong utterance of conviction of the unchangeable truth of God, and of the impossibility of disobeying His command to bless, with Balaam’s own past conduct; when, having received a plain command not to go to Balak, he attempted to change God’s command, and was allowed to deceive himself into that acceptance of an extorted permission, which was itself a sin (Numbers 22:12, Numbers 22:19-21). But for the time it so possesses his soul, that he perceives how it pleases the Lord to bless Israel, and accordingly he goes no more hereafter “ to seek enchantments,” that is “ omens,” which he might so interpret according to the rules of his art as to draw from them some augury, at least sufficient to satisfy Balak.

It would hardly be necessary to explain the relation of such a passage as this to those which speak of the “ repentance “ of God, had not some rather superficial difficulties been raised upon it. The ’’ repentance “ here disclaimed is, of course, causeless and capricious change of purpose, absolutely incompatible with the stately march of God’s All-seeing and All-ordaining Providence. The repentance, which (in language drawn from human emotions in order to be intelligible to man) is attributed elsewhere to God, is sometimes (as in Genesis 6:6), the Divine sorrow over man’s sin and consequent suffering; sometimes (as in Exodus 32:14, and many other places) the Divine forgiveness, on the penitence of the sinner, or at the prayer of an intercessor. On this there is a striking declaration in Jeremiah 18:8-10, of the conditionality of all God’s promises and threatenings, and therefore of His “ repentance,” on occasion of that change of conduct in the subjects of His dispensation, which He and His Divine prescience foresees. It will be seen, on thoughtful consideration, that the mystery, which is, as usual, implied in the apparent contradiction, is simply the great ultimate mystery of the reconcilement of the absolute sovereignty of God with the freedom and probation of man. From this exordium Balaam’s parable proceeds (Numbers 23:21-24) —

“He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, Neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: The Lord his God is with him, And the shout of a king is among them.

God bringeth them forth out of Egypt;

He hath as it were the strength of the wild ox.[1] Surely there is no enchantment with[2] Jacob, Neither is there any divination with Israel, Now shall it be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!

Behold, the people riseth up as a lioness. And as a lion doth he lift himself up, He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, And drink of the blood of the slain."

It will be at once observed that this second utterance rises far higher than the former. First it dwells on the present. It passes from the mere contemplation of numbers and material strength, to the higher spiritual strength of righteousness, free from all touch of " iniquity" and "perverseness," and to the indwelling presence of God, as a King, among a righteous people, hailed in glad trumpet-tones of triumph. It is against these that all auguries

[1] The word used here, in Deuteronomy 33:17, and in Job 39:9-10, has been rendered (from the Greek version) as "unicorn." But there is nothing in the word to indicate but one horn, and in the passage from Deuteronomy two seem to be clearly implied. The Latin version has " rhinoceros.'' But all the best Hebrew authorities refer it to the wild bull or buffalo.

[2] The marginal reading agreeing with the old version, has here " against " instead of " with." The original will bear either rendering; and either yields excellent sense. But this seems to suit far better with the context, and with the subsequent action of Balaam. would be sought, and all divination drawn from them, in vain. Then the prophecy goes on to the future. In its own due time the hand of God over them, which brought them out of Egypt, shall be revealed to work out that future; at His call the people shall rise up, untamable as the wild bull, fierce as the lion,[1] and shall not lie down, till they have devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain. It would be impossible to draw a more vivid picture of the avenging nation, now eagerly expecting on the border of their promised land the call of God, for which they had waited forty years, and when it came, ready for the bloody and unsparing conquest of extermination, by which those whose " iniquity was full " were to be swept away. No wonder that Balak, in despair, asks no longer anything, except " Neither curse them nor bless them at all." The next two parables are continuous, but distinct in themselves. Before uttering them Balaam still allows Balak to offer fresh sacrifice, and to conceive hope against hope, that a curse may be uttered in one place, against the blessing in another. But, when the time comes, he seeks no more omens or auguries; he beholds Israel in the well-marshalled encampment of their tribes round the tabernacle of God's presence; and ** the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him." In both utterances he speaks thus of himself, as overmastered by the inspiration of God: —

[1] It may be noted that these were the emblems of the two great tribes of Israel, — the bull of Ephraim, the lion of Judah.

Numbers 24:3-4, — " And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor saith, And the man whose eye was closed [1] saith:

He saith, which heareth the words of God. Which seeth the vision of the Almighty.

Falling down," and having his eyes open." This splendid description refers to revelation under two metaphors, the " hearing the word of God," and the "seeing the vision of the Almighty." But the

stress is so entirely on the latter, and it is so emphatically spoken of as coming to one whose eyes had been shut and now are opened, that it is impossible not to compare it with the celebrated passage in Job (Job 52:5), “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.”

Balaam is clearly conscious of a special and higher inspiration, carrying him out of himself into an ecstatic vision of God’s present and future dealings with the world. Unhappily for himself, the vision tells on his mind, not on his heart and spirit. He stands out as the very type of that knowledge with-

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1 The margin has the reading of our old version, is “opened.” There is much authority for both readings. But that of the text gives a far more striking sense. Balaam had been blind; now he saw.

2 The words “into a trance” of our old version are not in the original, nor are they supplied in the ancient versions and Targums. The Greek version takes the word to mean “ lying down to sleep, but having his eyes open.” But the meaning seems to be literally “falling prostrate, and so having his eyes opened” to see. CompareDaniel 8:18;Daniel 10:9. out righteousness and love, which (as St. Paul warns us) “puffs up” rather than “builds up “ (1 Corinthians 13:1), because it dwells on the surface and cannot pierce to the heart of things. The next prophecy, still dealing with the present and immediate future, hardly goes beyond the last (Numbers 24:5-9): —

“How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, Thy tabernacles, O Israel! As valleys are they spread forth. As gardens by the river side.[1] As lign-aloes[2] which the Lord hath planted, As cedar trees beside the waters.

Water shall flow from his buckets,[3] And his seed shall be in many waters. And his king shall be higher than Agag, And his kingdom shall be exalted.

God bringeth him forth out of Egypt;

He hath as it were the strength of the wild-ox:

He shall eat up the nations his adversaries,

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[1] The Targum explains the “ river “ as Euphrates, and the “gardens” the famous gardens along its banks.

[2] The ancient versions read here “ tents “ or “ tabernacles “; and the Targum of Palestine explains “ thetent which the Lord has spread “ as the firmament of heaven. But our version appears to be correct. The word is used inProverbs 7:17,Psalms 45:8,Son 4:14; it refers to an Indian tree, and is said to be derived from an Indian root.

[3] Most of the old versions and Targums explain this, not literally, but of the multiplication of the seed of Israel, and their spreading out over many nations. And shall break their bones in pieces, And smite them through with his arrows.

He couched, he lay down as a lion, And as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?

Blessed be every one that blesseth thee, And cursed be every one that curseth thee.” The blessing here is clearly two-fold — of fruitfulness and beauty in peace, and of victory in war. The description of the former is drawn, as is not unnatural in Eastern poetry, from the priceless blessing of water, and the luxuriant vegetation which it fosters. To be “ like a tree planted by the water side “ is the constant description of peaceful prosperity. The tabernacles of Israel are compared, now to the brooks flowing into the Jordan through the camp in the plains of Moab; now to the well-watered gardens by the great river Euphrates; now to the aloes, the trees of precious fragrance; now to the cedars, the emblems of greatness and magnificence of strength, spreading out, not on the heights of Lebanon, but beside the waters. In the land of their inheritance Israel shall not only “ pour water from his buckets,” — that is, water the fields by the simple means customary in the East, — but “ his seed shall be among many waters,” flowing freely without the labour of man. The picture exactly corresponds to the celebrated passage of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 11:10-11): “ The land whither thou goest on to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs. But the land whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for “ (see also Deuteronomy 8:7-8). It was suggested, no doubt, by the view over the deep valley of the Jordan, rich in almost tropical vegetation. But it is a picture of general fruitfulness, growth, and prosperity, in which the king of Israel “ shall be higher than Agag,”[1] the king of what was then the first of the nations (see Deuteronomy 5:20), and his “ kingdom exalted “above all the world. The mention of the king of the fierce tribe of Amalek leads naturally from the beauty of peace to the terrible glory of war. The phrases and ideas of the last parable are repeated; but with greater fulness and emphasis. The strength of the wild bull, the fierceness of the lion, are again made emblems of the warlike prowess of Israel. But the picture is now of the lion not as rousing himself to the fight, but as having conquered already, devouring his prostrate prey, sucking the marrow of its bones,[2] and then couching down in a grim repose, from which none dare rouse him up. The vision of the prophet passes

[1] The Jewish interpreters trace here a prediction of Saul’s future conquest of Amalek; but this seems hardly necessary to the passage, which simply implies exaltation of Israel over the mightiest powers, here typified in Agag.

[2] If the ordinary interpretation be correct, the metaphor is dropped in the phrase “ shall pierce them with his arrows.” Can the word “ arrow,” used also for a spear-head (1 Samuel 17:7), be applied metaphorically f o the sharp claws of the lion t on beyond the impending conflict to the completion of the conquest, and to the victorious rest after its labour is over. It will be observed that here again the prophecy is only of temporal prosperity and victory. There is nothing in it of that golden thread of higher spiritual idea, which in the true prophets of Israel runs through the texture of these temporal promises. The whole ends emphatically with the confession, wrung from the unwilling prophet, and stirring the bitter anger of the king: —

“Blessed is he that blessed thee, And cursed is he that curseth thee.” With this it would seem as if Balaam had desired to end his prophecy.

IV. But the last parable is apparently drawn from him by the remonstrance of Balak. He can at least warn him of the future,[1] if he cannot curse at his bidding. It opens with the same solemn

exordium as the last. But it is distinct from all going before, in being not only benedictory, but distinctly predictive of that which shall be “ in the latter days.” The first section is the famous prophecy of the victorious king of Israel: —

Numbers 24:15-19. — “And he took up his parable, and said, —

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[1] Here the Targums interpose the wicked counsel of Balaam to Balak to ensnare Israel. The Latin version, “ I will tell thee what thy people shall do to this people,” seems to refer to this same counsel.

Balaam the son of Beor saith, And the man whose eye was closed saith:

He saith, which heareth the words of God, And knoweth the knowledge of the Most High, Which seeth the vision of the Almighty, Falling down, and having his eyes open:

I see him, but not now:

I behold him, but not nigh:

There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite through the corners of Moab, And break down all the sons of tumult.[1] And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession, which were his enemies;

While Israel doeth valiantly. And out of Jacob shall one have dominion. And shall destroy the remnant from the city.”[2] ----------

[1] The name “ Sheth “ is in the ancient versions taken to be a proper name, as indeed, the antithesis of the passage seems to suggest. The Targum explains it “ the children of men,” or the “ children of the East,” obviously referring to Seth the patriarch. But it is now usually taken (as in our Revised Version) to be, not a proper name, but a word signifying “ confusion” or “tumult,”— “the confused noise and garments rolled in blood “ of the warrior, — and a passage in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 48:45) (which seems to be a reminiscence of this) has this sense most clearly.

2 The Targum explains this of some great city of the Gentiles. But it seems only to express completeness of victory (as in the conquest of Joshua), first overthrowing the enemy in the field, and then following them up, and taking city by city. The prophecy has clearly a personal reference, not merely to a triumph of Israel, but to some Great King, — the Star of their glory, and the Sceptre of their power — already seen, though far away in the distance of futurity — on whom all glory should be concentrated. The old Jewish interpreters referred this prophecy as a matter of course to the Messiah; it has always been a belief in the Church that, treasured in the tenacious Oriental memory, it was to be to the Magi hereafter the interpretation of the Star of Bethlehem; it is certain that the great pretender to Messiahship, the leader of the terrible revolt under Hadrian, referred to the prophecy, when he called himself Bar-cochab, “ the Son of the Star.”

Nothing is more likely than that the prophecy of some great king to come, which was at all times, under various phases, “ the hope of Israel,” should have been in some measure known and believed by this heathen seer. At the same time it appears clear that the kingdom foreseen by Balaam has no such signs of higher glory about it, as those which prophets of more spiritual

character always associated with the kingdom of the Messiah. It is a kingdom of mere temporal victory by the sword, in which Moab and her men of war, and Edom in the strong fastnesses of Mount Seir, shall fall under the hand of the conqueror, who shall root out his enemies, and take them city by city. In itself it was adequately fulfilled in the warlike empire of David, certainly extending to these lands and far beyond them. It is only in virtue of the general principle, which makes David's kingdom a type of the higher spiritual victories of Him who was at once the Son and Lord of David, and which often expresses itself in not dissimilar language in the prophets of Israel, that this prophecy can be extended further. We may well see in it what perhaps was hardly visible to Balaam's own eyes, — too apt, as we know, to be dazzled with mere earthly wealth and glory, — and, translating it into a more spiritual language, justify the hopes which the old Jewish interpreters drew from it. In the latter section of this prophecy Balaam turns his eyes on the Amalekites and Kenites, the two great tribes of the desert, and foretells their future destiny; and at last, in tones of gloomy foreboding, he tells of an invasion from the West, and a yet more widespread destruction.

Numbers 24:20-24. — " And he looked on Amalek, and took up his parable, and said, —

Amalek was the first of the nations; But his latter end shall come to destruction. And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his parable, and said, —

Strong is thy dwelling place, And thy nest is set in the rock.

Nevertheless Kain shall be wasted, Until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, —

Alas, who shall live when God doeth this? But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim, And they shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber. And he also shall come to destruction." Of the first two utterances the interpretation is clear enough. Amalek, the robber tribe of the desert, and the constant enemy of Israel, now "first of the nations " in strength,[1] is doomed to a destruction, which was to come (though the prophecy says not so) from the hand of the first king of Israel. The Kenites, the friends and allies of Israel both in the wilderness and in the promised land, shall continue safe in their strong nest[2] in the rock, till after many centuries the great Assyrian invasion shall sweep all away. Both these predictions were obviously fulfilled. In the last utterance, wrung out from the soul of the prophet, overwhelmed with the thought of a suffering, even to death, in the last terrible times, we see in dim but unmistakable forms the visions of a far remoter future. The " ships of Kittim " bring with them a host of destroyers. That Kittim is originally Citium in Cyprus appears certain; but it is equally certain that it was extended to include all the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean west of Palestine. In this passage (and in Daniel 11:30) the

---------- [1] The explanation "first to war with Israel" seems artificial and unnecessary.

[2] There is in the Hebrew a play on the words " nest " and Ken," which are all but identical.

Latin version and the Targums all refer it to Italy, evidently interpreting it of the future conquest by Rome. Probably in its original use it was vague, a prophecy simply foreshadowing some great invasion from the land of the West. It is to afflict the Assyrian Empire, which had afflicted all other lands. It is to afflict also " Eber," — that is, probably the country or the inhabitants ** beyond " the river Euphrates, far away to the East.[1] But at the end the destroyers themselves shall be

destroyed. The Jewish interpreters added that this should be by the kingdom of the Messiah, as is prophesied in the great vision of Daniel; but of this there is nothing in Balaam's own utterance. It simply closes in a dark and terrible picture of affliction and destruction; and it is strikingly characteristic that the prophet, whose heart was set on this world, and whose vision was bounded by it, should see as the ultimate goal of his prophecy nothing but images of gloom and terror. With these words of doom on his lips he " rises up and returns to his place."

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[1] The ancient versions here render " the Hebrews," probably referring to the patriarch Eber (Genesis 10:24-25). But it would be strange if the chosen people, throughout denominated by the higher title of Israel, were to be here suddenly called by the lower title of " Hebrew." Hence it seems better to take the word in its etymological sense of the " dweller beyond " the Euphrates (as the Targum of Onkelos and the Targum of Jerusalem take it), in which sense, indeed, it probably was applied originally to the Hebrews themselves.

Such is the general outline of these parables of Balaam, in some sense unique in the Old Testament, distinguished in tone and style from the utterances of all Jewish prophets, and, up to this point of Holy Scripture, the most vivid in their prophetic interpretation of the present, and reaching farthest as predictions of the future. But their tone and spirit are heathenish still. There is in them no germ of true spirituality, and therefore no germ of the undying life and hope of the prophets of Israel.

II. A second example of the parable of this same class — most remote from the original idea of " teaching by comparison," and retaining little right to the name beyond that which is given by elaborate parallelism of construction and highly metaphorical style — is the parable of Job. The name is given to a remarkable discourse, or series of discourses, extending through no less than six chapters (xxvi.xxxi.), in which, having silenced the contention of his friends, he closes the great discussion of the book.[1] Twice (in xxvii. i, and xxix. i) he is expressly said to "continue his parable." If we take each occurrence of this expression to mark the beginning of a new section of the discourse, the whole will fall naturally into three divisions, — an

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[1] The word is not used at the beginning of c. xxvi. But the chapter evidently belongs to the series; and in c. xxvii. i, Job is said not "to take up," but "to continue^' his parable. introduction in ch. xxvi, a first main portion in ch. 27:-xxviii, and a second in ch. 29:-xxxi.

Before attempting to estimate the general meaning of this " parable," it is perhaps necessary to glance at the great subject of Job's controversy with his friends. It should be remembered that this is not the whole subject of the book, as we have it now; for in the Prologue and Epilogue we have a glimpse of the probationary and disciplinary purpose of God's dispensation, overruling to good the disturbing element of a supernatural power of Moral Evil in the world, of which Job and his friends know nothing. But the question of the controversy is essentially one form of the perplexity, which is the great stumbling-block of Natural Theology, — the only thing which really staggers our sense of God's Righteousness and Wisdom, and so our living faith in Him. That perplexity comes from the permitted existence in the world of evil — sin, and (in less degree) suffering and death — which tempts men to Manichaean theories of Dualism, or to the blank despair of Pessimism. In the

Book of Job it takes the simplest form, of difficulty as to the perfection of what is still felt to be a Moral Government of God, in respect of the distribution of joy and sorrow, success and failure, in the world. For this is obviously the form which the history of Job's strange and unexpected suffering suggests.

It assumes two distinct phases of inquiry. First, whether special suffering implies special sinfulness, and whether prosperity is invariably and necessarily a reward of well-doing before God. Next, whether, in any case, man has a right to complain of the dealings of God with him — whether, in fact, he is not too insignificant, too weak, and too sinful, to have any rights at all before the most High. On the former of these points Job's friends maintain, as a time-honoured maxim of ancient experience, that joy and sorrow in this world are invariably proportioned to the good or evil doing of the recipient; and hence, at first indirectly and gently, afterwards with a plainspoken harshness, they infer that Job's sufferings argue in him some flagrant sinfulness, and urge him to repent, in hope of forgiveness and renewed blessing. They feel, like those who insist on " poetic justice," that this is the simplest way to sustain a belief in God as the Moral Governor of the world.

Accordingly, they refuse to acknowledge any imperfection or error in its application; they shut their eyes to unwelcome and perplexing facts, and so become " false witnesses for God." Job, on the other hand, emphatically denies that actual experience bears out this easy and comfortable theory. Not without wonder and perplexity, he dwells on the imperfection of God's retribution in this life — on the disheartened suffering of the righteous, and the insolent prosperity of the wicked. As for himself, he boldly and pathetically pleads that, according to the standard of human capacity, he is not specially a sinner; and in the extremity of his pain he cries out to God, and asks why he is so heavily visited. This leads on to the second point in the discussion.

Scandalized by his outcry, the friends urge that in any case God's dealings cannot be questioned; that He is too high for any plea[of justice or injustice from man; that all Job has to do is to submit absolutely to One, who has an absolute right to do precisely as He wills with the creatures of His hand. They support this view of God's relation to man by descriptions — in themselves most true and majestic — of God's infinite glory as the Creator, the Sustainer, the Destroyer, of all created things. Here again Job meets them face to face. He accepts to the full their declarations of the majesty of God, His unsearchable wisdom, His infinite power; but He believes that weak and sinful as he is, man has rights before God' which the All-just and All-merciful cannot and will not disregard. Hence he will still cry out to God to show him the reason of His ways. He longs for a Daysman to decide his cause; he believes that his Redeemer (or Avenger) liveth. Though at times he goes to the very verge of presumption, he still holds firm the conviction that '' the Judge of the whole world must do right." It is notable that in the close of the book. Job, when he comes to the sight of God, does accept the answer of an unqualified faith in, His infinite and mysterious Wisdom, and, casting off his self-confidence, "abhors himself, and repents in dust and ashes "; yet he is declared, in acknowledging the true facts of life, to have spoken of God " the thing that is right," and the complacent theories, by which his friends seek to defend God's justice, are condemned.

. The " parable " of Job, closing the dialogue with his three friends, is clearly intended to sum up the whole controversy. In it accordingly, the two subjects of his contention alternate, and in some degree blend, with each other.

{a?) Thus, in the introductory chapter (xxvi.), after a bitter reproach of the unmercifulness and the futility of the argument of his friends (vv. 2-4), he suddenly turns to dwell on the all-embracing greatness of God's kingdom — over the deep abyss, where the dead tremble before Him, over the earth "hanging on nothing,"[1] over the cloudy region of the firmament, over the sea, to which He has set a boundary, and the stars, with which He hath garnished heaven (vv. 5-13); and he ends all with the declaration: — " Lo! these are but the outskirts of His ways I Scarcely has a whisper of them reached our ears; The thunder of His power who can understand } "

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[1] The sense is undoubted; it is a marvellous anticipation of the discoveries of modern science, and an instructive contrast with the grotesqueness of so many ancient cosmogonies.

There runs through the whole a kind of impatience, that all this, which he knows so well, should be urged as if it were new to him, and that the truth, itself indisputable, should be made the occasion of more than doubtful inference.

{b.) The second division of the parable (ch. xxvii.-xxviii.), following this introduction, is somewhat obscure as to its general drift and coherence. In one part, indeed, of the former chapter many have doubted whether there is not some corruption of the text, and whether vv. 13-23 do not contain the third speech of Zophar the Naamathite, otherwise missing in the dialogue.[1] For this there appears hardly sufficient ground; but the very supposition shows the obscurity of the internal connexion. The whole fall into two parts. The first (ch. xxvii.) opens with a solemn declaration of Job, that " as God liveth, who hath taken away his judgment," he will not utter conventional falsehoods, and will not "justify his friends" by an insincere confession, while his heart condemns him not (vv. 1-6): —

" My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go:

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1 It is certainly strange that Zophar's speech should be missing, and the sentiment of these verses suits well enough with the argument of the friends. But in the present text there seems no break in the continuous parable of Job; and in verse 12 he seems to be about to take on his own lips the words of the trite wisdom of his friends. My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live.

Let mine enemy be as the wicked, And let him that riseth against me be as the unrighteous."

Then, taking up the truth which they themselves had seen and declared again and again, he acknowledges that if the unrighteous does gain, yet in the end God's retribution shall come on him, —

"For what is the hope of the godless, tho' he get him gain, When God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry. When trouble cometh upon him?"

No! his prosperity is frail as the spider's web; his power only a temporary tabernacle; his children shall be born to trouble; his wealth shall be gathered for the righteous; he shall pass away like the wind under God's wrath, and amidst the hissing of men (vv. 7-23). So far all is clear. Then — so abruptly that it seems as if some link had been lost — there comes in a sudden change of thought;

and in the next chapter (xxviii.), one of the noblest and most figurative of the whole book. Job dwells on the vain search of man after “ wisdom “; that is, after the knowledge of the secrets of God’s Providence over him and over the world. The connexion with the preceding chapter is certainly obscure; but it seems to lie in the thought of the inscrutable method of this Divine retribution, into which man would so gladly look. At the end he gives up the search; he knows that the secret is known to God from the beginning; but for man there remains only obedience and faith.

“ The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” This latter chapter demands a more detailed explanation.

It opens (vv. i-ii) with a vivid and picturesque description of the work of the miner, searching into the very depths of the earth — a description clearly drawn from eye-witness in the mines, perhaps of Egypt, perhaps of the Hauran itself.

Job 28:1-2. — “Surely there is a mine for silver, And a place for gold which they refine.

Iron is taken out of the earth, And brass is molten out of the stone.

Man setteth an end to darkness, And searcheth out to the furthest bound The stones of thick darkness and the shadow of death.

He breaketh open a shaft away from where men sojourn;

They are forgotten of the foot that passeth by;

They hang afar from men, they swing to and fro.[1] ---------- [1] The description is of the miner suspended by a rope in the shaft, to hew out the side galleries of the mine. As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: And underneath it is turned up as it were by fire. The stones thereof are the place of sapphires, And it hath dust of gold. That path no bird of prey knoweth, Neither hath the falcon’s eye seen it; The proud beasts have not trodden it, Nor hath the fierce lion passed thereby.

He putteth forth his hand upon the flinty rock;

He overturneth the mountains by the roots.

He cutteth out channels among the rocks; And his eye seeth every precious thing.

He bindeth the streams that they trickle not; And the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.” The whole passage dwells (much in the spirit of a famous chorus of Sophocles) on the wonders of man’s skill and enterprise in the material world, shaming the instinct of all other creatures, overcoming all natural obstacles, and piercing to the dark secrets of the earth.

Then follows the contrast of his ignorance of the deeper mysteries of the spiritual world (vv. 12-22).

Job 28:12-22. — “But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?

Man knoweth not the price thereof;

Neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep saith. It is not in me: And the sea saith, It is not with me.

It cannot be gotten for gold, Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.

It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, With the precious onyx, or the sapphire.

Gold and glass cannot equal it:

Neither shall the exchange thereof be jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal, Yea, the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, Neither shall it be valued with pure gold.

Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding?

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living. And kept close from the fowls of the air."

Destruction and Death say, We have heard a rumour thereof with our ears.

" Wisdom " is here the secret of God's will to man, on which depend the whole meaning and value of life • to know it is precious beyond all precious things. But man knows it not in itself; he searches for it vainly through the land of the living, the sea, and "the waters under the earth." Even in the unseen world of hell and death there is but a faint echo of the voice of wisdom. At last comes the grand climax.

Job 28:22-28: —

"God understandeth the way thereof, And he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, And seeth under the whole heaven; To make a weight for the wind;

Yea, he meteth out the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, And a way for the lightning of the thunder:

Then did he see it, and declare it;

He established it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding." The wisdom of God He alone knows; and it is represented (with a faint indication of that personification so magnificently worked out in Proverbs 8:22-31) as being with Him in the hour of Creation, declared by Him as the pattern — the " Law Eternal "— of His works. As for man, he cannot know this wisdom in itself; he can gain a glimpse of it, only so far as he accepts God's Revelation in godly fear, and follows His commandments in departing from evil. The conclusion breathes much of the spirit of the teaching of the Book of Proverbs. But, as is natural in one who, like Job, had not the full light and privilege of the Covenant with Israel, it claims even less of full knowledge of Him and of wisdom in Him. Here the fear of the Lord is wisdom: in the teaching of Solomon, it is but "the beginning of wisdom," — the condition (as Our Lord Himself teaches) of fuller knowledge of God.

(c.) From this magnificent parable, full of poetical beauty and high prophetic inspiration, Job passes on to the concluding portion of his discourse. This occupies three chapters (chaps, 29:-xxxi.) coinciding with three natural divisions of the subject.

It is marked by a simplicity of construction and connexion, and by a continuous flow of thought, pathetic indeed in its sorrow, but free from all the excitement and ruggedness of his earlier cries of pain.

It forms a sad but trustful conclusion to his struggle; he simply “ delivers his soul,” and leaves all in the hands of God. The first chapter is a lovely picture of the life which he once led in the light of God’s presence — first, in the richness of material blessing, and with all his children around him; then in the dignity of universal reverence from young and old, nobles and princes of the land; lastly, in the higher glory of acknowledged beneficence, “ because he delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him “; “ he was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.” In that blessedness he thought to live and die, and the reverence of men chimed in with his hope.

Job 29:14,Job 29:18-19,Job 29:25: —

“I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was as a robe and a diadem.

Then I said, I shall die in my nest. And I shall multiply my days as the sand: My root is spread out to the waters, And the dew lieth all night upon my branch:

I chose out their way, and sat as chief. And dwelt as a king in the army, As one that comforteth the mourners.”

There is throughout a certain tenderness and calmness of pathos, as of one looking back on life from another world. The next chapter (xxix.) describes the terrible contrast of his present condition — despised even by the lowest of men, the vagabond races who prowled on the edges of the higher civilisation — humiliated and tortured by loathsome disease — looking to God in vain for relief, and to man for the pity which once he himself had shown.

Job 30:1-4,Job 30:8-9,Job 30:12-13,Job 30:16-17,Job 30:20,Job 30:22,Job 30:23,Job 30:22-23,Job 30:31:—

“But now they that are younger than I have me in derision. Whose fathers I disdained to set with the dogs of my flock.

Yea, the strength of their hands, whereto should it profit me?

Men in whom ripe age is perished.

They are gaunt with want and famine:

They gnaw the dry ground, in the gloom of wasteness and desolation.

They pluck salt-wort by the bushes; And the roots of the broom are their meat.

They are children of fools, yea, children of base men;

They were scourged out of the land. And now I am become their song, Yea, I am a byword unto them.

Upon my right hand rise the rabble;

They thrust aside my feet, And they cast up against me their ways of destruction.

They mar my path, They set forward my calamity.

Even men that have no helper. And now my soul is poured out within me;

Days of affliction have taken hold upon me. In the night season my bones are pierced in me, And the pains that gnaw me take no rest.

I cry unto thee, and thou dost not answer me:

I stand up, and thou lookest at me.

Thou liftest me up to the wind, thou causest me to ride upon it; And thou dissolvest me in the storm. For I know that thou wilt bring me to death. And to the house appointed for all living. Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the needy } When I looked for good, then evil came; And when I waited for light, there came darkness.

Therefore is my harp turned to mourning. And my pipe into the voice of them that weep." The picture is painted, deliberately and bitterly, stroke by stroke, without, however, the anguish and the distempered vehemence of some of the earlier chapters.

Then in the last chapter (xxxi.) comes a simple and earnest protestation of his innocence of all the various charges made or insinuated against him.

He calls God to witness of the purity and integrity of his life past (vv. i-i i); of his reverence for the weak, and compassion for the poor and destitute (vv. 12-23); of his hatred of idolatry, whether the gross idolatry of the sun and the moon, or of the subtler worship of gold and prosperity (vv. 24-28); of his freedom from malignity and parsimony, from cowardice and from fraudulent oppression (vv. 29-40).

He ends all with the following declaration, full of a truthful and pathetic dignity.

Job 31:35 to end: —

"Oh that I had one to hear me!

(Lo, here is my signature, let the Almighty answer me); And that I had the indictment which mine advcrsary hath written!

Surely I would carry it upon my shoulder;

I would bind it unto me as a crown.

I would declare unto him the number of my steps; As a prince would I go near unto him.

If my land cry out against me, And the furrows thereof weep together;

If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, Or have caused the owners thereof to lose their life:

Let thistles grow instead of wheat, And cockle instead of barley. " The whole of this concluding section of the parable breathes a tone of subdued, patient, sorrowful earnestness; submissive to God's hand, yet still cherishing a consciousness of true devotion to His service, and refusing to acknowledge a special sinfulness, which the heart does not feel. It is profoundly instructive that (in ch. xli. 5, 6) at the very moment when God accepts his plea, Job is so penetrated with the sense of the Divine wisdom and goodness, that every shred even of this righteous self-confidence is torn away; he comes to feel what previously he did not feel of the imperfection of his service, and

immediately “ repents in dust and ashes.” The protestation of his “ parable “ is his last word to man; but it is not his last word to God. The whole parable is one of the noblest specimens of the poetry of the Old Testament — in its perfection of stately form, clothing complete simplicity of idea, in its singular union of dignity with reverence, and in its sight only by glimpses of the Divine ideal of goodness and of man’s declension from it, thoroughly characteristic of the ancient wisdom, of which it is the expression.

III. The last example of this species of parable is the grand triumphant and denunciatory song of Isaiah over the fall of the king of Babylon.

It is a portion of the burden of Babylon, opening a series of the “burdens of the nations,” which occupy a considerable section (cc. 13:-xxiii.) of the prophecies of Isaiah. The prophet beholds in vision the “ ensign of the Lord “ set up against Babylon, and, gathered around it, the “ consecrated ones “ and the “ mighty men “ of His host. He sees the terror, and hears the wailing, of the doomed city; he discerns even the instruments of the Divine vengeance — “ the Medes,” who “ regard not silver and gold,” and whose “ eye has no pity.”

“ Babylon the glory of kingdoms “ is to be “ as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah “ (cc, xiii. I; 14:2). Then he turns to Israel, to whom the fall of the oppressor is to bring “ rest from sorrow, and from trouble and from hard service,” and bids her “ take up her parable against the king of Babylon.”

Isaiah 14:4-23. — “ How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers; that smote the peoples in wrath with a continual stroke, that ruled the nations in anger, with a persecution that none restrained. The whole earth is at rest, arid is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall answer and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us t Thy pomp is brought down to hell, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation in the uttermost parts of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the uttermost parts of the pit.

They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, they shall consider thee, saying. Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and overthrew the cities thereof; that let not loose his prisoners to their home? All the kings of the nations, all of them, sleep in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast forth away from thy sepulchre like an abominable branch, clothed with the slain, that are thrust through with the sword, that go down to the stones, of the pit; as a carcase trodden under foot. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, thou hast slain thy people; the seed of evil-doers shall not be named for ever. Prepare ye slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers, that they rise not up, and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities. And I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon name and

remnant, and son and son's son, saith the LORD.

I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts." This splendid burst of figurative poetry tells its own story, with little need of explanation and interpretation. It falls into four striking pictures. That with which it opens is one to which we find parallels elsewhere, of the quiet rest of the whole earth at the fall of the oppressive magnificence of Babylon. The very cedars and cypresses of Lebanon rejoice that the havoc made by its fleet-building and palace building is to cease; the earth itself breaks forth into a song of relief and freedom. But to this succeeds a grand vision, which stands out unique in its terrible force, of the realms of Sheol, — the unseen world of the fabled Rephaim, and of the shades of the royal dead, — a land (as always in the Old Testament) of shadowy gloom and dreariness, — now stirred by the expectation of the descent of the soul of the great king, and exulting over his fall to the level of its impotence and nothingness. His is "the fall of Lucifer," "the day-star," "son of the morning," made hereafter in Christian poetry a type of the fall from Heaven of the prince of the angels. For alike in type and antitype, the root of evil is the pride, aspiring to God's honour, to place for itself " a throne above the stars, and to be like the most High," — now brought down to the gloom of Sheol, " to the uttermost parts of the pit."

Then the scene seems to change, and go back to some field of battle on earth, where the dead body of the conquered king lies, unburied and dishonoured.

Men look upon it and say, " Is this the man that made the earth to tremble? " Other kings lie in honoured graves; but he is cast out far away from the sepulchre, which he has prepared for himself, " as an abominable branch"; lost in the heaps of the slain; because he had been the ruin of his own land and the slayer of his people. His spirit is taunted in Sheol; his body trampled down on the blood-stained earth. Nor is the vengeance to be stayed even then.

"Prepare " (the prophet cries) " slaughter for his children," that they rise not up again. The Lord " will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son, and son's son." He will make it a desolation, and " sweep it with the besom of destruction." As always in the vengeance upon Babylon, there is no sparing in the present, or hope of restoration. For Babylon is the type of utterly cruel and ruthless wickedness, that satanic rebellion against good and against God v;hich may not be forgiven. The whole " parable " is one of the grandest specimens, even of the grandeur of Isaiah. Its tone breathes not so much fierceness or exultation, as an awful sense of God's righteous retribution upon evil; alike in the world visible and the world unseen. With these last and faintest examples of the principles of parabolic teaching, the investigation of its various phases may fitly close.^ The simplest thought will convince us that it indicates a great law of truth, first grasped by poetic intuition, and afterwards worked out by philosophic thought. In this, as in other respects, Holy Scripture is at once an epitome of the highest human literature, and the revelation of that which is the Divine answer to all its searchings after truth.

* It will be sufficient merely to refer to the "proverb" of Numbers 20:27-30, which is a fragment of some triumphant exultation from the land of Sihon over the defeat and desolation of Moab; to the "parable" of Micah 2:4, which is a short " doleful lamentation " over the spoiling of God's people; and to "the parable and taunting proverb" of Habakkuk 2:6, scorning the rapacity and recklessness of the spoiler. These examples are brief and simple, and require no detailed treatment.