

everything they see: they often hold themselves free to doubt even their own eyes. But in the main, what we can clearly see does exert a definite and controlling influence over our beliefs and actions. Now, there are some mysteries in the kingdom of God of which we can only gain an understanding and to which we can only become submissive through devout and intelligent reflection on the analogies which on divine authority are declared to exist in what we *can* actually see going on around us. When clouds of darkness shadow our spirits: when, even, we see no light at all: Christ comes to us with a parable, and his parable, as it were, becomes a lamp. It lights up the mystery. For what is really the matter? We are distressed because of what we can see in one particular sphere,—the spiritual. Christ explains the mystery by showing what we can see in another and precisely similar sphere: and thereby demonstrates the intimate harmony that prevails between the natural and spiritual worlds: demonstrates it in tones more pronounced than those heard in the suggestion of Milton's angel:—

What if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and
things therein
Each to the other like, more than
on earth is thought?

But we have reached the transition point, and pass on to notice, secondly, THE FUNCTION OF THE EAR IN PARABOLIC TEACHING. "Blessed are your ears for they hear."

Suppose now, you have some particular parable before you: it does not matter which. The eye may see it with lifelike vividness: see it too in much of its spiritual significance: but that is not enough. The ear likewise has its definite function. It must hear, in the twofold sense of understanding and performing. These 'earthly stories' (some of them) have the 'heavenly meaning' hidden away and it requires an attentive ear to catch that hidden meaning. And when the meaning is caught, there must be obedience. The parables are unique in this respect. Men may rise from the perusal of some masterpiece of fiction only to discuss its literary merits, sigh over the sorrows of the heroine, laud the unselfish devotion of the hero, or execrate the villain:—and then put it all back on the shelf. But the parables are not works of fiction. They may have been, and likely were, actual occurrences. And in any case they carry with them tremendous significance in the sphere of moral responsibility. They cannot be put back upon the shelf. They have not been told merely to while away the time. They have not been told merely to excite the emotions or quicken the intellect by a brilliant display of literary skill. From beginning to end they throb with a definite purpose which cannot be lightly thrust aside: a purpose, namely, either to move the will to holy activity, or else restrain the will from unholy activity.