

HARD SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

VI.

Therefore speak I to them in parables ; because seeing they see not and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. *MATT. XIII. 13.*

IF almost any one of us were asked to give off hand the reason why Jesus used parables in his teaching he would be likely to reply that it was for the purpose of making his meaning plain to a people dull of understanding in spiritual things. It is apt to be a surprise to us to have our attention called to the fact that when Jesus himself was asked the same question he gave the very reverse as his reason. He used parables in order that they might not understand. That this was the meaning of his answer is evident even from the statement in Matthew's gospel as given above when we read the context in which it stands. It is still more apparent from the parallel passages in Mark and Luke. "Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without all things are done in parables ; that seeing they may see and not perceive and hearing they may hear and not understand." (*Mark iv. 11, 12.*)

Nor does this stand alone as the solitary instance of such a procedure in the Bible. The very language in which it is stated here is but a free quotation from the commission given to Isaiah when he was called

to be a prophet and bidden to speak so as to "make the heart of the people fat, to make their ears heavy and shut their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn again and be healed." On more than one occasion too the Apostle Paul quotes the same passage as supplying the key to the manner of God's dealing with the Jews in his own experience. Evidently it is the statement of a law which has a somewhat wide application.

It is not, however, that our first and most natural thought as to the reason for the employment of parables is altogether wrong. So far as his own immediate disciples were concerned his desire was that they should understand his meaning, and understand it all the more clearly because of these parables. Not without success. For though they at first felt somewhat puzzled to catch his idea, he willingly gave them the key to the apprehension of his thought, and their subsequent delight in this mode of setting it forth is shown by the long list of his parables which they remember and record. Succeeding generations