

Word of God, poetry is the truest inspiration. The true poet is a seer, unbiased by system. His lamp may shed a fitful light; but its sudden gleam illumines for a moment the whole horizon. Above all, let us read the book of human nature for ourselves by intercourse and sympathy with living men, who bear in their bosoms the great heart of humanity. I like not the habits of a recluse, who flits about like a spectre in the great rushing and panting world. We shall best know this soil by knowing ourselves. That we may preach to others, let us practice an honest dissection of our own hearts. Nowhere is the heart of human corruption probed so painfully and so deeply, as in the discourses of Massillon, the great French preacher, whose devoted life kept him a stranger to the ways of the fashionable world, which he reproved; but when he was asked how he could draw such pictures of the passions, he replied, "I have learned them by studying myself."

This parable teaches that as the husbandman must read the heavens, another approach to the human heart consists in a genial familiarity with external nature; which stands like a devotee, with folded hands and veiled head, adoring the Creator—a glorious shrouded worshipper. Nature was the first external revelation made by God to man, and not one of its teachings has ever been withdrawn.

There is a profound analogy, also, between her phenomena and spiritual relations. She hangs out her emblems to the passer-by, and travels with us through all the swift-footed hours. Each of our hearers sees her spectacle, and hears her voice, as he enters our assemblies, and his heart and soul is filled with her solemn music; his mind is written over with her hieroglyphs, the interpretation of which he seeks from the professional expounder of the higher and later message of God to man. The Bible is full of external nature. The great Teacher, standing with his face illuminated with the light of heaven, and his feet amid the blossoms and flowers of the earth, took hold of such impressions as a genial key with which to open up the mysteries of the kingdom of God. To ignore this great book, and to speak to men as if they lived in a dun-

geon, and never saw the sun, is to give our teaching a stiff, pedantic and unnatural air, which will render it less powerful to hearts beating with the warm life of the world and breathing the air of heaven. There is much truth in the reproach of an American writer, who says: "I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say, 'I will go to church no more.' A snow-storm was falling around us. The snow-storm was real, the preacher merely spectral, and I felt the sad contrast, in looking at him and then out of the window behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived or acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in his experience did he import into his doctrine. This man had ploughed and planted, and talked, and bought and sold; he had read books; he had eaten and drunken; his head aches; his heart throbs; he smiles and suffers; yet there was not a surmise or hint in all his discourse that he had ever lived at all. Not a line did he draw out of true history."

From what has been said, I have not meant to inflame the mania for illustration, which has taken the world by storm in religious speech and literature. One feels degraded in being ever addressed in this way, as if he were a perpetual child and had not grown up to be a man and put away childish things. Our fathers confine such teaching to their nursery-literature. Originating with the modern preponderance of the popular element in the settlement and translation of ministers, and the love of popular applause, and disseminated through the influence of certain famous preachers of our time, it has corrupted the atmosphere and debased the intellect of the Church. People like it, because it saves the trouble of thought, and because it is a pleasant and harmless amusement, and so they flock to the sermons of such painters. Under such teaching, so little of the truth can be presented at a time, that it can never be exhibited in its extended relations.