

People, for example, often wonder and complain that they receive no benefit in a particular church or congregation, and they are sure to blame some one for it. But how can they, while they are not alive? Sermons or sacraments or prayers can never give fruitfulness to the seed of truth so long as it remains dead. Without life the Christian minister is a poor player, and the Christian professor a walking shadow.

II. The parable teaches that this life involves the labour of the husbandman, the chief part of whose work is the *preparation of the soil*. The farmer, when the seed has once been sown, commits it to the custody of the Almighty, who alone can make it grow. His labours are then, comparatively speaking, ended. But the toils of him who tills the soil of the human soul of man—the greatest creation in this world—are necessarily more arduous. One soul is vaster than the sphere. The outward man is but the smallest part and least proportion of humanity. Could it be expanded into a visible frame the human eye could not compass it. To prepare such a soil for the seed of eternal truth is no mean employment. And, when we look upon an assemblage of human beings of various individualities, histories, cultures, motives, feelings and inclinations, well may we exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Were it not for the awful authority of the command to preach the truth, who could undertake it? Were it not that the impressiveness of the injunction, the sublimity of the doctrine, and the littleness of temporal compared with eternal interests, sink all mere human feelings into nothingness and vanity, who would dare to put the Gospel trumpet to his mouth? Who would not say with Moses, "Who am I that I should go?" Or with Gideon, "O, my Lord God, where-with shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Or with Jeremiah, "O, Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am a child." Were it not that the weakness of the ambassador reflects glory upon the Monarch of the universe, who would take a hold of this ploughshare and confront the faces of men?

At any period of the world, he that

winneth souls is wise; but how much more in these times, when constant lecturing and writing on religious subjects have formed the soul into a formidable stronghold of resistance. The soil is hardened with reiteration. The arduousness of his work may well appal a skilful and earnest husbandman. Certainly it is an unlikely undertaking for shallow artists. Souls that have been petrified into a cold scepticism of all goodness, a cynical indifference to all good words, must look forth from their windows with a supercilious and amused feeling on the feeble exertions of such men, and be rendered only more secure in their strongholds, more reliant in their self-sufficiency, more fortified in their credulity.

Let me observe, then, that the *first* qualification is *spiritual life*. A candid man, though a little cynical, will not be hypercritical on an earnest preacher, who thinks not of himself, but his hearers. He will forgive the indiscretions of his sincerity. The first question will be: "Pleads he in earnest?" For it is life that begets life; it is fire that strikes out fire; and the hardest and driest edifice is not proof against conflagration.

But this vital consideration does not repudiate method. A preacher shows respect neither for the truth nor his hearers, who trusts to his earnestness alone. As the farmer must study the soil, so the spiritual husbandman should study human nature—a much larger and deeper book than was ever written by any theologian. Presupposing always a familiarity with the Word of God, where human nature is sounded to its greatest depth, I don't think we should cut acquaintance with our old friends, the metaphysicians; especially such as clothe their thoughts in the lucid paragraphs of Dr. Reed, the father of Scotch philosophy, or exhibit such comprehensive views of the passions of human nature as the *sermons of Bishop Butler*. Not a whit below these I place the writings of our poets, whose genius is chiefly employed in working on the deep veins that lie embedded in the soil of the human heart.

Poetry often sees into the depth of human nature with a deeper and truer glance than the cold, clear, analytic eye of the metaphysician. Next to the