

*JÜLICHER ON THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF  
THE PARABLES.*

It is now thirteen years since the first part of Jülicher's work on the Parables of Jesus appeared. It was promised then that this part, which was of the nature of a General Introduction, would be followed within six months by a second, in which the parables would be examined in detail, and treated on the lines laid down in the first volume. The second part, indeed, was already written, but circumstances intervened which prevented its publication; and it was only at the end of 1898 that the second volume appeared. In view of the completion of the work, the occasion appears favourable for giving some account of the general principles it supports. No more spirited protest has ever been raised against the traditional method of parabolic interpretation than is to be found in the earlier volume. Long as the book has been before the world, it is questionable if it is so well known to English theologians as it should be; and even at this late date it may not be inopportune to direct attention to a work whose importance, as a contribution to the literature of the subject, is beyond all question.

In this paper it is proposed to give a short account of two of the most interesting sections in the book—those which deal with the NATURE and the PURPOSE of the parables of Jesus. The former is the more important; for our conclusion as to the purpose of the parables will depend in great measure on that which we have reached regarding their nature; and to it—following Jülicher—we shall devote the greater space.

First, then, as to the NATURE of the parables of Jesus. We find in the Synoptic Gospels certain sayings of our Lord—twenty in all—described as parables. That number, of

course, is by no means the limit. Many other sayings are, without doubt, to be reckoned as parables, which are not expressly so named by the Synoptists. But in order to avoid false conclusions, Jülicher resolves to keep strictly to the sources. We must not start, as is often done by those who have treated the subject, with some theory of parables of our own, and decide that such and such sayings of Jesus are to be included in the category. Our use of the word is not authoritative for the New Testament, and the twenty examples, expressly designated *παραβολαί*, surely supply sufficient material, from which to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

The word *παραβολή*, which the Evangelists apply to these sayings of Jesus, is suggestive. We naturally think of its connexion with *παραβάλλειν*, and are tempted to draw conclusions therefrom. But these conclusions would be reliable, only on the assumption that the Synoptists had coined the word themselves. But this is not the case. Steinmeyer has a theory that parable was a form of teaching peculiar to Jesus. But there is nothing in the Synoptists' use of the word to support that view. No one would suspect, for instance, from the casual manner in which Mark uses the word for the first time (iii. 23), that he is applying it to a form of speech hitherto utterly unknown. And in Luke the word is introduced first (iv. 23) in connexion with a saying, not of Jesus Himself, but of His hearers in Nazareth. With the Synoptists, *παραβολή* is plainly a word familiar to all. They give no explanation of it. They do not feel that it needs any. The disciples hear Jesus conveying His teaching in a certain form, and, quite naturally and spontaneously, they characterize His word as a *παραβολή*. We read of certain questions which they put to Jesus regarding His parables, but never of one as to what a parable really is. To the disciples, as to the Synoptists, parable is a current term of familiar import,

not by any means a new name to designate a new form of doctrine.

Matthew gives us a hint (xiii. 35) as to whence this familiarity with the term *παραβολή* proceeds. He finds in the teaching of Jesus a fulfilment of the prophecy, Psalm lxxviii. 2, *ἀνοίξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου*. The importance of the quotation for us lies in the fact that it refers us to the LXX. as the source in which we must seek an explanation of the New Testament idea of parable. The classical use of the word does not come under consideration. In the Gospels the word represents some Hebrew or Aramaic word, with which Jesus and His disciples designated certain of His sayings; and as the word *παραβολή* is so consistently used by the Synoptists for this purpose, we conclude that the selection of it did not originate with them, but was already determined by long familiar use. From the LXX. we have no difficulty in concluding what was the Hebrew equivalent. Matthew identifies the parables of Jesus with the *παραβολαί* of the LXX. in Psalm lxxviii. 2, and the *παραβολαί* of the LXX. are identical with the Hebrew מִשְׁל. With very few exceptions, which indeed appear to be due to chance, the Hebrew מִשְׁל is, in all its meanings, consistently rendered by the LXX. as *παραβολή*.

But, unfortunately, there seems to be as little unanimity of opinion as to the nature of the מִשְׁל in the Old Testament, as on the question of parable in the New. Amid the conflicting definitions of the various authorities, it is difficult to reach any satisfactory conclusion. Jülicher thinks that the root idea in the word is that of comparison. The comparative particle ׀ plays a leading part. Whether it be present or absent, the idea of comparison is always there. Similes, proverbs, allegories, all the various forms and figures of speech which receive this name מִשְׁל in the Old Testament, have this one thing in common—that there is

always some likeness expressed or implied, there is always some comparison instituted.

Among the approximate synonyms the most important for our present purpose is the חידה or riddle. How closely related the two are, is shown in the words in which Ezekiel introduces his allegory of the vine and the two eagles (xvii. 2), חוד חידה ומשל ומשל. And the reason of this close connexion is evident, for every riddle is founded on comparison. Thus, for instance, Samson's riddle to the Philistines, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," is really a series of metaphors. The eater and the strong are put for the lion, meat and sweetness for the honey. But close as is the relation between the two, משל and חידה are not identical. We are not told of Solomon's exchanging משלים (instead of חידות) with other royal persons; while, on the other hand, when we read of his 3,000 משלים, we understand the term to refer, not to riddles like that of Samson, but to such sayings as we find in the middle chapters of the Book of Proverbs. At a later time, indeed, we find that the משל and the חידה are practically identified. In the apocryphal literature—notably in Sirach—obscurity and difficulty have become essential characteristics of the παραβολή or משל. We meet with the phrase εὔρεσις παραβολῶν just as we have λύσεις αἰνιγμάτων, and the expression ἐν αἰνίγμασι παραβολῶν is interchangeable with ἐν παραβολαῖς αἰνιγμάτων. This, of course, is the natural result of the influence of scribism, whose tendency was to claim honour to itself by magnifying the obscurity of the Scripture which was the subject of its study. But the fact that this characteristic of obscurity was the predominant one in the conception of משל among the scribes at the time of our Lord, need not prejudice us as to His use of the term. He had little sympathy with their labours; and just as, in the Sermon on the Mount, He breaks away from the traditions

of the scribes and reaches back to the Law itself, so on this question of the  $\lambda\psi\omega$ , it is probable that He was more in sympathy with the great Moshelim of ancient Israel than with their latest interpreters.

With the Evangelists it is another matter. It is only too plain that to them obscurity is an essential characteristic of the parable. Let them speak for themselves. Take John first. In His farewell address to His disciples Jesus says (xvi. 25): *ταῦτα ἐν παροιμίαις λελάληκα ὑμῖν· ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμίαις λαλήσω ὑμῖν, ἀλλὰ παρῤῥησία περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπαγγελῶ ὑμῖν.* And the disciples reply shortly afterwards (xvi. 29): *Ἴδε νῦν ἐν παρῤῥησία λαλεῖς, καὶ παροιμίαν οὐδεμίαν λέγεις.* We have this word *παροιμία* used again in x. 6, with reference to the figure of the Shepherd and the sheep: *ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐκεῖνοι δὲ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τίνα ἦν ἢ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς.* Now the word *παροιμία* does not occur in the Synoptists. But it is used sometimes in the LXX. to translate  $\lambda\psi\omega$ , and the conjecture lies near that by *παροιμία* =  $\lambda\psi\omega$ , John means the same thing as the Synoptists by *παραβολή* =  $\lambda\psi\omega$ . One thing is plain, at any rate—that to John obscurity is characteristic of the *παροιμία* = *παραβολή*. The disciples are delighted when Jesus passes from such dark, mysterious sayings to plain, open speech. The *παροιμία* admitted of no *γνώσις* on their part (x. 6). There is a hidden meaning which they cannot grasp. Word and thought have parted company. The hearers receive only *τὰ λαλούμενα*, not *τὰ ὄντα*. The *παροιμίαι* are virtually *αἰνύματα*, exactly like that of Samson to the Philistines.

With this view of John's the Synoptists agree. We have a parallel to the above passages from the fourth Gospel in Mark's: *οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην, καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γνόσεσθε;* (iv. 13). Again, iv. 9, 23, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"; and iv. 24, *βλέπετε τί ἀκούετε*, are a warning that some deeper meaning lurks

beneath the words. That obscurity belongs to the nature of parables is expressly declared in Mark iv. 12, where, in the words of Isaiah, it is said that the hearers of the parables see and do not perceive, hear and do not understand. The parables are a method of teaching intended for the multitude who do not possess the *μυστήριον* of the kingdom of God,—selected expressly with the purpose that they may not obtain this *μυστήριον*. From the disciples *γνώσις* is not withheld, but they attain it, not through the parables, but solely through special private instruction on the part of Christ, *κατ' ἰδίαν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ἐπέλυνεν πάντα* (iv. 34). So far of Mark. The position of Matthew and Luke is exactly the same. In Luke viii. 9 the disciples ask forthwith *τίς εἶη ἡ παραβολὴ αὕτη*; and Jesus answers (viii. 11), *ἔστι δὲ αὕτη ἡ παραβολή*. Plainly word and meaning here are two different things. The words tell of what befell the seed which the sower sowed. The meaning is that such and such is the reception which the Word of God meets with in the hearts of men. So again in Matthew xiii. 36 the disciples make the request: *διασαφήσον* (so Jülicher would read) *ἡμῖν τὴν παραβολὴν τῶν ζιζανίων*, reminding us of the definition of an old scholiast *παραβολαὶ μὲν τὰ εἰρημένα καὶ δεόμενα σαφηνείας*. It so happens that the word *διασαφέω* is the one used by Josephus (*Archæol.* v. 8, 6) in connexion with Samson's riddle. And the interpretation, the *λύσις*, given to the reader of the Gospel is exactly on a line with that which Samson receives of his riddle. *Ἐξ ἰσχυροῦ ἐξῆλθε γλυκύ*, runs Samson's riddle (*Judges* xiv. 14), and the interpretation is, *τί γλυκύτερον μέλιτος; καὶ τί ἰσχυρότερον λέοντος;* (xiv. 18). Jesus's parable runs: *ἦλθεν ὁ ἐχθρὸς . . . καὶ ἐπέσπειρεν ζιζάνια ἀναμέσον τοῦ σίτου* (*Matt.* xiii. 25), and the interpretation is: *τὸ καλὸν σπέρμα οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας· τὰ δὲ ζιζανία εἰσιν οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ· ὁ δὲ ἐχθρὸς . . . ἐστὶν ὁ διάβολος*. It is difficult to see what difference there is between this *παραβολή* and that *αἴνιγμα*.

The reason is plain why, according to the Evangelists, the parables are so dark—because all the principal terms in them require to be understood in quite a different sense from the literal one. The hearer, in order to *συνιέναι* must substitute for the *ἀκούμενα* other conceptions (*νοούμενα*) borrowed from a different sphere. What that other sphere is, and what these conceptions are, must be revealed to him. Without that the parable remains a riddle. In the parable of the sower, the seed *is*, to the *συνιείς*, not seed, but the Word; that which fell by the wayside, a certain class of hearers; and so on. There is, of course, a certain resemblance between the thing signified and that which takes its place in the parable, between the *νοούμενον* and the *λαλούμενον*. The selection of certain ideas to represent those which the speaker has in his mind is not, that is to say, pure matter of caprice, as if one were to say “mouse” when one meant “tower,” or the like. The seed has a certain resemblance to the Word, the field to the world, just as in Samson’s riddle there is some ground for representing the lion by *ἰσχυρός*, and the honey by *γλυκν*. But the discovery of what the ideas are, which the terms introduced represent, is a matter of as much difficulty in the parable as in the riddle.

To sum up the Evangelists’ conception of parable,—it is a speech in which the familiar conceptions introduced conceal subjects of the highest importance, subjects which, on comparison with the conceptions which are substituted for them, are found to exhibit a certain resemblance to the same.

So far, then, of the Evangelists’ view of parables. Is it that of Jesus? That is another question. Jülicher is convinced that it is not. In order to decide the question we must examine more closely the conception of parable here before us.

There is little difficulty in concluding what place, among

the required figures of speech, we are to assign to the parable as understood by the Evangelists. It is plainly nothing more or less than an allegory. It has not always been perceived by those who have protested against the allegorical interpretation of the parables, that they were contending against the principle of interpretation recognised in the Gospels. Paul's interpretation of the passage regarding the two sons of Abraham (Gal. iv. 22-26) is founded on the model of that of the parables given in Matthew xiii., "the seed is the word," "the enemy is the devil"—*αὐται* (*i.e.* the *παιδίσκη* and the *ἐλευθέρα*) *γάρ εἰσιν δύο διαθήκαι*. And Paul knows the right name for such figures—*ἄτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα*. Among the definitions of allegory we may note that of Suidas, *ἀλληγορία ἢ μεταφορά, ἄλλο λέγον τὸ γράμμα καὶ ἄλλο τὸ νόημα*, and Quintilian's concise description: "aliud verbis, aliud sensu ostendit."

Allegory, like metaphor, belongs to the figures of speech founded on comparison. It is, in fact, an expanded metaphor, the difference between the two consisting in this, that while metaphor has to do with only one conception, allegory introduces a connected series of conceptions. To arrive at a better understanding of the nature of allegory let us, then, start with the germ from which it springs—metaphor. Metaphor is a figure of speech founded on similarity. It is closely allied to the simile, which also rests upon the *ὁμοιον*. But the distinction between the two is clearly marked. Take some examples from the Gospels: "Satan will sift you as wheat" (Luke xxii. 31); the multitudes are *ἐσκυλμένοι καὶ ἐρριμένοι ὡσεὶ πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα* (Matt. ix. 36); "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. x. 16); "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings" (Luke xiii. 34)—these are similes. "To devour widows'



houses" (Mark xii. 40); "Be whole of thy scourge" (Mark v. 34); "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Mark x. 21)—these are metaphors. That both rest upon the *ὁμοιον* is evident. Jesus's efforts on behalf of his people are *like* the anxious care which a hen shows for her brood on the appearance of danger. The illness, under which the woman with the issue of blood was suffering, is *like* a scourge under which one smarts. So far simile and metaphor agree; but the agreement extends no further. For there is this broad difference between them, that while simile puts the two similar objects side by side for the purpose of comparison, metaphor substitutes for the original one the strange one which resembles it. In both figures a foreign object is introduced. In Matthew ix. 36 Jesus is speaking, not about sheep, but about the multitudes; in Mark v. 34, not about a scourge, but about an illness. But in the latter case no mention is made of the illness, which is properly the matter in question, but only of a scourge. Every simile may be converted into a metaphor; *e.g.*, Matthew x. 16, "Be serpents and be doves"; every metaphor into a simile; *e.g.*, "Be healed of thy disease, which torments thee like the whip under which the slave smarts." But the unsatisfactoriness of the result—in the one case, unintelligible metaphors, in the other, long-winded similes—is a proof of the wide difference between the two. The simile, which always contains some comparative particle, such as *ὡς*, compels the reader to compare the two objects that are laid before him and observe their resemblance. The illustration is intended to be a help to him, to aid his understanding, as in Matthew x. 16, or to excite his emotions, as in Luke xiii. 34, or to rouse his will, as in Matthew vi. 7, where the addition *ὡσπερ οἱ ἐθνικοί* serves to strengthen the warning *μὴ βαττολογήσητε* by calling up a picture of those whom the hearer has no desire to resemble. But in order that the simile succeed in its purpose,

we must give full effect to the *ὡς* or *ὡσπερ*, and carefully compare the two objects it presents to us. Every word is to be understood literally. The *ἄχλαιοι* are *ἄχλαιοι*, but the sheep to whom they are compared are also real sheep; the shepherd is not Jesus but a real shepherd; Jerusalem is Jerusalem, but the hen, the brood, the wings are likewise all to be understood in the literal sense. They mean the same here as in any book on poultry. Only on that understanding can we make the comparison to which simile invites us. But in metaphor it is quite different. The scourge in Mark v. 34 is not a scourge, but a painful disease which resembles it; the treasure which we are to lay up in heaven is not a real treasure of gold or silver or precious stones, but something which resembles such earthly treasure. That is to say, metaphors are not to be understood literally. One thing is said and another thing is meant. Instead of the two objects being placed alongside of each other, as in simile, one is substituted for the other.

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*(To be continued.)*