

The overflowing drapery of illustration clouds and diminishes the majestic person of truth, which, when unadorned, is adorned the most. Such teaching is a poor compliment to the religious culture of our people. When Paul uses illustration he apologizes to his readers. He says: "I speak as a man." And again: "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh." He complains to the Corinthians that, because of their carnality, he had to feed them with milk, and not with strong meat. Illustration is needed to simplify what is difficult, and to impress what is valuable, but, beyond a certain point, it is injurious. That the soil of human nature may be properly cultivated, all parts of man should be appealed to. Man should be spoken to as possessing intellect, imagination, affection, feelings, social principles and impressions of the great panorama of nature, but the teacher need not compare till he perplexes and illustrate till he confounds.

The parable teaches that, while the Word—the many-sided and inexhaustible Word—the Word which has something to suit all men, and the same men at all times—which has a key for every lock in hearts that Satan has bound—is the grand instrument of regeneration, yet the process is an individualizing one. The growth is from individuals to masses. Whence arises a difficulty. For when the Word is preached, every man is trying to put it past himself. In this skirmish a stupid man fences with the cunning of a sophist and the skill of a rhetorician. The depraved heart, like Adam, rolls off the prophet's burden. Thus men, when a charge is made, shift its responsibility, and when a duty is urged, shirk its performance. But still the preacher must hunt for the precious life of the individual man until he is able to say and make him feel: "Thou art the man." Let us remember the criticism of Foster on the teaching of one who, in breadth of view, power of metaphysical analysis, chasteness of language, stateliness of march, and general impression, was one of the greatest preachers that ever lived—the late Robert Hall. After a severe analysis, he comes to the conclusion that the very comprehensiveness and grandeur of this great

preacher's addresses was his great defect; causing him to view men in the mass, by which the hearer never felt himself individualized. He concludes that a plainer and humbler man might have done more good. This testimony is all the more encouraging to ordinary men, that such views are eloquently enforced in some passages by Hall himself. Justice to this great subject compels me still to add, that, as we value life, so prayer to God is essential to success in this tillage. A prayerless ministry must be a powerless ministry. The husbandman does much when he waters the seed with his tears. The doctrine of grace, or the efficacy and necessity of the Spirit's operations, constitute a grand feature of the New Testament Church. Faith in this doctrine, and not only faith, but an abiding and universal sense of it, are essential to success. We may work, we may study till we are enfeebled, we may seek aid from every department of truth; but if we do not believe in our own insufficiency, and in the necessity of Divine grace, few souls shall be turned into the righteous way. Human corruption will always prove too strong for human eloquence. The source of natural life and the source of spiritual life are one and the same, that is, Almighty God. Paul plants, Apollos waters, God increases.

III. The next part of this culture is the *work of the church*. The natural seed grows to maturity under the sunshine. So the rays of the Sun of Righteousness are reflected throughout the Church to warm the seeds of Divine truth scattered in human hearts. To exhibit a perpetual testimony of Jesus to the end of the world, the Church preserves the Gospel, the sacraments, and the communion of the saints. She lifts up her voice, sings aloud beside many waters, and makes proclamation to the world on every shore. Unless we form this conception of the Church, as a witnessing and conferring power in the earth, how can we sing a great proportion of the psalms and paraphrases, which are addressed not to God, but to men, and consist largely of offers of the Gospel?

And again, as the climate has much to do with natural growth, so the atmosphere of Christian congregations has a