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# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—THE INDISPENSABLENESS OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY TO THE PREACHER.

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PROFESSOR FLINT, of Edinburgh, in closing his opening lecture to his class a few years ago,\* took occasion to warn his students of what he spoke of as an imminent danger. This was a growing tendency to "deem it of prime importance that they should enter upon their ministry accomplished preachers, and of only secondary importance that they should be scholars, thinkers, theologians." "It is not so," he is reported as saying, "that great or even good preachers are formed. They form themselves before they form their style of preaching. Substance with them precedes appearance, instead of appearance being a substitute for substance. They learn to know truth before they think of presenting it. . . . They acquire a solid basis for the manifestation of their love of souls through a loving, comprehensive, absorbing study of the truth which saves souls." In these winged words is outlined the case for the indispensableness of Systematic Theology for the preacher. It is summed up in the propositions that it is through the truth that souls are saved, that it is accordingly the prime business of the preacher to present this truth to men, and that it is consequently his fundamental duty to become himself possessed of this truth, that he may present it to men and so save their souls. It would not be easy to overstate, of course, the importance to a preacher of those gifts and graces which qualify him to present this truth to men in a winning way—of all, in a word, that goes to make him an "accomplished preacher." But it is obviously even more important to him that he should have a clear apprehension and firm grasp of that truth which he is to commend to men by means of these gifts and graces. For this clear apprehension and firm grasp of the truth its

\* As reported in *The Scotsman* for Nov. 18, 1888.

snowstorm of a few weeks ago, an old soldier whom had become poverty-stricken and ill, and who, tho he had a little money, lodging-house-keepers were unwilling to take in for fear he should die on their hands, crept into the hay in the cellar of a livery stable and died. The world has no welcome for the discouraged, the broken down, the defeated, the hopeless. Only Jesus Christ has a welcome for such. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

**A DEMAND FOR PUBLIC SPIRIT.**—The other day, on one of our city streets, a vicious young hoodlum brought out a rat which he had caught in a tenement house, and putting it down, trap and all, on the sidewalk, brought forth a kettle of boiling water and proceeded to have "fun" by pouring the hot water over the wretched victim. His sport did not last long, however, for an energetic young clerk on her way to work, seeing the cruel deed, shouted: "Stop that at once!" The brutal creature only looked at her in astonishment and laughed. Then she pleaded with him to be merciful, and he mocked her. Then she went to a policeman and had him arrested and taken before the police court,

and, in spite of her dread of notoriety, appeared against him, and had him punished. Of such stuff heroes and heroines are made. The moral climate of the world would rapidly grow healthier if we all followed her example.

**REPENTANCE THAT COMES TOO LATE.**—A pitiable illustration of sinning in haste and repenting at one's leisure without avail occurred the other day in New York city. A husband and wife, both young people, had a quarrel and parted in anger. The man rushed from the house, and tho the wife followed him to the door and piteously called after him to come back, he was heedless of her appeal. Three or four hours later, his anger having cooled down, and being now thoroughly ashamed of himself, he started home to ask her forgiveness, and dreamed of ending the evening in peace. Imagine his consternation and grief to find that in his short absence the house had been burned down and the charred, dead body of his wife taken from the ruins. "If I had not left her in anger! Oh, if I could only hear her say 'I forgive you!' was the poor fellow's unavailing cry.

## EXEGETICAL AND EXPOSITORY SECTION.

### OF EXPOUNDING THE PARABLES.

By R. L. DABNEY, D.D., LL.D., AUTHOR OF "SENSUALISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY EXAMINED," LATE PROFESSOR IN THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, ETC.

THE correct expounding of the parables is of vast importance to the preacher, because Christ and the inspired writers gave the parables for direct homiletic use, because their meaning is so wide, and because their exposition has been so often abused.

In the New Testament these illustrations of truth are named both *parabole* and *paroimia*. The former is an idea laid alongside of another for its illustration. The *paroimia* (in the Old-Testament proverbs) is defined by Passow as a wayside truth. Use of both names by the Evangelist is justified by two facts: that said proverbs are parabolic, *i. e.*, express their truths by a figure; and that, in Hebrew, one word answers for both. The fable, the parable, the metaphor, the simile, the allegory, the type, the prophetic symbol, all have this in common, that they indicate an analogy, a parallelism of relation between two ideas, of which the better

known assists in the understanding of the less known or unknown.

Trench makes this difference between the fable and the parable: That the fable ascribes action and force to natural objects, as trees and beasts, which are not naturally possible; but the parable employs for analogy a narration of actions which are naturally possible. Thus he would call Jotham's narrative (Judges ix. 8-15) a fable, where he makes the tree, the vine, and the bramble talk. He would call the words of Nathan to David (2 Sam. xii. 1-8), of Isaiah (v. 1-4), and of Ezekiel (xxxvii. 1-10) parables. A metaphor is an undeveloped simile, and its rhetorical force is the greater, because of its brevity and suggestiveness. A simile is a fully developed metaphor. An allegory, properly speaking, is a detailed narrative, evidently unreal or imaginary, in which each action is designed to represent by analogy the several particular parts of a chain of connected truths. The most familiar and distinct example of the allegory is Bunyan's "Holy War."

We, who are strict constructionists in the exposition of Scripture, hold that there are no proper allegories in the Bible, except in the evidently pro-

phetic passages: in other words, we assert that the actual historical narratives of Scripture are nowhere to be allegorized, because not intended by the Holy Spirit to be allegories, but narratives of facts. Here we array ourselves against that whole army of expositors, so popular and so mischievous, since the days of Origen even to our own time, which sought in the Scripture, besides the grammatical meaning, a spiritual, an allegorical, and an analogical, sense. Here we have the powerful support of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The close relation between the parable and the allegory, as well as the fact that perverse interpreters have allegorized some parables, justifies a word of discussion to support this position. Scholars are aware that the famous passage in Galatians (iv. 24-31) was seized on by the allegorists to sustain their theory of exposition. They have always claimed that Paul here gives us, by example, his authority to allegorize what seems to be but a plain historical narrative of fact in Genesis xviii. 10-14 and xxi. 1-2.

If we remember aright, even Dr. Fairbairn in his "Typology" concedes this example: while he seeks to restrain the hateful and perilous results of such exposition by this caveat, that we are to find types and allegories only in such seemingly narrative passages of Scripture as are thus applied by some other "inspired" man.

We fear this limitation will be found ineffectual. It admits this assumption: that passages of Scripture which, in the view of common sense, are simply and only historical, still may contain a hidden allegorical meaning. After making this fatal admission, we should fail to restrain the vagrant imagination of the allegorists by telling them that it belongs to the Holy Spirit to say where such hidden meanings exist. It appears to me at least doubtful whether the Apostle intended to say that he, himself, will allegorize that domestic history of Abraham's family. The

English version manifestly gives a very unwarranted meaning to the Greek; this is "*ἀτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα*," "which things have been allegorized"; that is to say, by somebody (most possibly by rabbinical expositors; who gratified their bigoted pride by making Ishmael stand for the pagan world, and Isaac for their own chosen people).

A very different affair, truly, from Paul's saying that he, guided by inspiration, found a valid allegory in this simple historical narrative, and thus gave us, by example, his authority for finding such hidden things in other plain historical passages!

Coming now to parables themselves, we propose these four principles for guidance in their exposition:

1. Like all other Scripture, they must be expounded "according to the analogy of the faith." The meaning of one Scripture must be consistent with that of other Scriptures. This rule follows immediately from two facts: That truths are essentially interconsistent, so far as comprehended; and that God, being omniscient and infallible, will never truly contradict Himself. Hence if we really get His meaning in two Scriptures, they must be interconsistent.

2. Doctrines are to be received primarily, from the literal and didactic passages of Scripture, and not by analogical, human inferences from particular features of parables. The reason is, that the direct, unfigurative, didactic propositions in Scripture were intended by God for nothing else but propounding truths; while the parabolic, like all other figured passages, were intended to illustrate truths. They are in a sense, "dark sayings." Their direct apprehension requires the perception, not only of a truth, but also of an analogy between that truth, and some natural action or thing. Here our first rule has its use. Interconsistency must be preserved between dogmatic, didactic declarations in Holy Writ, and our construction of figurative analogies. And here the author-

ity of the direct dogmatic statement must dominate our construction of parabolic figures.

The history of doctrines is full of burning instances of the mischievous abuse of this rule. Thus a semi-Pelagian argued from the words of the prodigal (Luke xv. 18), "I will arise and go to my Father," that the repenting sinner turns himself to God, without any need for the call of the Spirit. A good Papist argues the Romanist dogma, that God created Adam "*in puris naturalibus*," and that his first righteousness was a supernatural grace first lost in his fall, from the parable of the good Samaritan, where the thieves are said to have first stripped their victim of his clothes and then wounded him (Luke x. 30). In the parable of the lord and the unforgiving servant, Socinus seizes on the master's words (Matt. xviii. 32), "Oh, thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me," to argue from it that no expiation for guilt or satisfaction to law is needed to provide for the free forgiveness of sin by God.

What is all this but an insolent attempt to make the Holy Ghost responsible for what He did not say? On this insolent plan the silence of the inspired writers might be made to teach every vagrant fancy of every heretic. Parables are intended to be word-pictures. Their effectiveness depends on definiteness, rapidity, and brevity. The inspired limner puts in so many lines and strokes as are needed to make the picture present his main points of truth. He does not add all possible details, because these would ruin the definiteness of his picture. Nothing, therefore, may be inferred from the omission of supposable details.

3. Our Lord has Himself given an express and full interpretation of two parables: The sower and the seed (Matt. xxiii. 3) and the tares and the wheat (Matt. xxiii. 25). These are the expositor's models. He should study them, comparing the emblems

with the truth intended, until he is thoroughly imbued with their method.

4. Our fourth rule is most important in this respect, that it is most frequently violated. The detailed features of the parable are not to be forced to teach truths other than those contained in the sacred writer's avowed scope. This scope is always clearly stated or sufficiently indicated in the context, sometimes at the beginning, sometimes at the end of the parable. Common-sense should dominate in the exposition. This rule does not teach that every parable is to be limited to the illustration of one single point of doctrine; we do not adopt the exposition which compels the parabolic narrative to confine itself to a single point. While each parable certainly has some one, central truth which it chiefly seeks to inculcate, this one truth may be a center to other connected truths, which may also find their illustrations in the explanation of the principal truth. But, on the other hand, a parable is not to be made an allegory, it is not to be assumed that the sacred writer is dovetailing each individual tenon in the features of his parable into its particular mortise, in a system of didactic truths.

The real purpose of the parable is to present a vivid word-picture which may assist in the teaching and better apprehension of some main truth (sometimes with a few connected truths). Therefore the sacred speaker may add features for the sake of giving vraisemblance to his picture; nothing more.

Here are a few instances of the absurdities sometimes resulting from this abuse. In our Lord's parable of the steward (Luke xvi. 8), this dishonest man is described as wheedling the tenants and debtors so as to secure for himself future hospitality, by conniving at villainous frauds on his master. Our Savior relates that the proprietor heard of this cunning trick, and commended its shrewdness. Then follows Christ's application of His parable. "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends

of the mammon of unrighteousness," etc. Are we to infer hence, that Christ recommends to Christians dishonest uses of their wealth, and promises future blessedness as the reward thereof? This would be impiety. No! Our Savior is enforcing simply the central idea, that Christians are only stewards, not owners of their worldly riches, and, therefore, their wisdom is to employ them righteously in this life, so as to gain good from them in the life to come, after they shall be stripped away from us.

In Luke xviii. 1-8 is the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. The picture presents us a widow imploring aid from a judge who is devoid of respect for God or public opinion, and the plaintiff, a widow, helpless and unprotected, here prays for a righteous verdict against the opponent in her suit, but meets with utter disdain and indifference; her case seems hopeless, without family or proper means of support, and with a selfish, imperious atheist for a judge, who has already repulsed her; yet at last he gives her verdict. The judge explains that he has yielded to her claim from a very unworthy and contemptible motive, namely, his fear of being worried or teased by her, not by a proper sense of justice. Does this authorize the expositor to teach that believers may expect to tease or worry God into granting their petitions? This would be near akin to impiety, yet it would result naturally from this overweening method of exposition. Christ Himself gives us the real scope of this parable. It is to impress on us the proposition that perseverance in prayer will succeed with God, where our petitions are guided by faith (verse 8). This promise, He illustrates in the parable by a beautiful argument *a fortiori*. In the case of the poor widow, she succeeded by simple perseverance, with everything against her in her own surroundings and the character of the judge; how much more will the perseverance of believers prevail with God, when everything is in their favor—the

infinite love and faithfulness of the Judge, the blessed support of the communion of saints, the glorious advocacy of the Son, the eternal electing love of the Father toward His petitioners,—this is the scope of this blessed parable, and it is not to be pushed any further.

Again our rule receives illustrations from the notable abuses of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 19 to end). The scope of our Savior's teaching is to show the dire future misery which follows upon the life of the unbelieving, self-indulgent, and the abuse of wealth in this life. This leads Him to set forth the closely connected truth, that extremest destitution and poverty are comparatively light, if borne with Christian faith and patience, because of the magnificent reward with which the future life recompenses the Christian grace which endures temporal miseries aright. Or the teaching may be summed up in this statement, that eternity will reverse the worldly judgments of unbelieving men, so that he whom they deem the wretched will prove the blessed one, and he whom they deem enviable will prove to be the miserable wretch, because his earthly prosperity was abused by unbelief and selfishness; and nothing is to be foisted into the parable except those truths, which are scripturally and doctrinally connected with that main scope. A corollary from this truth is the one illustrated in the latter portion of the parable—that unbelievers deceive themselves, when they imagine that startling, supernatural events would subdue that carnality which refuses to hearken to the sufficient evidence of Holy Scripture.

But let the overweening method of exposition be taken, then Christ may seem to be responsible for the following propositions: That the home of the Old-Testament saints is but one department of a Hades; that the home of lost spirits, at least until the resurrection, is another department of the same Hades; that intercourse may and

does frequently take place between the souls of the redeemed and the lost; that disembodied lost spirits are susceptible to the pains of material fire; that the pains of the damned are purgatorial in the Popish sense, *i. e.*, work sanctification in the soul, since the soul of the rich man, before selfish and ruthless, now cherishes pious anxiety for the salvation of his brothers,—a dawn, in fine, of true repentance. Now there is no scriptural support or authority for a single one of those propositions. The Rabbins taught such a Hades, but is there one word of Scripture to tell us where it is, and whether the homes of the saved and the lost are neighboring parts geographically of the same place? Or whether there is actual intercourse, or what is the nature of the miseries of disembodied lost souls, before the resurrection? Is there one word of doctrine, which countenances the idea that penal misery is sanctifying? No! Our Savior did not mean to teach these propositions, He meant to teach the great Bible truth taught throughout the Scriptures with the vividness of a picture; and, to make this picture intelligible and impressive to a Jewish audience, He admits the current Rabbinical ideas familiar to His hearers only as a part of the make-up of the picture; not as parts of His didactic system. These examples ought to be sufficient.

To sum up their lessons: The expounder must practise modest caution; he must ascertain clearly the real scope of the sacred writer; he must let this govern and restrain him. He must feel that it is far wiser and more honest to stop even this side of the limits of legitimate inference, than to gratify his fancy or craving for novelty or desire of brilliancy by risking a transgression of those limits into the territory of doctrinal error. He should teach himself to judge this as a very solemn and awful sin; the sin of putting into the mouth of the Omniscient Christ and the Holy Spirit words which They did not speak.

I have set down my protest against allegorizing. As any one might expect, expositors who are infected with this itch allegorize the parables also, and that with the most mischievous results. This one of the rich man and Lazarus presents us with an instructive instance. Many of the prelatial Fathers with Theophylact insist on finding here an allegory. They will have the luxurious rich man symbolize the Jewish Church, and Lazarus the Gentile body. The riches of Dives represent the rich and ecclesiastical privileges of Jewry. His luxurious abuses represent the Rabbinical Pharisaic perversion of Mosaic doctrine, of legalism and self-righteousness. The poverty of Lazarus symbolizes the spiritual destitution of the pagan world. The desire to be fed with fragments from the rich man's table represents the eagerness of the Gentile mind to receive spiritual revelation from the Jews. The dogs who licked his sores symbolize the different schools of pagan philosophy which vainly sought to satisfy the Gentile mind in its hunger after spiritual truth; the death and damnation of Dives represent the overthrow and exclusion of the Jewish body from Christ's Church; the blessedness of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom represents the admission of the pagan world to its blessings, etc.

The best refutation of this dream is the simple statement of its own results. If this allegory is correct, then the exclusion of Jewry from the Gospel blessings is irreparable and final; "a great gulf fixed," etc. But Paul, in Romans xi., teaches the exact contrary, both figuratively and didactically. It is not true that the pagan world laid itself at the portals of the Hebrew Church, as a petitioner for the light of their Scriptures. As a body, the pagan world treated Jewry with boundless scorn and contempt, and the religion of the Old Testament as a despicable superstition.

Here and there a man of pagan birth, like the centurion of Cesarea, received the Old-Testament religion; but they

were the rare exceptions. It is not true that the schools of pagan philosophy, Oriental, Alexandrine, Athenian, or Roman, aimed to alleviate the spiritual need of pagan souls. Their whole teachings aimed to support the arrogance of pagan unbelief, to deny the vital doctrines of original depravity, regeneration, and the resurrection of the body, which were the butts of their scorn and ridicule. The velvet tongues of the dogs alleviated the pains of Lazarus much; soothing and cleansing his ulcers from their pus, and other irritating exudations. The pagan philosophers produce no other effect than to aggravate the vice and miseries of their homes and societies; to rot out their civilization, and to drive thinking minds into despairing skepticism, materialism, and atheism.

Surely such warnings of error and futility ought to be enough for sober minds.

Now Paul intimates: Let us see the puerile and suicidal results of that ideal fancy; the law given on Sinai was given to the Hebrews primarily; and if it implies a bondage, it is the Hebrews, not Ishmaelites and other pagans, who were enslaved by it. So then I have the authority of your own allegory, gentlemen Pharisees, for asserting that the present Jewish Church, having rejected its Messiah, is the enslaved community, and that Gospel believers, irrespective of Israelitish lineage, are the emancipated. Your own

allegory destroys your own conclusions. So I recommend that both of us drop allegories, and follow the good old doctrine expressly taught in both Testaments, that sin and selfishness enslave the soul, and faith and grace emancipate it, whatever be the lineage. Let the beautiful coherency of detail expressed by Paul's doctrine, with his own scope in this epistle, be considered.

I hold, then, that inspired men give us no authority to allegorize the historical narratives or the parables of Scripture; all are to be understood in their own obvious grammatical sense, interpreting Scripture by Scripture. The best practical argument against the Origenist theory is derived from its abuse in every age; it has filled the church with vast aggregations of the inventions of prurient minds, misled by some false expositors, claiming for them the authority of divine doctrines.

If this way of interpretation be once allowed, there is no limit left to the corruption of religious beliefs, except the possibility of the wildest human fancies. Anything, or everything, which a depraved imagination can do, may be thus foisted into the church's creed. It is a historical fact that the allegorists have advised or cherished every false dogma which has corrupted and cursed the church of this day. To a certain class of minds, the temptation to this abuse is as alluring as it is mischievous.

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## SCHOOL OF BIBLE STUDY.

By D. S. GREGORY, D.D., LL.D.

### THE THIRD GOSPEL.

THE first three, or the Synoptic, Gospels have been seen to be Evangelistic in their origin and aim, seeking to call out from the great Gentile races of that age those who, having been saved by faith in Christ as Jesus and Lord, should

constitute the Church or Kingdom of God on earth. Matthew prepared the Gospel for the Jew; Mark for the Roman; Luke for the Greek. Toward the close of the century—long after the other three Gospels had been sent out—John produced his Gospel—as will be seen—for the Christian and the Church.