No. 770

On the use of parables.
Matth. xxiii. 10. "And the disciples came unto him, saying, 'Why doest thou speak to them in parables?"

Whoever has read the N.T. with care must have observed the variety of manner, as well as the adapting of his instructions, he has used in conveying the truths, weighing the motives of his digressions, to have escaped his hearers, sometimes he reasons, sometimes he demonstrates; now he delivers his precepts in the most plain, unmasked manner, yea, he abandons the principles he is teaching, as the events to which he refers, the issue of allegory, as in the figurative, metaphysical expressions of the Oriental style. But there is no form,
in which he has conveyed instructions, more remarkable, than
that of parables. They occupy a very considerable propor-
tion of his discourses; seem to have been a favorite mode
of teaching. It must be, one would think, a heedless
fervidous mind, that is not enlightened, or an inensi-
ble heart, that is not touched, by the parables of our
Lord. They usually rise, as it were, fresh from the occasion,
and are suggested by the scenes of nature then on view,
by the conduct and passions of men as.acted at the
moment. Everything around him, both in the nat-
ural and moral world, is made to seem with instruction.
The parables seem to have been delivered, not with the ut-
most simplicity, yea, without the least attempt, but
just as the occasion prompted them, yea, as the course
of his teaching led him to address them to various clas-
ses of hearers, to his disciples, to the multitude, to
Pharisees, to the chief priests. Thus, the question: "Is
my neighbor?" called forth from him the beautiful
parable of the good Samaritan; the parable of the rich
man, whose ground brought forth plentifully. Only how
he ought to dispose of his goods, was suggested
by an application to determine a suit concerning an estate
that of a certain man, who made a great sinner. When he was pre-
sent at a entertainment; if those of the careful in the
prodigal son the unjust steward, the merciful
rest; then great numbers of publicans and sinners, of Phar-
isees and scribes, were before him, yea when the latter only
ventured against them their meanness and insolence. But
it seems to have been a favorite practice with us, to
through the medium of parables, to bring to view his
own character, the offices, with he sustained as the
Messengers of heaven, the Mediator between God and
Man. Thus he represents himself, as the bowels, the
avenger, the proprietor of an estate, the careful shepherd;
the just master, the kind father, the splendid bride-
groom, the powerful nobleman, the last of a hundred
of the king upon his throne judging the world. Whereas the nature of the commission, as God had given him to execute, of the duties or prospects of his disciples, could be shadowed out, & made impressive, by this interesting & striking mode of instruction, he appears gladly to have availed himself of it. Thus by parables, he taught the missions &c. as "over", in such words, the ears of his countrymen might see the purpose & character of his mission, & their own duties & destination. This manner of teaching so often, so successfully, used by our Savior, must have much to recommend it, if we are naturally prompted to ask, those disciples in the text, "why didst thou go out to them in parables?" The question was asked just after our Lord had delivered the parable the former. In seeking for an answer to it, we shall find the reasons, why he delighted so much in this mode of instruction.

The first answer to the question, "why goest thou out to them in parables?", is the answer given by our Savior, his disciples made the enquiry. "Therefore", says he, "spake I in parables, because the seeing see not, & the hearing hear not, neither do they understand. For this people's heart is waxed gross, & their ears are hard of hearing, & their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, & hear with their ears, & understand with their hearts, & should be converted, & I should heal them." It will be seen at once, that this reason has an immediate & peculiarity reference to the Jewish nation. It describes a particular state of mind, which existed among the people, whom he addressed, & who renounced the mode of teaching by parables extremely uncomfortable, if not absolutely necessary. This state of mind consisted in a deep rooted ignorance of the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom, & in a hardened insensibility to the calls of promises of the God. Their ignorance of sensibility were satisfied by strong, but false expectations, which did not fulfill, by the influence on the corrupt teaching of their doctors, & this led to weakness in their minds all regard to the better & clearer part of the.
law of God, if it is on things of little importance. This lamentable state of the views & feelings of the Jews is represented by the figurative expressions, "that seeing they see not; hearing they hear not, neither do they understand;" we, though they have the means of arriving at the true knowledge of these things, yet they obstinately refuse them, as they are like men, who will not see, though they have eyes, nor will not hear, though they have ears. They are thus described by a quotation from the prophet, as totally insensible to any thing, that should lead them to higher views. Nor it was because they were in such a condition of temper & feeling, that misleads, we ought to them in favor; if we reflect on the subject for a moment, we shall find it to have been very good reason. They had shut their eyes against the evidence of his divine mission, already afforded by his miracles by his heavenly instructions; & thus had manifested an almost unceaseable dispossession of this positive & feeling. Nor among a people thus blindly destitute & filled

with unanswerable, but deep-settled, expectations of a temporal Messiah, what method of instruction was adapted to be most successful? Certainly, it would not have been consistent with a regard to the cause of truth, to have attached their prejudices with open undiscerning violence, & to have torn up with rude & ill-judged all their old trains of thinking. To have done this would have been at once to have armed a host of passionate & malignant feelings against the new dispensation of religion. Not a Jewish breast, but would have overlooked indignation. So false hopes & pernicious notions had been assailed in the offensive form of a direct assault. But, I knew, that in order to bring them to a frame of mind suitable for the reception of the true, some regard must be had to their prejudices & delusions. The night was to be admitted as they could bear it, as it would be useful to them. All the rubbish of their childish expectations of gross views was to be removed, as to be cleared away, cut out, & forcing them to feel the loss. Therefore, we saw, selected the mode of instructing by parables, as the dress

The mass of these prejudices, a path for the progress of the Gospel.

The reasons, why have now been given, for the use of parables were such, as apply almost exclusively to the peculiar circumstances of the Jews at the time the Gospel was promulgated... And we may add, that this method of teaching was peculiarly suited to the character of mind among the oriental nations. We find not only from the Bible itself, but from those other writings, that the genius of these nations had been taught to expect, in the sacred writings, to find the truth represented by parables, allegories, and fables. This indistinct feeling required something more, than a train of cold and lifeless reasoning; they required in their figures glowing imagery, imagination but was powerful aid to the cause of morality. No wonder, then, that any such a people must have adopted the impressive and lively mode of instruction by parables. It was suited to the genius of the people, and was admirably adapted to convey the impression of religious truths.

But there are good reasons for the use of the mode of
The powerfully commands attention. We cannot be surpr
ished that our Saviour should have resorted to it, in ord
to impress the eternal truths of His holy religion. Indeed,
many are thus taught with delight to the parable of the Di

gospel, on whom the best discourse concerning the necessi
of repentance, & the mercy of God, would have been lost
by the parable of the talents reached some hearts, that would
otherwise have been made to feel their responsibility. The
could have been to relate a story, curiosity at least, would
from it, the disposition to listen. It is almost before the pre
are aware of it, they were impressed into some very important
parables engaged the attention; for when
that was once secured, & the mind became more interested
in the subject; it was easy to stamp upon it the great
truths, which were concealed under the veil of allegory.

Again, we may observe that parables are better adap
than almost any other mode of discourse in order to gi
further, to give true conceptions accurate ideas of religious

gernal truths, to the great mass of mankind. There
are very few minds, who do not need some assistance in
sion to the situation of the laws. One very d"
order to understand the real nature of the full force of doctrines or precepts. If they are stated or discussed in an abstract form, as principles merely, without being illustrated or enforced by some real or supposed application, they will leave but a very faint and insensate image on the hearts of those who hear them. Men, who are not accustomed to the modes of moral reasoning, find it difficult to gain exact, adequate notions on the subject, unless they are presented with some sensible image, some object of comparison, something on which they can reason from what they do know to what they do not know. Now this is exactly what is supplied by parables. In them a story is related, in which certain truths or principles are illustrated or exemplified in the conduct or feelings of the characters who are introduced; these principles themselves are turned to a religious account, by being taken from their connection with the narrative, and applied by the reader or hearer. In the N.T. parables are made to embody and forth in a distinct form the doctrines or precepts of the age it supplies all that was wanting to a clear apprehension of them; it gives them a living, breathing, and animated existence; they are no longer obscure and indefinite shadows passing off without our being able to seize them, but they are made to stand before us in the full proportions of the impresses one beauty of real life. There is a companion constantly associated between our own character and condition, those of some others. But if we see principles of action exemplified in men who have like passions with ourselves, He who reads the parable of the profligate of the vineyard, who went one morning to another, and finally his beloved son to receive the fruit of his labor, sees now those successive parables as if in his soul, as he read on they succeeded in presenting the problem, not injective of or precepting the remiss, that he could gain by the most elaborate description & circumstantial detail. And here we may perceive one peculiarity of the parable, as of all other parables; that is, that the acts are not chosen from among the inferior animals, they are men like ourselves, the taking of the human race. It is the interest in this conduct, by a sympathy in their fate, began
It is something whose every imitation in the way we are called.
thus the truths of principle to be inculcated come home thus,
known your lessons with the greater force of efficacy.

And another reason may be mentioned for the use of parables.
They afford the best method of attacking insinuated prejudices.
while passions in such names as not to create the
offense of malignant or hostile feelings. Where it
becomes necessary to rectify errors, to dissipate delusions, to
reform our ways, to bring the offender to a sense of his danger
and guilt, perhaps there is no way in which the difficult task
be so well executed, of the painful truths that must
be told or successfully insinuated into the mind, as by
insinuating them under the veil of a new name.

I have already spoken of their use
in this respect with regard to the Jews: but the principles
is a special one. If it does not allply with as much
force to all men of all ages as it did to the Jews, having
still its correctness of its power are verified by every day
experience. We owe it to the source of truth, not to dim
its influence or prevent its reception; by inculcating among
us a host of passions of bitter feelings, against it. Distinct
we should never fear to declare in some form of what we be
lieve to be right: we should never casually desert the standard
of truth. But discretion & good judgment are always the
use of. Now we know there are many likelies for men of
strong passions at war with the advice we would give with
principles we would inculcate, we should approach them
with caution & tenderness, that we may subdue them the
more effectually. The parables of are remarkable exam
ples of this wise & conciliating mode of instruction. Take
for instance at the parable of the good Samaritan. It
was directed against the most obstinate prejudices &
the most exclusive feelings. If you had asked the question
who is my neighbor? If he was me, that remembered of
a people who thought none but their countrymen enti
fited to their regard, he treated the rest of the world. If
as Sai. had endeavored to prove his judgment, that he
was to consider all mankind, even his enemies, as the
Samaritans as his neighbors - he would doubtless ha
tested away from x with contempt & disdain, all his
native prejudices would have arisen up in arms against
or offensive a doctrine; & he would probably have become
deeply confirmed than ever in his errors... But instead of this, how maliciously does one and all proceed to state the impiety and impiety of this exclusive national spirit. By the faithful and the sincere, & the question, teach it, he indirectly compelled the Jews to convict himself... having brought them to the self-condemning conclusion, & thus to bring to the reason, he was prepared to listen to the spirit of obedience to the charge of Knox there do likewise. (In the C.T., there is another instance, in which hardness of guilt, so much more difficult to be subdued than any prejudice, was touched & softened by the application of address. I mean that, in which Nathan applied to David. The king of Israel, notwithstanding his complicated crime, seems to have been some mean of filling in conscience to find some means of repressing in full reflections. On the throne of Israel, he slept over his guilt, & forgot that he had enconfessed it to the consciousness of his own conscience. Then was the royal whisper to be awoken? & Nathan directly & truly charge him with his crime, & threatned him with the punishment of it, & then, that, as the

the transport of resentment would have driven him from his presence, made him feel his vengeance: so he would have sought for excuses of one kind or another to soften & palliate his crime. But Nathan wisely addrest a different course: he brought it before the king, being a picture of his guilt, veiled under the outward conduct of another person in a similar case; this evoked his natural emotion, made the judge of his own case, & his condemnation was forced from his own mouth. When Nathan said, "Thus saith the man: the king was secretly obbliged to the confession of the heinous sin."

Heaven know. I have been before the Lord? These examples finely illustrate the power of the success of the mode of conquering prejudice & enforcing guilt by the indirect & cautious mode of urging him. 

From this brought before you some of the reasons, which I suppose to have induced our Saviour, to speak to the people so much in parables; & thus we find an
answers to the question of the disciples as constituted our text... I have made these remarks by way of an introduction to some explanatory notes, intended occasionally to guide, in my discourses, of the parables of the N.T. They are certainly among the most valuable parts of the volume of divine truth. They diffuse a charm for grace around the instructions of our Saviour, (it must be inexpressible heart that can resist them) They present bright and beautiful pictures of heavenly truths, where the light of the Word are so finely dispersed, that while the heart is made better, by the view, the eye is solemnly delighted; Foh is in these subjects, if in any, my soul that ought to feel an interest; while we are bound, by divine instructions, to admire the divine wisdom, it appears in all our Saviour's instructions; let it not be in vain, that the Bible has brought the truths of heaven to every one from the cottage to the throne; while the beams of truth are unfolded, let it not be our condemnation that we have loved darkness better than light.  Sept. 1820.

Other, from whom comes all that is good, all that is pure, fountain of wisdom, and source of light, may our minds may be disposed to receive instruction from those holy words. May we listen to the divine teaching of our Saviour, in all its forms, may receive light, and profit from them all. But it not be in vain, that the laws of divine wisdom has come to us by J.C., let every one learn from day to day to understand better and practice more purely the duties of our holy religion. May we feel that we are responsible to the Saviour, and made as in the fear of love. May His mercies, through the power of at least to thyself and thy.
At home, Decem. 29. 1820, forenoon.