

out a parable spake he not unto them." This is an important and interesting topic, which we shall treat by offering a few observations on the subject of parables in general; upon the nature and design of those delivered by the Saviour, and upon the probable reasons which influenced him to adopt this peculiar mode of conveying his instructions; and especially the remarkable one which he expressly assigns for employing it on the occasions already stated, "without a parable spake he not unto them."

There is an essential point in which a parable differs from simple fiction. In all others fiction and parable are identified; they are both the creations of fancy—pure inventions, or facts heightened, and thrown into imaginary combinations, by that faculty of the mind which delights to expatiate in ideal regions, where creations and combinations are wonderful and without end; which was certainly bestowed upon us for good; and which not to employ would be a reflection upon our Creator, as if he had endowed us with an essential property, that he intended to be either useless or pernicious. The element of the imagination is fiction, as much as reason is the element of understanding, and love of the affections.

But the parable is not merely a fictitious narrative, it has always an end beyond itself; it sustains the character and belongs to the order of means; it is constructed to answer some purpose, either political, moral or religious; and under some peculiar circumstances is admirably adapted to produce effect. The word "parable" is derived from the Greek word, which signifies "the comparing two things together;" it is a similitude, or agreeable kind of allegory, which means more than meets the eye; it is the fanciful disguise which truth sometimes condescends to wear when she would associate with her enemies, subdue their prejudices, or silence their invectives. Of parabolic fiction we may observe, that it had its origin in the most remote antiquity; that it has been employed by the greatest and wisest instructors among all nations, and through every age; and that it has the special sanction of the inspired volume.

In the early ages of the world the principal channels for conveying instruction were poetry and fable; the highest powers of reason were little exercised; they were the allotment of a few. Legislators, philosophers, and priests, all resorted to persuasion rather than to argument, and depended more upon the imagination, and the passions of mankind, than upon their understanding and judgment. Whether they were to be induced or subdued, to be led to engage in some new pursuit, or to abandon one already undertaken, to admit a truth, or to reject a prejudice, the instrument used to effect it was some beautiful fiction or allegory, which influenced them as by a charm. The origin of parables, so far as we can trace it, appears to have been with the Hebrews. It is most certain that the oldest specimen of this kind of writing is to be found in the Scriptures, which carry us far beyond the earliest fragments of antiquity, into the earliest ages of the world. The earliest Greek writers were poets, who blended philosophy with allegory. The earliest Egyptian writing consisted in symbols, which gave birth to this kind of composition. The prevalence of parables, through all antiquity, is indisputable. Aristotle calls a philosopher a lover of fabulous tradition, as folding up the principles of true wisdom in the veil of fiction. The uncertainty in what class we ought to place Orpheus, whether among the race of living men, or among the imaginary gods and heroes which fancy produced from Egyptian symbols, and their characteristic epithets, induces us to look to Homer, as furnishing the earliest exemplification of this mythological instruction. After the poets, philosophers employed this method

to convey their doctrines. The Fables of Philostratus, and of Esop, proceed on this principle. The mode of teaching by fables among the Greeks is first ascribed to Hesiod; nor are all the fables assigned to Esop the invention of that sage; but he seems to have brought this parabolic method to great perfection. Pythagoras taught by emblems, and pointed enigmatical sentences. Plato, whose sublime philosophy has procured for him the title of "divine," conveyed his sentences by metaphorical delineations; and frequently guards his readers against terminating their researches in his allegories, but exhorts, that they should, through the metaphor, penetrate to the things concealed under his images and symbols. This mode he borrowed from the Hebrews and Egyptians; he even sometimes mentions Syrian parables; but he concealed his tradition from the Jews, partly because their separation from all nations made them to be held in hatred and contempt, and partly to secure to himself the consideration of having taught, by this fascinating and useful mode, to a greater extent and in a more beautiful form than others. All the philosophers adopted the parabolic manner, more or less, until the times of Aristotle; who first took from philosophy the veil of fiction, and clothed it in a dress more simple. I have only to remark under this head, that the most celebrated philosopher of the heathen world, he, who so greatly excelled in wisdom and virtue, as well as in the art of communicating both, that he was the glory of his own times, and still continues the admiration of posterity; that venerable man actually employed the last moments of his valuable life in embellishing with the graces of poetry, the beautiful and instructive inventions of Esop; nay, if we may trust his own account, he was urged to this task, by an impulse of that Sovereign Power, whose perfection he described through the thick mist of Pagan superstition. And how far the employment was consistent with so distinguished a character we may form some judgment from hence, that in all succeeding times, the same method has still been adopted and applied to the important purpose of instructing the rulers of nations in their tender years, as the easiest and best way of forming their minds to the love of excellence, and engaging them in the pursuit of wisdom; but we need not have descended to modern times for a proof of this point, which receives a full confirmation from a well-known instance in the records of the Roman people. In the happier and better times of the republic, about 260 years from its commencement, we read that the one half of that rising race of heroes was in the very act of separation from the other. In the height of a war, in the crisis of public danger, the people, from a sense of ill-treatment, real or imagined, vowed an eternal disunion from the senate, to which they were attached by all the ties of duty and of interest. But what are obligations, or arguments, to an inflamed multitude, resolved at all hazards to redress themselves and punish their rulers? Yet, from this state of confusion did a single senator reduce them to order in an instant, by means of an expedient, which his good sense, assisted by his knowledge of the human heart, suggested to him. And what was this expedient? The seasonable application of a moral fable. Nor is there wanting, in the politer periods of Rome, a more illustrious instance of the same truths, exemplified by the same illusions, "If the foot shall say, because I am not of the hand I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? and if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?"

This fitly introduces us to the sacred volume, where instances of this mode of teaching abound, and where every instance is perfect in its kind. Four examples permit me to select, they are incomparably beautiful, and the interest which they cannot fail to excite,