

elsewhere in the Psalm there are examples of incomplete parallelism, these are mostly incomplete parallelisms of a different kind from those which occur in Psalm cxiv.

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### THE IRONY OF JESUS.

THE irony of Socrates consisted in the fact that he always pretended to be on a level with, or even inferior to, those with whom he conversed. Himself the wisest man of his time, he gave himself out to be the most ignorant and foolish: of better life and manners than the vast majority of the Athenians, he associated with persons of loose morals, as though he were one of themselves: one of the ugliest of men, he drew attention to his ungainly features, and at the same time saved himself from the ridicule of others by claiming to be one of the most handsome.

Jesus never put Himself on a level even with the best of His contemporaries. The Jew of His day was, both in point of enlightenment and in point of morality, far superior to the citizen of Athens of the time of Socrates, yet Jesus consistently claimed to be superior to the best men of His nation, not merely of His own day, but of the best age in its history. He claimed to be a greater legislator than Moses, wiser than Solomon, and a preacher of more authority than Jonah. But although He never pretended to be on the level of those whose teacher He was, He not unfrequently made His hearers imagine that they were on a higher level than, in His opinion and in point of fact, they were. When He spoke of ninety and nine *righteous* persons (Luke. xv. 7, cf. on the other hand, Matt. xviii. 17: a *publican* and a Gentile), the Scribes and Pharisees whom He was addressing inevitably took the compliment to themselves and were doubtless intended to do so, however little in the eyes of Jesus they deserved it.

On another occasion He encouraged His disciples by making them believe that they had greater insight into "the mysteries of the Kingdom" than the rank and file of the crowds who came to hear Him, to whom the stories which He told them, and which have come down to us in the barest outline, were interesting tales and nothing more (Matt. xiii. 11 ff.)<sup>\*</sup> For it is impossible to suppose that those familiar parables, the longest of which could be spoken in a few seconds, could in their present form, have arrested and retained the attention of an eastern crowd. Such a fable as that of the Prodigal Son or that of the Labourers in the Vineyard would, no doubt, when delivered, be filled with such a wealth of detail and fulness of description that it would occupy, it may have been, an hour, or even more. It is only on this supposition that the mere story can have become an end in itself to the multitude, and have made them forget or neglect to look for a spiritual meaning. The sense to expect and the ability to perceive the inner meaning was, Jesus said, confined to the twelve most intimate disciples; but it must have humbled their pride and detracted from their satisfaction to discover that they were quite unequal to the task of reading the moral of such a simple fable as that of the Sower (Mark iv. 13), or of the Tares (Matt. xiii. 36), and could not understand how a person is to be considered unclean, not on account of what goes into his mouth, but on account of what comes out of it (Matt. xv. 15 f.; Mark vii. 17 f.).

It is a part of the irony of Jesus, too, that these parables were told to the multitude with the express purpose of withdrawing their attention from, rather than leading it to, the facts and laws of the spiritual *régime* whose inauguration He proclaimed. There was no reason why Jesus should not have spoken as plainly to the general crowd as He did to "His Twelve."<sup>1</sup> They were just as capable of

<sup>1</sup> So the Syriac.

understanding Him as these, and would have made as good use of their knowledge, but Jesus preferred that each one should find this kingdom for himself. The majority, indeed, never discovered it at all. They had listened to words that told of the relation of God and man, of the human soul, and of the meaning of life, and they had heard nothing but entrancing tales of things that happen every day. They seemed to be fulfilling the words of an ancient oracle: they "listened without hearing, and looked without seeing" (Matt. xiii. 14; Isaiah vi. 9).

Sometimes the fact that Jesus was making use of irony may have been apparent to those to whom He spoke, but as a rule it seems to have escaped their observation. When the Pharisees sought to account for His occult powers by saying that it was by the chief of the demons that He cast evil spirits out of men, His reply was—"Your own sons then—by what power do they cast them out?" (Matt. xii. 27). Jesus would not have admitted that the sons of the Pharisees possessed such powers, and the form of the answer indicates that the Pharisees themselves were aware that the claim was unfounded, though in this instance they may not have seen that Jesus was ridiculing their pretensions. At other times there was no attempt to hide the irony. After exposing the illogical position of the strict Jews in such matters as that of washing the hands before meat and the observance of the rules of cleanliness generally, quite apart from inward purity and integrity, Jesus apostrophises them: How finely you frustrate the divine commandment by your tradition! (Mark vii. 9; cf. v. 6, Finely has Isaiah prophesied of you, etc.).

The same weapon was used to curb the eagerness and still the excited feelings of His too zealous disciples. When the Seventy (or Seventy-two) returned from their first preaching expedition, somewhat elated by the unexpected success

of their mission, and most impressed by the fact that evil spirits had proved obedient to their powers of exorcism, Jesus rebuked their too great enthusiasm by saying in irony that no doubt they had dealt a final blow to the kingdom of darkness, that, in fact, He had seen Satan falling as fast as lightning from heaven, adding at the same time that the power to exorcise bewitched persons was after all a small matter (Luke x. 17 ff.).

At times the irony of Jesus takes the form of innuendo. When one "learned in the law" asked Him which was the principal commandment, Jesus not only answered his question, but added the second commandment also, about which the questioner had not asked, but of which he had much need to be reminded (Matt. xxii. 35 ff.). St. Luke adds that the Pharisee forthwith required a definition of the term "neighbour." In answer Jesus related the story of the "Good Samaritan," which does not supply the definition sought, but would certainly bring home to the listener the truth that, whoever obeyed the second commandment, it was not the class to which he belonged (Luke x. 30 ff.). In St. Mark's version of the incident the scribe adds a comment of his own upon the answer of Jesus which draws forth the remark, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," the irony thus taking the form of *litotes* (Mark xii. 33 f.).

But the most common shape in which the irony of Jesus shows itself is that of sarcasm directed against his persecutors.

The Pharisee's prayer (Luke xviii. 11 f.) and the lurid description of the end of the rich (Luke xvi. 22 ff.) form a biting exposure of the life and fate of the average man of wealth of His day. In the latter passage the irony passes from one phase of bitterness to another, and the whole piece is only surpassed in intensity by the scathing invective of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew. In this outburst of passion Jesus presents a complete contrast to Socrates, who was always the

calm philosopher, who believes that all error is due to ignorance and that man requires only to be shown the good in order to follow it. To the Greek, life consisted largely of abstract thinking and the correct expression of thought, and the mainspring of his activity was the search for truth. Jesus was a Hebrew, and to the Hebrews, as to the Semites generally, the prevailing motive has always been an intense craving for justice, especially for justice for the poor. It was injustice to the poor, practised by those who were the acknowledged instructors and exemplars of the common people in religion and morals, which excited the irony and indignation of Jesus as nothing else did. In this He was only following in the footsteps of every one of the long line of the moralists and reformers of Israel. If there is nothing of this in Socrates, it is because the poor and the slave were nothing to him.

Sometimes, on the other hand, a personal note entered into irony of this intense sort. When His opponents corrupted one of His most intimate disciples and took advantage of His being in a lonely place, in which He appears to have concealed Himself during the last night or two of His life, He taunted them with not daring to arrest Him by daylight and in public (Matt. xxvi. 55). Yet to the three whose drowsiness permitted His enemies to approach unobserved, and even to the traitor himself, His irony was of the gentlest (Matt. xxvi. 40 ; Luke xxii. 48).

Finally, there is a considerable number of passages in which the irony is of the lightest, and might rather be called raillery or even banter. This is so in the familiar conclusion to a discourse, If any have ears to hear, let him listen ! One incident which has nonplussed the apologists is that known as the " cursing of the fig-tree " : No fruit be on thee again for ever ! (Matt. xxi. 19). The most natural explanation is that Jesus spoke in jest, as any Syrian would do to-

day. It may be said that this does not account for the fig-tree immediately withering ; but neither does any explanation account for that. Only a few minutes later He crossed the Temple-priests in argument in a way that is supposed to be characteristically modern (Matt. xxi. 24 f.), and on the day before, when the same persons remonstrated with Him for disturbing the wonted solemnity of the Temple courts, he replied that were the children to hold their peace, " the stones would at once take up the cry " (Matt. xxi. 15 ; Luke xix. 40). Here, as in other places (Matt. xxiv. 2, and often), we have no doubt simply a hyperbole, but the irony of it consists in the fact that those whom He addressed doubtless took the words literally.

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