THE following Discourse was prepared under circumstances which left the Author little time and less inclination for a long or elaborate composition; and it is now given to the world at the request of those to whom, at the moment when that request was made, he could deny nothing.—If any further apology is necessary for its defects and its publication, he has to observe that whatever small profits may arise from its sale will be added to the funds of the National School in Hodnet.

JUNE 2, 1823.

A

FAREWELL SERMON,

&c.

"*Dearly Beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*"—1 PETER ii. 11.

IN the counsel itself which St. Peter, in these words, conveys to the Christian world, there is little which requires to be explained, or which is capable of lengthened illustration. That the lusts of which he speaks are the worst enemies of our spiritual nature you are not now, for the first time, to be told; nor have I now, for the first time, occasion to explain to you the best and only effectual manner of purifying the heart and of conquering its unruly passions.—There is one circumstance, however, in St. Peter's exhortation which, as it is, at all times and in itself, well worthy of our most serious thoughts, has, I confess, at the present moment, very deeply and peculiarly impressed and affected me; the reason, I mean,—which the Apostle urges for a resolute denial of all unholy desires and dispositions; in the shortness and uncertainty of our continuance in the present world; in the swiftness of our passage through it; and in the fleeting nature of those hopes and fears, those sufferings and enjoyments which fill up and diversify our journey.

"I beseech you, *as strangers and pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts!" He speaks to us as to men who have here no settlement or abiding stay; who are passing through life as travellers through a foreign

foreign country to their distant home; and in whom, therefore, it is mere madness to heap up possessions which they cannot hope to carry with them, or to set their hearts on objects which they must soon leave behind, which they must, themselves, cast away, or which will, inevitably, be taken from them.

The idea is common to many other passages of Scripture. Good old Jacob, in his conversation with the King of Egypt, spoke of his life (lengthened as it was beyond the later experience of mankind, and prosperous as it may appear to us to have been, in many of the things wherein men are accustomed to place their notions of prosperity) as of a short and uneasy journey. The author of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm describes himself as a stranger upon earth; and St. Paul not only instances these declarations of the ancient Israelites as sufficient proofs of their faith in a world beyond the grave, but himself adopts the illustration as the best encouragement to diligence and self-denial, to remind us that the Christian, like the patriarch, is, in this world, in a foreign land; that in the earth which now is we have no abiding city, but that one only rest remaineth for the people of God in that New Jerusalem whose builder is the Most High; within whose walls alone the tyranny of chance and change shall be brought to an end; where all which we are then allowed to keep, we shall keep through endless ages, and such as we then are found to be we shall continue everlastingly.*

Is it necessary for me to prove the fitness of this comparison, or how truly the life of man is, in these passages, described as a pilgrimage? Which of us is there whose experience may not bear abundant witness to the changeable nature of our prospects in the world: the uncertainty of our best laid plans, the insecurity of our firmest possessions? Where shall the man be found who, for long together, continueth in one stay? Which of us does not behold and feel himself and every thing around him, with various speed, but with equal certainty, hasting on to dissolution

* Genesis xlvii. 9. Psalm cxix. 19. Hebr. xi. 9. 13.

dissolution and decay, while all which we endure, and all which we enjoy has no more comparative permanence than our good or bad reception in an inn, or the still briefer accidents of a voyage? Life bears us on like the stream of a mighty river. Our boat, at first, glides gently down the narrow channel, through the playful murmurings of the little brook and the windings of its grassy border. The trees shed their blossoms over our young heads; the flowers on the brink seem to offer themselves to our young hands; we are happy in hope, and we grasp eagerly at the beauties round us; but the stream hurries us on, and still our hands are empty.

Our course in youth and manhood is along a wider and deeper flood, and amid objects more striking and magnificent. We are animated by the moving picture of enjoyment and industry which passes before us, we are excited by some short-lived success, or depressed and rendered miserable by some equally short-lived disappointment. But our energy and our dependence are both in vain. The stream bears us on, and our joys and our griefs alike are left behind us; we may be shipwrecked but we cannot anchor; our voyage may be hastened but it cannot be delayed; whether rough or smooth, the river hastens towards its home, till the roaring of the ocean is in our ears, and the tossing of his waves is beneath our keel, and the lands lessen from our eyes, and the floods are lifted up around us, and the earth loses sight of us, and we take our last leave of earth and its inhabitants, and of our further voyage there is no witness but the Infinite and Eternal!

And do we still take so much anxious thought for the future days when the days which are gone by have so strangely and uniformly deceived us? Can we still so set our hearts on the creatures of God, when we find, by sad experience, that the Creator only is permanent? Or shall we not rather lay aside every weight and every sin which does most easily beset us, and think of ourselves henceforth as wayfaring persons

persons only, who have no abiding inheritance but in the hope of a better world, and to whom even that world would be worse than hopeless, if it were not for our Lord Jesus Christ and the interest which we have obtained in his mercies?

It is not Death alone (it should be always borne in mind), it is not death alone (though Death, even in the midst of Life, is near to every one of us), which may disappoint our best grounded hopes, and derange our most prudent purposes. Fresh objects, fresh feelings, fresh hopes and fears start up in every fresh stage of our being, and each, as it starts up, drives out some of its predecessors from the hold which they seemed to have so firmly gained on us. We ourselves change continually, and, even where we remain the same, the objects round us alter through the influence of ten thousand accidents, over which we have no controul, and for which, humanly speaking, we have no remedy. What man has built a house and can reckon on dwelling in it, what man has planted a vineyard and may hope to eat the fruits thereof?—It is for others, ordinarily, that we take thought, for others that we labour: and it is into the labours of other men that we ourselves enter in to enjoy them. Surely then, when all is uncertain, and when so much is calamitous; when we cannot be happy without attachment, and where attachment is so closely followed by separation; it is worse than idle to fix our hearts in a world where our treasure cannot be; and to hazard the only real happiness which God holds out, by catching at the shadow of happiness which surrounds us!

But if such are the considerations which (taken as a general truth, and stated in general language) the uncertainty of mortal life is always calculated to awaken in us, more especially have thoughts of this nature been called up in my mind by the near approach of that time when my ministerial labours among you must have an end; when I must give over, into other hands, the task of watching over your spiritual

spiritual welfare, and when many, very many, of those with whom I have grown up from childhood, in whose society I have passed my happiest days, and to whom it has been, during more than fifteen years, my duty and my delight (with such ability as God has given me) to preach the Gospel of Christ, must, in all probability, see my face in the flesh no more.

Under such circumstances, and connected with many who now hear me by the dearest ties of blood, of friendship, and of gratitude, some mixture of regret is excusable, some degree of sorrow is holy. I cannot, without some anxiety for the future, forsake, for an untried and arduous field of duty, the quiet scenes where, during so much of my past life, I have enjoyed a more than usual share of earthly comfort and prosperity. I cannot bid adieu to those with whose idea almost every recollection of past happiness is connected, without many earnest wishes for their welfare, and (I will confess it) without some severe self-reproach, that, while it was in my power, I have done so much less than I ought to have done to render that welfare eternal.

There are, indeed, those here who know, and there is One above all who knows better than any of you, how earnestly I have desired the peace and the holiness of his Church: how truly I have loved the people of this place; and how warmly I have hoped to be a means in His hand of bringing many among you to glory. But I am at this moment but too painfully sensible that, in many things, yea in all, my performance has fallen short of my principles; that neither privately nor publicly have I taught you with so much diligence as now seems necessary in my eyes,—nor has my example set forth the doctrines in which I have, however imperfectly, instructed you. Yet, if my zeal has failed in steadiness, it has never been wanting in sincerity. I have expressed no conviction which I have not deeply felt; have preached no doctrine which I have not steadfastly believed: however inconsistent my life, its leading object has been your welfare, and I have hoped and sorrowed,

sorrowed, and studied and prayed for your instruction, and that you might be saved. For my labours, such as they were, I have been, indeed, most richly rewarded, in the uniform affection and respect which I have received from my parishioners; in their regular and increasing attendance in this holy place and at the Table of the Lord; in the welcome which I have never failed to meet in the houses both of rich and of poor;—in the regret (beyond my deserts and beyond my fullest expectations) with which my announced departure has been received by you; in your expressed and repeated wishes for my welfare and my return; in the munificent token of your regard with which I have been this morning honoured;* in your numerous attendance on the present occasion, and in those marks of emotion which I now witness round me, and in which I am myself well nigh constrained to join.

For all these accept such thanks as I can pay: accept my best wishes: accept my affectionate regret: accept the continuance of those prayers which I have hitherto offered up for you daily, and in which, whatever and wherever my sphere of duty may hereafter be, my congregation of HODNET shall (believe it!) never be forgotten. But accept, above all, as the best legacy which I can leave behind me, a few plain words of advice, such as are suggested by my text and by the circumstances under which I now address you; and such as, if duly borne in mind by each of us, will strip our separation of its most painful features, and secure to us, if our faith is true, a more blessed meeting hereafter.

The parting with those whom we love, for any considerable length of time; the dissolution of ties which have lasted long and have been the source of mutual happiness, must, under any imaginable circumstances, be, as I well feel, a heavy trial. Yet how few are there among us who have, during our past lives, sufficiently recollected that a parting of a far

* A handsome Silver Tureen had been given to the Author by his Parishioners, in a manner the most impressive and gratifying to his feelings.

far more awful character was always certain, and at any time might be immediate; that we were living with our friends and neighbours as if we and they were alike to remain on earth for ever; that we were living, all the time, on the crumbling brink of a ready-digged grave, into which, one by one, we were surely and successively to slip down, be mourned, and forgotten! We are a mighty multitude travelling through an intricate wilderness. Our longest friendships and most persevering quarrels are like the intercourse of wayfaring men; a few words of greeting as we pass each other in our speed, or for a little while walk side by side, till the crowd separates us, or we turn down different roads, and meet again, perhaps, no more.

Now, from hence, the lesson which I would draw is as follows. If our best earthly ties must be of so short continuance, how earnest should be our diligence to do all the good in our power to those whom we love while they are yet within the reach of our kindness. If our bitterest animosities are so soon to be terminated by death, or by some one of those countless changes which divide us, even during life, almost as effectually as death itself could do, how anxiously should we endeavour to "agree with our adversary quickly while we are in the way with him,"* before our good resolutions are cut off in darkness, and no more shall remain but the punishment of our neglect and the bitter memory of our past opportunities. Our time is very short! Shall we then grow weary of well-doing? We must each of us part with our neighbour very soon! Shall we part in anger? In the whole world there is no other distinction of persons recognized by the Gospel but those whom we *love*, and those whom we *ought* to love, and the duty which we owe to both of these is the first and most striking lesson which the uncertainty of life should teach us, and which we may learn even from such a rehearsal of death as is afforded in our own approaching separation.

Would to God, indeed, that I could hope to leave you all as truly at peace

* Matt. v. 25.

peace with each other, as, I trust and believe, there is peace between myself and you! Yet, if there be any here whom I have at any time offended, let me entreat his forgiveness, and express the hope that he has already forgiven me. If any who thinks he has done me wrong (I know of none), let him be assured that the fault, if it were one, is not only forgiven but forgotten. And, let me earnestly entreat you all, as it may be the last request which I shall ever make, the last advice which I shall ever offer to you—Little children, love one another and forgive one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath loved and forgiven you!

Nor are they the duties only which we owe to our enemies and our friends which are to be learned from the consideration of our pilgrim state on earth; and from the uncertainty of all things round us. Pilgrims as we are, in that very name the fact is implied that "we seek a country:" and we are encouraged to look forward to a better and more enduring home. Divided as we soon must be, we are taught that, to those who love the Lord, no parting can be eternal; and, even in the warmth of our earthly attachments, (when those attachments are allowable and holy), we have the strongest motive for endeavouring so to pass through the journey of life, as, that, after death, we may meet those whom we love in happiness. I do not forbid, I would not, for worlds, even damp or discourage those pure domestic affections, those sacred friendships and harmless and useful predilections of kindred, of country, of neighbourhood, which make up so much of the general happiness of mankind, and without which the world would be, still more than we find it, a vale of tears and misery! We do well to love our kindred; we do well to cling to our friends; we do well (uncertain as the possession may be), to value their love while it yet is spared to us, to fear their loss, and to sorrow over their separation from us. But, let us ask ourselves, how, if we cannot, even for a few years, lose sight, without sorrow, of a relation, a friend, a neighbour; if we cannot cover up a kinsman in his grave without

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some natural tears; if I cannot leave you now, for a distant land, without a pang of more than common bitterness; how shall we endure, hereafter, to see our lots in the day of judgment determined in different worlds, and that great gulph extending itself between us which is for ever to divide the righteous and the ungodly? And, reflecting on these things, let us, for God's sake, for our friends' sake, and for our own; as we love our friends, as we love ourselves, and desire that neither we nor they should sorrow everlastingly, prepare them by advice and ourselves by repentance, so to part for a time as that our parting may be for a time only: but that the parent may embrace the glorified form of his child, the husband of his wife, and the friend of the sharer of his confidence, in that land where every tear shall be wiped from every eye, where no unkindness shall wound, no suspicion alienate, but where those virtuous affections which were tried and purified here, shall reap their reward of eternal indulgence and enjoyment!

Above all, however, if we fear so much to lose our earthly friends, if we feel the dismalness of a lonely heart, and that so dependant are we on each other's help and kindness that, even in Paradise, man could not be happy alone; let us consider how much sorer misery is it to be separated from that Best and Greatest of friends and benefactors, from whose unseen but unfailing presence alone it comes that we are either holy or happy; whose blessing is found in the universal smile of nature; whose Grace is the source of every amiable and every delightful sensation of the heart; in whom we live; through whom we love each other; and by whom we are loved (unless we wilfully cast his love away) with a tenderness ten thousand fold exceeding all which the best of parents can feel for his offspring? It is hard to leave our friends, though but for a time; but it must be harder still, one day, to be driven from the face of God for ever! But, if we love God in the life which now is, His love will never fail us, and the love of our virtuous friends will be also, through endless ages, secured to us!

Love,

Love, then, one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath loved you; but, Love Him, above all things, by loving and serving whom, you may, by prayer, by intercession, by example, and by final union, most effectually secure and most lastingly enjoy your earthly attachments also!

So, when some few short years are at an end, and when He in whose bosom are the appointed days of man, shall have finished the number of his elect, and hastened the wheels of his kingdom; it may be that we, who now, in sorrow and anxiety have offered up our prayers and tears together, may together join in that triumphal hymn which, on the sea of glass and before the sapphire throne, the soldiers of Him who was slain for us shall sing in unison; that he who has thus long, in much weakness, been your shepherd, may, through mercy, enter with you into the fold of the great Shepherd of all, and present you blameless and undefiled before that presence which no unclean nor unholy thing may look upon!

To these general observations it was my original design to have added some more particular hints adapted to the circumstances of the Parish; and which might, perhaps, have fallen with greater weight from me at this hour of parting than on any former occasion. But I fear to weary you, and I feel my own firmness likely to fail if I proceed much further. Two points, only, I will mention, of those which press on my mind. I would recommend to your continued and increased support the Charity School of this place, and its Benefit Society. The former of these I have had the happiness to see first raised and since growing up to great and generally acknowledged usefulness. The latter, which had almost fallen to decay, I have seen revived, on a better principle, with an abundant prospect of greater and more enduring prosperity. The advantages of both, to the rising generation and that which is now sinking into old age, to the poor themselves, and to those higher classes of society who can never be uninterested in the morality, the industry, and happiness of those beneath

beneath them, I have not now time to enumerate as they deserve, nor, to those who hear me, is, I trust, such a recapitulation necessary. All which I will do is to express my earnest hope that both these establishments may (as well as every other good work), continue to flourish under your protection and encouragement; and that the seed thus sown in the infant mind, and the comforts thus secured for the sick, the aged, and the mourner, may bring forth in every succeeding year, more abundant fruits of intelligence and devotion, of industry and sobriety, of content and gratitude.

Finally, Brethren, farewell!—May the God of Love and Peace and Purity be your guide and guardian through the remnant of your pilgrimage here, and grant you, at length, an entrance into that abiding city of righteousness, whither our desires and our steps are tending; and purify your hearts from every evil thing, and fill you full of all grace and Godly hope, in all time of your tribulation, in all time of your wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment!

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