

the king's heart, she carried her point, and Absalom was suffered to return.

The fourth instance of this mode of instruction is the matchless parable of Nathan to administer reproof to his guilty sovereign. The reason of thus censuring the royal offender is evident. That the heart of David was insensible to his crime, or hardened against it, appears from the circumstance, that, during at least nine months, he seems to have felt no compunction, and had expressed no penitence. In this state of mind openly to have attacked his conduct would have irritated, but could not have melted him. The prophet has therefore recourse to a parable, the parts of which display the most correct judgment, and the most exquisite feeling. The substance of it was calculated to rouse all his passions as a man, and all his justice as a monarch; and its application, like an unexpected stroke of thunder, smote his conscience, and destroyed his security in a moment. "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 brought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him and his children; it did eat of his own meat, 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 to him. But he 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 thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." It is scarcely possible to read this parable without tears. What Bathsheba was to Uriah, as the wife of his bosom and his only beloved—the cruel injustice of the monarch, who had even too many indulgences—are most touchingly portrayed in the ewe-lamb of the poor man, his only lamb, nourished and brought up with his children, and most dearly prized,—and contrasted with the wealth, power, and oppression of the rich man, whose cruelty is represented as wanton as his measures were unjustifiable, insulting, and violent. The indignation of the king, which followed a tale which he supposed was matter of fact, is natural and strong; his judgment is severely just, and it is confirmed by an oath. At this moment, the tremendous, the abrupt charge, "Thou art the man;" changing the monarch into a criminal, turning upon himself his anger, his justice and his sentence; at once depresses the heart, and demonstrates more powerfully than could a thousand arguments, the force and fitness of this mode of instruction. It opened the eyes of the royal penitent to his guilt and danger; and the powerful emotions of his mind are exhibited in the most affecting and beautiful psalm which he wrote on this occasion, Psalm li.

CHAPTER III.

FROM these striking instances we pass on to the New Testament, to the unrivalled fables of Him who "spake as never man spake." Into a discussion of their particulars or aggregate merits we shall not enter, but simply state their general nature and design.

The parables of our Lord have a character in common with those of other teachers, and one peculiar to themselves. They are beautiful, transcendently beautiful; they adorn without seeking to do it, every point of doctrine and every moral precept. Grace was poured upon his lips, and flowed through all his

instructions; the specimens of the pathetic and sublime, from the Old Testament, already adduced, are surpassed in those parables which enliven the preaching, and enrich the discourses of our Lord.

Their simplicity astonishes while it informs; they are great without effort; and captivate by approving themselves to every man's conscience. The magnificent productions of genius may excite our admiration; but here a Master-hand is manifested, by giving dignity which would by another be overlooked or despised, and in making the plainest feature of nature, or the most ordinary occurrence, an occasion of unfolding the most important truths, and the means of illustrating and enforcing them.

A character of infinite importance is attached to these parables; others were directed to a particular purpose, and answered a given end; they secured their object, and in so doing, resigned their agency. To censure an ungrateful people, to trample upon under foot in some individual instance, to awaken the feelings of a parent, to reprove an offending sovereign: these were grand designs, and were effected by their corresponding parables; but those of Jesus always interest, because they aimed not at one thing, but at every thing interesting to man. What sublime doctrines were conveyed by them! They elucidated the great scheme of redemption; they placed in various points of view the principle upon which it proceeds, the reception it met with in the world, the difficulties it had to encounter, the triumph it would finally secure, and the punishment which must follow its rejection. They unlocked the mysteries of the kingdom, even the deep things of God; death, judgment, hell, and heaven, were shadowed forth under familiar but striking images; the precepts of religion were enforced by showing the operation of different principles in the human character in a figure; thus embodying that which, in a more didactic shape, might have effected less, or have been wholly disregarded.

The peculiar character of these parables was their variety and extent. They put in requisition the whole course of nature—nothing was overlooked—nothing neglected. It was said of Solomon, that "he spake of plants from the hyssop that groweth upon the wall to the cedar of Lebanon." This was his praise as a naturalist: but of Jesus, as a teacher, we may say, he left nothing in nature untouched, from the grain of corn falling into the ground and dying, in order to multiply (which he made the symbol of his own death,) to the glowing orb of day, which he exhibited as the faint representative of himself, when he said, "I am the light of the world;" and in all this illimitable range of illustration he elucidated spiritual and eternal things not simply by narratives framed in the imagination and brought to bear upon a moral subject, but by his analogies, to be traced between surrounding objects and visible things, he made plain the principles advanced and enforced in his sermons; thus blending types and parables; appealing to the judgment through the senses and the fancy; carrying this figurative mode of teaching to a greater extent and perfection than it had ever reached before, and divesting it of every thing evil, rendering it subservient exclusively to good, "opened men's ears, and sealed their instruction." In thus delineating the character of our Lord's parables, we have anticipated their general design—which was to answer the grand end of the mission—to fulfil his office as the prophet of the church, "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." The truths and duties which these parables embody and enforce are of interesting nature, of universal application, and of perpetual obligation. But this form of conveying these instructions was chosen for reasons which depend on local and temporary considerations; and which arise out of the cha-

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