

Symbols.

- "I will come again, and receive you
unto Myself" JESUS.
- "Whom having not seen ye love" PETER.
- "Be patient therefore, brethren" JAMES.
- "We shall see Him as He is" JOHN.
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SYMBOLS.

WHY is the Apocalypse written in language for the most part symbolical? Hear a popular writer quoting another writer :

“It is a language of ideas rather than words. It speaks by pictures rather than by sounds. . . . When God deigns to talk to man He must use the language of man. The Scriptures were designed for the whole world ; hence it was meet that their predictions should be couched in what may be termed a universal language, but the only universal language in existence is the language of hieroglyphics. The key to the scriptural hieroglyphics is furnished by Scripture itself, and when the import of each hieroglyphic is thus ascertained, there is little difficulty in translating, as it were, a hieroglyphical prophecy into the unfigured phraseology of modern language.”

Then the popular writer goes on to say that every rule has exceptions, but

“Any system of interpretation that violates this fundamental law of the book is thereby stamped as erroneous. . . In the Apocalypse Babylon does *not* mean Babylon, nor Jerusalem Jerusalem, nor a Jew a Jew, nor the temple the temple,” &c.

Now, while the first writer seems honestly feeling his way to a clue, the second writer would puzzle us more than the most formidable array of hieroglyphics. According to him, the statement of what a thing *is* is just what that thing is *not*.

Let us turn from the “universal language” and the science of negations to the word of God. Gather round the Lord Jesus. Sit at His feet, and hear His word as He opens His mouth in parables, and utters things kept secret from the foundation of the world, even those seven symbolic utterances con-

cerning the kingdom of heaven which are the admiration of the faithful in every age since.

The Lord had taken His position in one of the fishing vessels on the sea of Galilee, and was addressing the great multitudes that were gathered together to Him, and standing on the shore. He was speaking in parables ; that is, He was clothing the import of His words in the simplest incidents and language of every-day life. He had just ended His first discourse about a sower sowing seed, shewing that the seed found its lodgment in different kinds of resting-places ; that some seed got appropriated to another use than was intended before it even germinated ; that other seed germinated, but died for want of nourishment ; that other seed germinated and had nourishment, but was crowded out by other and ranker growths. But other seed fell into con-

genial soil, was properly nourished, and had room to grow and produce of its kind, but that all was not equal in abundance, for some yielded little more than half what others did, while others only yielded half of that ; adding, significantly, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Arrived at this stage of His discourse, His disciples approached, and enquired of Him why He was speaking to the people in parables.

In answer to which came the weighty response which is the divine KEY to symbolic teaching : “Because *it is given unto YOU* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to THEM *it is not given.*”

Then that principle, so contrary to human ideas, viz., “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”

That is why, says the Lord, "I speak to them in parables: because seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, 'By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.'"

Next we see the *reason* of the symbolic teaching. The testimony was indeed to be presented *outwardly*, but inasmuch as Israel saw not the Lord's glory in it, as Isaiah did; inasmuch as they had cultivated indifference of heart to it, had shewn no sign of interest in it, had been occupied with their own concerns, and let God's interest in them pass by with unconcern; therefore this indifference which they had shewn voluntarily should be fixed upon them judicially. They should be *rendered* slow of perception, so as not to take

in the marvellous revelation of God's glory about to come ; the eye should be dulled, the ear slow to perceive, the veil should be upon the heart. God had called, and they had refused. God had stretched out His hand, and no man had paid attention to it ; they had set at nought His counsel, and snuffed at His reproof. Would He spread out His heavenly treasures by His super-eminent Son before a graceless, thankless, unappreciative people ? No. If children refused their mercies, God would make children of Abraham out of the stones in the road rather than His word to their fathers should fail in its accomplishment. He would make choice of a few—one here, and one there—and He would specially endow *them*. He would make them willing ; He would cause their eyes and ears to take in : if not all at once, yet by degrees they should grasp and understand those

mighty plans that were to be read under the simple words and childlike tale spread out so artlessly by this remarkable teacher, Himself so simple and guileless that a mere babe might ask Him questions, and yet so wise, that if a hypocrite asked a catch-question He would so answer him with his own words as to leave him like a gnat scorched in the flame of his own seeking. The few men given Him by His Father out of the dark world were these specially favoured ones, to whom He could say,

“But blessed are your eyes, for they *see*; and your ears, for they *hear*. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” (Matt. xiii.)

Let the spiritual reader turn back to

the beginning of this paper, and peruse the definitions of the "universal language" advocate, and the discoverer of the law of "negations," and match them against the utterances of the Lord Jesus, and he will not fail to discover that, so far from a "universal language," "Scriptures designed for the whole world," &c., these prophetic utterances, meaning exactly what they set forth, are meant only for such as shall receive the kingdom of God as little children, and by eyes, ears, and hearts divinely opened to see what the multitude fail to see.

But it may be urged, You set out to tell of symbols, and you have discoursed on parables. The answer to which is, that both words have their origin in the same word, the preposition being different in form, but the same in sense; so that while "symbol" tells you to take the simile *together with* the

thing it assimilates, the “parable” tells you to take the simile as *parallel* to the thing it assimilates, which comes to the same thing, and is the same thing. When Ezekiel (xx. 45) is told to set his face toward the south, and drop his word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field ; and say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of Jehovah ; Thus saith the Lord Jehovah ; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree : the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it : it shall not be quenched,—what is the response of those so solemnly addressed ? Ezekiel has to return answer : “ Ah, Lord Jehovah ! They say of me, Doth he not speak parables ? ”

So, the same prophet (Ezek. xxiv. 3), is told to utter a parable to the rebellious house. "Say to them, Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it," &c. ; and under this most striking parable, uttered on the day Nebuchadnezzar set himself against Jerusalem, did the Lord Jehovah denounce the bloody city, shewing that not only should the choicest of the choice be seethed in the city, but that the city itself should be cleansed like a copper pot made red-hot to rid it of its impurities.

• We get thus divine light on the nature of a symbol or parable. It is not a "negation," nor an "opposite," nor a "hieroglyphic," nor a "universal language," nor a thing that may be classified into a dictionary, but it is the Lord Jehovah making His communications among a rebellious people, so that the rebellious may know that it is He who

speaks, whether they grasp the meaning or not, but that those who tremble at His word may not only know that it is *He who speaks*, but also know and understand *what He says*.

Take Christ Himself as the Crucified One, and behold Him variously estimated by three classes. To the Jew He is a stumbling-block; to the Gentile, foolishness; to the believer, the power of God—the wisdom of God,

Mistrust, therefore, these men who “judge after the flesh,” who do not rise above earthly things and earthly thoughts. Daniel fasted three whole weeks, and ate no pleasant food, and humbled himself before God with a view of getting His mind; and God heard his prayers and appreciated his desires, and not only gave him to understand that he personally was greatly beloved, but he got an insight of the divine counsel concerning his people,

extending over twenty-five centuries, and was instructed that all their future blessing should be bound up in Messiah.

This is a day in which the child of God needs to be well instructed in the divine purposes, for the "time is at hand," and the Lord is near. He says, "Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear [lay hold of] the words of this prophecy [Revelation] and keep [that is, make them their own] those things that are written therein : FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND." It is in view of the nearness of this time, and the effort of the enemy to distract the mind of the people of God with the vain imaginations of men, that this series of papers is written and issued from time to time. But although help may be afforded by them, it is only in hearts divinely prepared that they will be understood. What is meant by *prepared* will be gathered from Luke i. 17, where the

angel says of him who was the Lord's forerunner, that "he should make ready for the Lord a *prepared* people."

The last prophet who testified to Israel before the Lord's first coming thus encouraged the godly: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him...For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven."

Symbols. Yes, we shall have to speak of many symbols to those whose heart is opened by the Spirit of God. And "the wise shall understand." (Dan. xii. 10.) Not the wise of this world.

Not those who mind earthly things. Not those whose affections are on things of the earth. Such are content with what they can gather from "the times and seasons"; and as the wise are to be taken in their own craftiness (1 Cor. iii. 19), it may possibly be that, when too late, these may find out their error; for that day is to come "as a snare" (Luke xxi. 35), "as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Peter iii. 10), "as travail upon a woman with child" (1 Thess. v. 3). "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I NEVER KNEW YOU. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." (Matt. vii. 22, 23.)

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