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FAREWELL SERMON

PREACHED IN

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

AT THE

SCHOOL SERVICE, JULY 24, 1875,

BY THE

REV. JAMES MARSHALL, M.A.

ASSISTANT MASTER, WESTMINSTER SCHOOL.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

Oxford and London :

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“GRATIAS tibi agimus, Domine Deus, pro Fundatrice nostrâ Elizabethâ Reginâ, ceterisque Benefactoribus nostris, quorum ope et litterarum studiis recte in Tuam Gloriam utentes, una cum fidelibus defunctis omnibus ad cœlestem vitam resurgamus per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum.”

A Farewell Sermon, &c.

ST. LUKE xii. 48.

“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”

EVERY truth declared by absolute wisdom is at the same time a law enacted by absolute power. Such a truth, and therefore such a law, is the sentence of the text. The truth is appreciable by the rudest intellect; in no race of men, hardly in any individual man, is the moral sense so debased as not to acknowledge the justice of the law. So that if human nature disregard the truth, or break the law, it is a wicked servant condemned out of his own mouth.

Laws are enforced by penalties and sanctions. The sanction of this law is found in the many stripes which shall be laid on the servant who knew his master's will and did it not.

Here, then, is a law whose meaning we cannot dispute, nor gainsay its justice. Its requirements are strict; the penalty for disobedience terrible. It concerns us, therefore, very nearly to know whether we fall within its scope. Yes; all who hear the law are included under it, as having received much; for the law is part of the great gift, the knowledge of the will of God which is contained in the Gospel. This is the pearl of great price for which the thrifty merchant bartereth all that he has, and blesses himself for the exchange.

But every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, and therefore leads to the knowledge of the giver. Let us consider a little in detail the gifts which we have received. When the Apostle is dealing with quantities so incommensurable as the sufferings of this present time, and the glory which shall be revealed, he yet says, "I reckon." Let us, then, take our tablets, and put down what in common fairness we must reckon as received from God.

First, then, is given us our body, so wonderful a piece of workmanship, that the intelligence of which it is the exponent, has wrung a kind of worship from those who have rejected the God of revelation. And, as the heathen sacrificer held his breath in his scrutiny of the reeking vitals, so the scientific anatomist stands aghast at the multiplicity of functions necessary to effect the simplest actions, and at ramifications seen to run into more intricate complexity as his knowledge advances. This body is a gift; we have power over it. Our will immediately controls its motions; the will has a less immediate but more important influence, in compelling the organized frame to obey the laws on which its well-being depends. Many forms of disease and incapacity are the standing, though unacknowledged evidence, that where much has been given, the much that is required has not been forthcoming. The body wrecked by drunkenness, gluttony, lust, sloth, and uncleanness, not less than the show of their countenance, doth witness against shameless men.

But the thing which animates and directs the body, the soul with all its faculties of feeling and

intellect, that, too, is a gift; a gift whose value outweighs the world.

But a man's soul is his very self; and it seems a paradox to say that a man's self is given to himself, and that he is responsible for himself. It not only seems to be a paradox, but it is one; yet this paradox is attested by the common sense of mankind. All the unwritten postulates on which human intercourse is founded, the material of ordinary conversation, every word of expressed or implied blame, advice, encouragement, admiration, praise, every law passed, every honour conferred or punishment awarded, every epitaph whether true or false, evidences the belief that man is a trustee for himself, and that the trust may be well, and may be ill administered.

This spirit, which knoweth the things that are in man, and by a mystery is the thing which he knoweth, is capable of another gift, by comparison with which all previous endowments sink into nothingness. The spirit of man is capable of the Spirit of God, and through Him of communion with the Son and the Father. The same creative Spirit which moved upon the face of the waters, and gave life to all that is, doth still by the same sign of water re-create the soul unto eternal life in holy Baptism. And here, in presence of omnipotence and infinity, we might think that the much and little of our text was lost; but no, the law is universal, for the world of grace as well as for that of matter and mind. Mystery upon mystery. Again, we are responsible for a power which is absolutely irresistible. The Holy Spirit, that is given through Christ to man, may be grieved by the resistance of

man to His vital impulses, and O what joy does He give in token of His good pleasure. We have seen that encouragements, commands, and prohibitions are grounded on the conviction of human responsibility ; and the Apostolic precept, "grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," is the proof that this growth in grace, which is the greatest thing that we can conceive within us, is supremely and comprehensively the much that is required of us. So that here the analogy of faith holds good. As God the Son when He became man submitted Himself to the conditions of birth and growth, so God the Holy Ghost has willed that His own Almighty operations should in some inscrutable manner be modified by the will of man, in whom He is pleased to dwell.

Now, in human creatures, the growth of every power comes by regulated exercise and use. You will not soon forget the power and penetration with which that truth has been lately brought home to you^a. "To him that hath shall be given," is as truly a law, as that much shall be required of him. Now the world is the appointed place where every gift is to be used and every faculty exercised. The conditions of the world are very different, though they all rest ultimately on the original charter of the race: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

To many this is the literal law of their lives. The prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," is to them a shelter from an actual and ever-present apprehension. The battle between work and want

^a The reference is to a sermon preached by the Head Master, from the text, "To him that hath shall be given."

was the scene on which their infant intelligence opened ; they pass through the same scene to their very entrance on the rest of death, if that mercifully anticipates the cold and dreary security of the poor-house. The powers of the body are stunted by being prematurely taxed, the mind often scanted of nutriment and exercise. For multiplying population requires cheap production, cheap production necessitates division of labour, division of labour means monotony of toil, where the workman is robbed of all interest in his work, all play of intelligence or fancy, all sense and pleasure of creative act.

Now suppose a person were to indulge his fancy, by picturing conditions of life the very opposite of these, how would he proceed ? Would he not say to himself, From infancy to maturity the child, the boy, the youth, shall have his wants supplied without any demand on his own labour,—he shall have that long leave of absence from the productive workshop of the world. All exertion of his bodily powers shall be directed to the development of the powers themselves ; as he grows older, the exercises shall be so regulated by gymnastic science, so artfully combined into games, so seasoned by the zest of rivalry, that they shall not only give command of limb and quickness of eye, but shall at the same time teach control of temper, presence of mind, and power of organization.

The mind shall have the richest and the rarest diet. The greatest works of the greatest intellects of the past shall be its daily food. The student shall read these masterpieces in the grand languages in which they were written, that by the

necessity of comparing widely different forms of expressing thought, he may gain a firmer grasp of thought itself, and trace the one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, and the past contemporary with the present. For him philology shall recall dead languages to life. He shall see the original talent of speech put out to goodly interest: he shall see mankind in its vigorous youth adapting sounds and words to the expression of its multiplying wants and thoughts, by discerning a soul of likeness in things unlike, which is at once the secret of the poet's spell, and the basis of scientific system.

While he thus studies man,—the proper study of mankind,—and finds that, where life and will enter, probability takes the place of certainty, he shall assure himself of the ultimate existence of certainty, by learning the immutable laws of lower matter in the relations of number and magnitude. He shall follow the investigation as far as his intellect will carry him, till perhaps he measures the tension of the invisible web of attraction into which the universe is woven, and stands amazed at the power of the instrument by which he makes the calculation. Neither shall the perception of beauty in form or sound be stinted. The hand shall be trained to fix, in line or colour, the impressions of the sight, or perhaps even the subtler sense that underlies the impressions. The voice in music shall learn a new expression of mind, with marvellous charm over the senses, and yet with that charm dependent on unconscious obedience to fixed laws of number and proportion.

His social instincts shall be developed by com-

panionship ; the collision of mind with mind shall strike fire from both ; membership with a great body shall shame him out of the littleness of self ; a healthy competition shall stimulate his energies. He shall pass from teacher to teacher, so that he shall enter into the labours of many minds, and assimilate what is most choice in the individuality of each.

And all this is but the filling-in of the picture. The main subject has yet to be outlined. Suppose that this society had its roots in the very origin of Christianity in the country ; suppose that the statutes of its foundation spoke of the worship of God, devotion to Christ, hunger for the Spirit as the staple of boyish life ; suppose that every school-time was still begun and ended with prayer, that the members of this body resorted to a Church of matchless beauty, where noble provision had been made for the worthy worship of God, and that, besides, opportunities were made in which the word was divided to them as they were able to bear it, by those whose love and sympathy were too familiar to be doubted. Suppose that after careful instruction and preparation they took upon themselves their baptismal vow, in the presence of deeply-interested witnesses, and sought the grace of Confirmation supported by the prayers of those by whom, and of those with whom they had been taught. Suppose that then a quiet access was open to Holy Communion, as often as any great sorrow or great joy moved them to open their heart to God ; or, better still, when experience had taught them that every state of circumstance was God's opportunity to draw them to Himself, and that the only life worth living was the life of habitual communion with Christ.

Truly, my brethren, this is a picture to make our heart leap within us; surely he, whose goings out and comings in are amidst such blessings as these, is one who has received much. But is not this sketch of the conditions conceivably most favourable to the growth of the human soul here realized in actual fact? Has any part of the description been drawn from imagination? Is not every person here present fully seized and possessed of all this noble franchise? How shall we tremble at the much which shall be required! Tremble indeed, for there are in the background the many stripes of punishment for him who knew his master's will and did it not. But there is a love that casteth out fear. Turn your hearts to God; let stream into them some ray of that love of God who hath given us His only-begotten Son, and has assured us that with Him he will give us all things, by these blessings with which He has endowed you. I do not underrate the toil, the watchfulness, the privation, the suffering, necessary to use God's gifts aright; but I do say, that all these without love profit nothing, and that with love they lose their nature; privation changes to abundance, and labour is regenerated into delight. The several motions of that love, the gratitude which dilates the heart with a sense of enrichment that overmasters its capacity, the rising transport of humility, as it ascribes its gifts one after one to the giver, and finds at last to its delight that not one good thing within it or without it is its own, but that all that is good within it is the stirring of God's Spirit, all without it the token of His hand—this joy, so searching that it cannot be thought upon

without tears, is the obedience which God accepts for His Son's sake. This untold addition of blessing is a rendering of the much that shall be required of us for the much that we have before received. Doth not our Church say truly, "O God, whose service is perfect freedom?" Doth not the Latin yet more grandly set forth the truth, "*Deus, quem nosse vivere, cui servire regnare est?*"

And now, I hope I may say a few words in the name of another^b as well as my own, of the further blessings which riper years bring with them, especially in this place. The young have so strong a sense of life, and so large an interest in the future, that they are ever pressing forward; whatever they meet in life is a means to an end, a thing to be grappled with and conquered; and so they are too busy to discern the fitness and beauty of the things themselves. But as the lease of life runs on, a man takes a more leisurely and intelligent survey of his habitation. The beauty of simple things opens upon him. God's air, and rain, and sunshine, bring a message to his heart. The greensward is a rest and refreshment to his sight. The ordinary patch of country, from which the younger man turns with impatience because there is nothing to be done there, no hill to be climbed, no feature to be talked about to others, will move the more discerning heart of age to say grace unto God, who has spread such a table of delight to feed the eye and sense. So, too, all relations with our fellow-men assume a deeper colour and a higher interest. The young man

^b The Rev. H. Tatham, appointed to the Head Mastership of the Hereford Cathedral School.

often regards as things of course the expressions of love that are lavished upon him,—the warm greeting, the affectionate remembrance, the hearty welcome of hospitality. They are to him merely the small change in the intercourse of life; he scarcely stops to count their number, or note their value, before he thoughtlessly flings them into the wallet of oblivion behind him. But he that has seen more of himself and the world, whose longer continued habit of daily confession unto God has taught him how little there is lovable in himself, is deeply grateful for all indications of regard and kindly construction of his words and deeds, and sometimes is almost unmanned by the transient look or slight and unobtrusive act which betrays a deeper sympathy.

But the lesson that perhaps is most surely learned, and is most delightful in the learning, is the love, the tenderness, and the respect that is due to childhood, boyhood, and youth. Younger eyes may see the tendency to evil; and to that, no Christian of whatever age dares shut his eyes: but longer experience reveals beauties of character and finer susceptibility of good. Boys are no longer regarded in the mass, as components of a form, an eleven, or an eight, but each unformed face looks its individual appeal as the centre of much love, the idol of sanguine hopes, the child of many prayers, the precious jewel of a home. Christianity betters the good lesson of the heathen satirist of the great reverence which is due to boys. It teaches men to regard them as the bearers—often, it is to be feared, almost unconscious bearers—of the treasure of baptismal grace; each one so dear

to God that He has redeemed him with the blood of His only-begotten Son, and calls him to a home where he will be rejoiced over with more than a father's and a mother's love. And when the older learner in the school of Christ thinks how his own memory passes over the stirring incidents of mature life, and moves among the scenes and clings to the persons familiar to childhood, he will tremble lest act or word of his should give offence to one of those little ones, whose angels do always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.

No one who preaches in this place can forget the mighty dead which lie below him and around him. Reserve is usually maintained upon the topic, because it is felt to be a kind of presumption to appropriate a thought that must be common to all. But it is not this cloud of witnesses that compasses me now. It is not the kings of the nations, even all of them lying in glory, every one in his own house; it is not the mightier potentates, who from their tombs still hold sway over the intellect and imagination of mankind; it is not these that haunt my fancy now. This well-known choir to me is teeming with young and vigorous life, with multitudes not as they now are, but the boy or the youth that memory recalls, and that is still wonderfully latent in the man; some in the body, some released from it, like that sweet and gentle spirit that has last been called to his rest. Each place of privilege or custom is peopled with a double, a triple, a manifold presence. My loved and honoured superiors and colleagues are representative, as well as present. To all, present or absent, I am a willing debtor;

with some I have been knit by the close tie of trial suffered in common: for in the troubles and sorrows of school life, and they are neither few nor slight, we took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends.

But what a changeful throng succeeds. The yearning look of the child that feels the loss of his mother's kiss, the bold, unreflecting frankness which wins the confidence it challenges, the finer, stronger charm of shy and sensitive reserve, the glow of success, the heroic suppression of disappointment; the little vanities that disappeared at a word, and were so pretty and engaging that it went against the censor's heart to speak the word; the sensibility sometimes so delicately shewn, sometimes yet more dear for the honest awkwardness of its expression; the wonder, the scare, the almost reproach, and then the passionate burst of tears when the meaning of the black seal upon the letter was broken; the consciousness of the word kept and trust justified ennobling the homely features; the power and refinement which mental exertion leaves upon the countenance; the gracious seriousness and gathering look of high resolve when holy things were spoken of, which flashes a light of promise into the darkness of the future; the sight which rejoices angels, the cold, proud, hard-set features softening under God's grace unto repentance,—all these and other phases of the health and sickness of the maturing soul, many as the leaves upon the tree, changeful as the April cloud, come crowding thickly on. Each one importunately prefers its claim for love. No human heart, whatever its will, can fully answer even one

of all these claims. Bankrupt in itself, it must resort for supply to the unsearchable and inexhaustible riches of the love of Christ.

Of you therefore here present, in your own persons, and as representing those that have gone before, I ask your prayers, that God would forgive the scant return that has been made for the much that has been given. Of you I most humbly ask pardon for all things whereinsoever I have offended any one of you. I would fain dwell on the things with which conscience reproaches me; but I have detained you long enough. And I have now the benefit of Christian fellowship. I know that by many my pardon is granted before it is asked; for do I not know that they have come to God's holy table, and is not that an assurance that they are in charity with me in common with all mankind?

One familiar word at last,—*Floreat*. May this school of the sons of the prophets be a living branch of the true vine,—*Floreat*. May each member of the school not only be a branch that blossoms, but may the blossom set in goodly fruit, that by the same nourishment of the root shall ripen unto eternal life.



