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Farewell Sermon.

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PREACHED IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BRIGHTON,

MAY, 17, MDCCCLVII.

BY

WILLIAM GRESLEY, M. A.

PREBENDARY OF LICHFIELD.

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P R E F A C E .

TO THE CONGREGATION OF S. PAUL'S CHURCH.

MY VERY DEAR FRIENDS,

I could not trust myself to say all that was in my heart, when preaching to you for the last time.

Never, perhaps, has there been a congregation between whom and its pastors more mutual sympathy, and good-will, and kindness has subsisted than amongst us, at S. Paul's. Meeting together daily in God's House, for common worship, partaking together continually of our Saviour's blessed Body and Blood, engaged in so many works of Christian charity, it was impossible that we should not be united together in heart and spirit.

Long may this harmony and love continue, though I am no longer with you.

Let me take this opportunity of thanking you most heartily,—not only generally, for the kindness which I have experienced, but, for many special tokens of your regard; some of you for a most beautiful service of Communion Plate; some for the costly and splendid Window which is designed to represent the worship of the Universal Church, as set forth in the Te Deum; and other windows, for my new Church; besides a magnificent Bible, Communion Book, Altar Cloths, and other valuable gifts, more numerous than I can count.

It needed not these costly presents to preserve the remembrance of you in my heart: but, they are gratefully accepted for the sake of Him to whose service they are dedicated.

Ever, my beloved Friends,

Affectionately Yours,

WILLIAM GRESLEY.

MAIDENHEAD,

May 26th, 1857.

A Farewell Sermon.

EPHESIANS vi. 24.

“GRACE BE WITH ALL THEM THAT LOVE OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST IN SINCERITY.”

I do not like to think, my dear brethren, that this is the last time of my addressing you from this place; for though I am about to cease to be one of the officiating priests in this Church, yet, I hope often to visit a place endeared to me by so many associations, and perhaps sometimes to be permitted to occupy my old place amongst you.

Pardon me if, on this occasion, I say a few words of myself.

It is now more than six years since I came here as a visitor, and was allowed to take part in the services of this Church. I look upon it as a great era in my life. I found, as I believed, a Church where a great work was going on for Christ; where, as the Apostle says in the text, men, “loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” The devotion of the clergy to their ministerial labours appeared to me most exemplary and unwearied. In the midst of many temptations to the pleasures of worldly society, they lived a life devoted to God, and to his service,—occupied in winning souls to Christ. I felt that God’s blessing was on the work, and when, soon after, an opportunity arrived, I resolved to offer myself as a fellow-labourer in the vinyard. During the six years of my ministration in this Church and parish, I have never ceased to rejoice and thank God that I had been permitted to take a part in so good a work, and share in the praise, or in the dispraise.

The most prominent feature which characterizes this Church is the care taken in the reverent service of Almighty God.

The worship of God is the great object of our lives. It was for this purpose that we were created. For this purpose, when we had fallen into sin, we were regenerated and born anew, of water and the Spirit. For this purpose, when we sink into the grave, we shall be raised again from the dead,—that we may worship God to all eternity. True worship implies that we “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Without the love of Him we cannot be true worshippers. And such worship I believed that I had found here. Others go to Churches where they may hear the gospel preached: and far, very far be it from me to disparage the faithful preaching of the gospel. But, I confess, that with me the first object was to find a place where God was really worshipped. The most eloquent preaching ill compensates for a cold unreal service.

There are peculiar facilities in this place, beyond

most others, for maintaining a reverent and holy worship. A liberal and unanimous congregation, a skilful choir and organist, seconding the zeal and piety of their pastor, have all contributed to produce the admirable service which it has been our privilege so long to enjoy.

The light in which I have always regarded the services of this Church, is, as an attempt, and a very successful one, to bring out the real capabilities of the English ritual in all its beauty of holiness. The worship of God ought to be accompanied by reverence and grandeur. When God condescended to prescribe a ritual for himself, under the old dispensation, it was ordained to be with splendour and magnificence. It is true that the ancient ritual was one of types and figures of good things to come : and *we* have the anti-types and the reality. Instead of the mere flesh and blood of bulls and goats, we do, as our Church declares, “ verily and indeed partake of the body and blood of Christ.” The blessed Eucharist is ten thousand times more holy than the sacrifices

of the former dispensation. But, is the superior holiness of Christian worship any reason why its accompaniments should be cold and irreverent? On the contrary, we might conclude that the more holy and spiritual our worship, so much the more warm, and reverential, and diligently cared for should be its accompaniments. Such has ever been the practice of the Church universal. No sooner had it risen from the persecutions of the first centuries, than it at once built splendid Churches and Basilicas in honour of Christ, and adopted a reverential and ornate ritual. If we cast our eye over the surface of Christendom at the present day, we shall still see, almost everywhere, the greatest attention paid to the service of God. In our own Communion, unhappily, during the last century, when the love of Christ waxed cold, and few served him in sincerity, much slovenliness and irreverence was suffered to creep in. Our Churches, closed, except for a few hours on the Sunday, became, disfigured with damp and mildew: attempts here and there to

restore something of decency, were, from long disuse, executed in the most tasteless manner. In short, our parish Churches were, very generally, a disgrace to our religion.

We have to thank God that within the last twenty years a better feeling has arisen in this country. A great work has been going on,—nothing less than the restoration of the worship of God throughout the land, to its fitting solemnity,—and that, not by any change or innovation, but simply by drawing forth the resources of our own Prayer Book. The Church in which we are now assembled is one of the results of this movement. It has sprung up from the craving of an awakened piety, for something more of fitness and decency in the worship of God than had recently prevailed.

It is a great mistake to suppose that, in this movement after a holier worship, there is anything connected with the peculiar errors of Rome. Ignorant and designing people raise a cry of Popery, when they see any thing which accords

not with their prejudices. But can it be Popery to restore the English service to its due solemnity—to do simply what the law of the English Church allows or enjoins? There may be those who like things because they assimilate with Rome: others may *dislike* them for the same reason. People will have their peculiar fancies and prejudices. For myself I care only whether it be for the greater glory of God. Whatever tends to express reverence and love for Christ our Lord, and to symbolize and exhibit the great objects of our faith,—this I should gladly see adopted. I do not wish to go beyond the lawful limits of the Church of my country, which have happily been defined, and I trust, set at rest by recent judgments. But whatever of reverent ceremonial is compatible with her institutions, that I hope we shall see gradually restored throughout the land. And for this reason,—because I know from experience that great attention to the general reverence, and even minute propriety, of God's service, has a very

powerful effect to draw souls to God ; it speaks to many minds more forcibly than the most eloquent sermon. Yes, there is an immense influence for good in the reverent service of God, such as we are privileged to join in, in this Church. It has a marvellous power to convert souls from sin and worldliness to true religion ; and to lead them on from grace to grace in the path towards perfection. A poor sinful soul, laden with iniquities comes, it may be accidentally, amongst us: he sees, what perhaps he has never seen before, a congregation of real worshippers, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and look upon his service as the great object of their lives. His heart is stirred within him, and he wishes that he too could learn to worship God. He comes again and again, and still ever feels more and more the sacred influence around him. Example is proverbially better than precept. The sight of a congregation worshipping is more effective, in leading others to worship, than the most urgent exhortation, when the example is wanting. It is

the carelessness and irreverence of the worship in too many Churches which, I am persuaded, is the cause of so few conversions. It is to the care which is taken to give a life and reality to our worship here, which has won so many to our communion, and, I trust, has conduced to the salvation of many souls.

Another principle which we have endeavoured to carry out in this Church, is, to afford every opportunity to the members of our congregation for private communication with their pastors, whether for confession, if they need it, or for spiritual counsel and advice. It has been our practice to dwell much on the need of the worthy reception of the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. How often have we quoted to you the words of our blessed Lord, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." But, it would be most improper and dangerous to urge persons to a rash and indiscriminate reception of their Saviour's Body and Blood,

without a due preparation of their souls by true repentance and faith. To meet this requirement, we have from time to time invited those who were doubtful of their fitness, to come and open their grief, as the Church directs them, "to one of God's ministers, that they might receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice." The happiest results have sprung from thus faithfully following out the instructions of our Church; and many, I trust, will have cause to thank God everlastingly for having been brought, through this Ordinance, to true repentance and an amended life, and taught to "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

I need not remind you that much difference of opinion, and many discussions have arisen with regard to the doctrine and practice of confession. It has been a cause of sincere grief to me (indeed, almost the only great trouble which I have experienced in this place,) that I have found myself opposed, in respect to this subject, to the opinion of one, to whom, in all cases which

appeared to admit of question, it was my duty to yield my judgment—I mean the respected Bishop of the Diocese. I have no authority whatever to say that his Lordship's opinion is changed ; yet, I have reason to believe that it is so far modified, that he no longer considers the opinions held by myself and my friends to be incompatible with perfect loyalty and faithfulness to the Church in which he bears authority.

The very discussion of the subject has had the effect of leading those who are sincere to truth. It is, I think, now very generally admitted, *first* that the principle of Confession and Absolution is most undeniably and distinctly recognised in the English Church. Indeed, it is impossible to deny the fact, unless we set aside the plain sense of words. And, *secondly*, that the practice of it must be left to each parochial minister, and those members of the Church who desire to avail themselves of it, subject, of course, to the correction of the Bishop, if any abuse arise in this as in any other matter. In truth, absolution

is a privilege which the members of the Church have a right to claim at the hands of their priests, in its proper time and measure, just as much as any other Ordinance of Religion. I only wish that more persons would claim the privilege than those who are found to do so. Hundreds there are, now living in sin, and worldliness, to whom the confession of sin might be the beginning of a new life, and the first step towards a happy immortality. There is no one thing so helpful to conversion of the soul to God, and true repentance, as this ordinance of the Church.

With regard to the clamour which has been raised on this subject—those who talk so loudly at public meetings about such matters, would I fear not feel themselves very much flattered, if they knew the perfect indifference with which they are regarded by us. In truth, our only regret has been, to see persons acting with so much bigotry and folly. I can compare their sayings and doings to nothing more fitly than to the blustering

noise of the storm that rages without, when all is peace within our home. Nay, to follow out the simile,—as the rage of the tempest drives men to seek for shelter under the friendly roof, so the very clamour of their controversy has, to my knowledge, driven those who desire peace to take refuge here.

But enough on this unpleasant subject. Let us turn rather to the words of holy benediction, in which St. Paul takes leave of his beloved Ephesians “Grace be to all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Can I, my beloved Brethren, in parting from you, (though it be but for a time,) beseech for you a greater blessing than that ye may love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that His grace and peace may be with you.

It is not the wrangling of controversy, but the loving the Lord Jesus Christ, and the being beloved of Him, that is the great object of all our preaching, all our prayers, all our endeavours, yea of our very lives. He that

hath the love of God in his heart, hath everything of real value, both for this world and for the world to come. "God is love," and "he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God." He that is "rooted and grounded" in the love of God, hath a sure foundation, on which to build the fabric of eternal life. Who can tell the height or depth of the love of God? "We love God because he first loved us." Hereby perceive we the love of God because he hath laid down his life for us." "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God." Must not He who knoweth and believeth these things love God above all earthly things? And yet there is nothing of necessity enthusiastic or high-flown, or beyond the power of an ordinary man of honest heart, in loving the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It is not so much a thing of mere sensibility and feeling, as of earnest sober duty. If God gives sensible, enthusiastic, high wrought feelings of love to any of us, let us be

thankful, and see we be not unduly elated. But if we have not these feelings let us not be disappointed. We may still love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. "This, says St. John, is the love of God that ye keep his commandments." This is the only true test of the love of God in our hearts, that we yield a willing and hearty obedience to His commandments—that we follow His will not our own—seek to please Him by a cheerful obedience. "Who so keepeth His word, says St. John, in him verily is the love of God perfected."

But O! beware of that great rock of stumbling—the great danger of the present day, beware that ye set not your affections on the things of this world. "If any one love the world, the love of God abideth not in him." We must not suffer the world and its absorbing interests, nor our own corrupt passions and desires, to steal our hearts from God. But we must love Him with all our hearts, and souls and strength.

And if we love God, we shall love our Brethren also—that is another test. “If a man says he loveth God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar”. If we love one another God dwelleth in us. We are joined together in Him—so that we must needs love one another, as fellow members of Christ. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we must needs love the members of His body. Therefore as the aged apostle exhorted his beloved brethren with his latest breath—“Little children love one another.”

And then *the Grace of God will be with you and abound*. His grace will surely be with all those who “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” His grace and his peace will be with them. No harm will touch them. The Evil One will have no advantage over them. They will have a strength greater than their own to direct their steps, and keep them from falling. They will go on their way rejoicing—strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

O! may it be so with you my dear Brethren. Cherish in your hearts above all things the love of Christ. Prove the sincerity of your love by cheerful obedience to His commandments, and by your love and charity for each other. Let nothing separate you from the love of God. Beware of the world and its allurements. Beware of covetousness. Keep a watch over the still remaining faultiness of your own hearts. Worship the Lord your God and Him only. Worship Him in the beauty of holiness: delight in His service of prayer and praise, and to partake often, with due preparation of heart, in the blessed Sacrament of your Saviours body and blood. If scruples arise in your minds by reason of your sin and unworthiness, do not hesitate to go, as your Church bids you, to the minister of God's Word, who is appointed for the very purpose of giving you consolation and help. Care not for the rude cavils of the ignorant world, in this, or any other matter. Keep to your Church and her ordinances. Let nothing move you to for-

sake her or to speak evil of her. Live according to her holy laws and you are safe. And above all, let all things be done in charity. “Be kindly, affectioned one towards another with brotherly love.” Speak evil of no man. Love even your enemies. Do not treat them with bitterness—neither with contempt. But, if I might so speak, treat them with good-temper—that is the true form of Christian love towards enemies and opponents. Pray often, watch against sin, “stand fast in the faith—be of good comfort—be of one mind—live in peace—and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

Finally, Brethren, farewell. May the blessing of God be with you all. Mercy unto you, peace and love be multiplied.—Amen.



P O R T R A I T
OF THE
REV. W. GRESLEY, M. A.,
PREBENDARY OF LICHFIELD.

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*Published with his consent.—Lithographed from  
Life, by Mr. Charles Baugniet, to whom the  
Rev. W. Gresley sat.*

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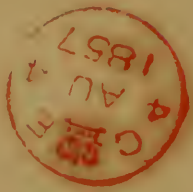
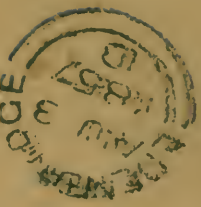
We are authorized to state, that this Portrait has the full approbation of the Rev. W. Gresley's family and friends, and, is considered, by all who have viewed it, to be one of Mr. Baugniet's masterpieces.

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