

FAREWELL WORDS:

ADDRESSED

TO

St. John's Reformed Congregation,

IN

LEBANON, PA.,

On the Evening of Sunday after New Year, 1864.

BY

H. HARBAUGH, D. D.

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FAREWELL DISCOURSE.

“ Finally, brethren, farewell.”—2 CoR. XIII. 11.

There is on earth no relation more solemn and sacred, than that between a pastor and his flock; none which so involves their mutual good in this world; none which so extends its consequences into eternity. We may, therefore, well pause and consider when such a relation is about to come to an end.

There are various ways in which this relation may be broken. It may be done by the motion of the pastor; or it may be done by the motion of the congregation, or a part of it. In either case, it may be wilful, violent and unjustifiable. In such cases, it is likely to prove an evil both to the pastor and the congregation; for what God hath joined together, must not be sundered from arbitrary or selfish motives on either part. Nor can a blessing rest on those, who, indifferent to the higher will of Providence, follow in this respect only their own tastes, wills and devices. Such separations also generally carry with themselves more or less of mutual ill-will.

In the present instance, we believe the case to be, in all these respects, otherwise. We separate in mutual good-will. We part also with an intelligent conviction on both sides, that it ought so to be. Though abundantly assured of your sincere affection—an assurance signed and sealed by a thousand kindnesses—all acquiesce in the separation as necessary and proper.

This is the third time, in a ministry of a little over twenty years, that my pastoral relations have been dissolved; and

yet it has, in no case, been from my motion, purpose or will. If there is one doctrine of our holy Christianity more precious to me than another, it is that of a particular providence. Hence, I have long since made it the rule of my life, to remain contentedly where I am placed, till removed by Him alone, who numbers the hairs of our head, clothes the lilies and feeds the sparrows. The call, which now removes me from this congregation, is not of my seeking; but having come, I take the voice of the Church as the voice of God, and follow the lead of Israel's pillar of cloud, confident that some land of promise lies still before me, and that I shall at least have your good wishes on the way.

But here are the sad-sounding words: "Finally, brethren, farewell." Let us look at them more closely. Perhaps they are not as sad as they sound. Viewed in the glorifying light of Christian faith, they may contain and suggest just those thoughts of cheer and comfort on which we ought at present to dwell.

Though there are only three words in the text, yet every one of them contains a world of meaning. The first word reminds us of the end—the solemn conclusion toward which all things are tending, and to which we, as pastor and congregation, have now come: "Finally!" The second reminds us of the intimate relation we have sustained, and shall still sustain, toward each other: "Brethren!" The third reminds us of the mutual good-will for each other's welfare, with which we part: "Farewell!"

"FINALLY."

The word has a solemn, earnest, impressive sound. It is the sound of parting. It makes one think of the end of joys, or the end of sorrows. It is as the going down of the sun, when the last lingerings of the day begin to mingle with the shades of night. It is as the close of life, when its scenes are about to be left behind, and a new stadium begins. Finally! It winds up the successive chapters of our life, and declares what is done is done forever.

As used here by St. Paul, it is a solemn closing word. He had instructed, directed, reproved and comforted the congre-

gation at Corinth, as their Shepherd and spiritual guide; and now, as he is about to conclude his Epistle to them, he once more pours forth the warm wishes and desires of his heart in their behalf: "Finally, brethren, farewell."

The end is always earnest. We instinctively feel, even in closing a letter of friendship, that the heart should speak—once more speak warmly and affectionately at the close. The last words in every parting have the same character.

When separations are about to take place, the mind is naturally turned upon the past. It rushes in upon the present moment. Old associations and memories are lively, and intensified. As the scattered rays of the sun are gathered by a lens and cast into one burning point, so all that has gone before, crowds into the solemn "finally," which we speak in parting.

Three years and three months we have labored together. A brief review at this parting hour is proper.

The need of an entirely English congregation in this place, had been felt for years. The enterprise was undertaken, while the main material which afterwards composed its nucleus, was still in the bosom of the first congregation. The pastor and government, and many of the members of the old congregation, encouraged the enterprise, and the separation was peaceable. You erected this church, costing, with its present organ and other items, over \$23,000.

Three years ago, then, we started out together with a debt of \$7,300, and 61 members—without organ, without a single Sunday School book, chair, book-case, or anything belonging to a Sunday School; started out like a couple, who begin housekeeping without any outfit of furniture, or scarcely a loaf for the first breakfast.

The debt has been paid, an organ bought and paid for, furniture and library for the Sunday School secured—and all the hundred other little items that belong to ecclesiastical housekeeping, acquired; so that a home has here been made for the new beginner, which feels now like a home to all.

To the original 61 members have been added 62 others—19 by confirmation and 43 by certificate, making 123. Of

these 5 have died, and 11 been dismissed to other distant congregations—leaving our present number of adult members, in full communion, 107. The additions have thus been an average of over 20 a year. The average annual loss by death and dismissal, a fraction over 5. The actual average increase of adult members, a little over 15 a year. The increase of infant members by baptism, is 33. Ten infant members have been taken to the church triumphant.

Taking into consideration the difficulties and hindrances, which are always found to stand in the way of second churches, the progress of St. John's Church is by no means discouraging.

Though all the heavy, extra demands referred to, have fallen upon the new congregation, the current expenses of the church have been regularly and cheerfully borne besides. The pastor's salary has never lagged behind, but been paid as regularly as every quarter has ended.

Besides, you have maintained a systematic contributing society, the proceeds of which—not small—have been paid to the Boards of Domestic Missions and Beneficiary Education. The contributions of the children of the Sunday School during this Tercentenary year, are also all sacred to benevolent purposes, however strong might have been the temptation to use them for the increase of the Library. Though the regular tercentenary offerings of the members have not yet been called for, one offering of \$1000 has been made, besides the offerings of the children.

All these pecuniary drafts upon this small congregation have been silently and cheerfully honored. The aggregate, when the number of members from whom it all came is considered, is actually vast. All this certainly indicates a vigor and an earnestness which is itself success; and which needs only the continued favor and blessing of God to make that success in due process of history one hundred fold more.

This is not all. When we, a few in number, entered this new church, its walls were cold. All was strange! Its very gates, pews, pulpit, altar—its rooms and furniture—its surroundings and belongings—yea, the very sound of its bell—

all were new and unfamiliar. The home-feeling was absent and wanting. No associations, no memories, no fond and sacred affections, clung to the spot. The ivy of the heart had to learn to take hold on new walls. There was nothing anointed—nothing consecrated to the heart's love. All were more than strangers here in a strange place.

Is it so now? Do any memories, sacred associations, and holy affections cluster here? Has the bell the voice of a stranger to you? Does the sound of the organ—do the chants, the hymns, the prayers, fall new and unfamiliar on the ear and the heart? Does this pulpit, this altar, yea, these walls awaken no memories, and stir no sacred echoes in the deepest and loveliest retirements of the heart? We need but ask these questions, and they are answered.

This has become a sacred and loved spot to you and your children. How—why? The heart loves, and sacredly remembers the place where it has been blest. Here you have heard of the sublime mysteries of faith—here you have been comforted in sorrow—here God has accepted at your hands the offerings of penitence, prayer and praise. Often have your own hands decorated these walls, this pulpit and altar, and that organ, in imitation of those who spread palm-branches before the triumphal progress of Christ. From love to Him and his Church, have you gathered the “fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of His sanctuary, and to make the place of His feet glorious.” Here festal days have created a festal feeling, and sanctified it with the savor of religious joy and love. Here children have warbled their Christmas carols around the brilliant Christmas-tree, whilst the breasts of adults were warmed afresh with the undying memories of their own childhood and early life. Here have been heard and felt Christmas canticles, Good-Friday litanies, Easter anthems, triumphant Ascension and Whitsuntide hymns. The heart has become familiar with all the sacred feelings and recollections which these holy seasons and days beget. Here children have been baptized—here young members have been confirmed—here officers of the church have been ordained—here holy com-

munions in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood have been commemorated—and here solemn funeral services have been held. Here hearts have been moved by sacred penitential sorrow, by assurances of faith, by visions of joyful and holy hope, and been refreshed by the bliss of a Saviour's love. Because our hearts have been thus touched in this place, it has become a sacred place to our hearts.

How has this spot changed since first we knew it! Hearts centre here. In our homes, this is called home. A sweet sacredness hangs around it, like fragrance around flowers. We feel as if angels had been here! It is to us as the spot where the patriarch's mystic ladder touched the earth—the house of God, and the gate of Heaven!

True and blessed consecration of the place, I say, has been somewhat made. All the beautiful feelings I have feebly described will grow with age, if you are true to the spirit and genius of the Reformed Church, and of the infant years and history of St. John's congregation. And in these, my parting words, I solemnly charge you, that ye be not turned aside by the irreverent and profane spirit of the age—that ye forget not the days on which Jesus Christ was born, suffered, rose, ascended, and bestowed the gift of the Holy Ghost! I charge you, in the name of your children, that ye omit not those commemorations which so sacredly and lastingly bind their hearts to the sanctuary, and through it to Christ Himself, and confirm them in those blessed associations and memories, which will cling to them to their dying day, and be, as I verily believe, remembered in Heaven.

I know that all these things will live among you. Only to my connection with them, and my enjoyment of them with you, applies the solemn “finally.” You will not blame me, if I feelingly call to mind, amid this parting hour, that to me, on all these blessed days and scenes of heaven, is now written the tearful “finally.” But, amid other scenes, I shall live and feed on the memory of them, as the bee in the dark Winter days lives on the stores gathered in bright and sunny Summer hours. These are the golden treasures that no time or distance, no joy or sorrow, can take away from us. Would

that he had been as truly and deeply Christian as his words are, who said :

“Let Fate do her worst, there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past, which she cannot destroy ;
Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.
Long, long be my heart with such memories filled !
Like the vase in which roses have once been distilled ;
You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.”

“ BRETHREN ! ”

I have said that this word reminds us of the intimate relation we have sustained, and shall still sustain towards each other.

It is the high word of Christian brotherhood. It rests on the revealed fact—and never known till revealed—that in Christ Jesus, and in the regeneration, of which He is the ultimate source, we have one Father, who is above all, and over all, and in us all. That in the birth from Adam, we are all estranged from God and from one another—but that in Christ Jesus the whole family in heaven and earth are one communion—that every other kind of kindred is nothing worth, where this does not exist—that it sets aside nationality, so that there is known in it neither Greek nor Jew—that it annuls the distinction and difference of cast and station, so that there is neither bond nor free—that it transcends sex, so that there is neither male nor female—but Christ is all and in all. “For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have all been made to drink into one spirit.”

This is the deep and glorious basis of Christian brotherhood. This is the indissoluble tie, that has bound, and shall bind, us together. This is the bond, which neither distance nor death can break asunder. It is this that makes all partings hopeful, all farewells cheerful.

How beautifully has the holy Apostle placed this perpetually binding word between the solemn “finally” and the otherwise sad and hopeless word “farewell!” He would have them at Corinth know, and lay to heart, that neither the

"finally" nor the "farewell" can sunder them as "brethren." The word—and the blessed truth that underlies it—is there for the everlasting comfort, joy and hope of God's saints, amid all the meetings and partings of this changing earthly life.

Our paths often diverge—our spheres of labor lie apart—we meet and separate even in the same city of God, like strangers, who meet for a moment "in the crowded streets of busy London;" but those diverging paths, after a little space, shall all converge again. They all lead toward the golden gate of the celestial city—they all end in the peaceful Salem of everlasting rest.

It is as near to heaven from one place as from another. From all places the angels know the way. Under every mound the resurrection morning shall find us. And whether we get home a little sooner or a little later—as measured by what on earth is called time—the interminable eternity of bliss before us will be alike long and glorious to each and all.

Only let us remain "brethren"—unchangably allied to our common Lord. Only let us be found among those whose life is hid with Christ in God. Only let us stand in readiness at His coming. What blessed congratulations shall characterize that meeting, when we shall hear, in the presence of Christ and of each other, the greeting addressed to each and all: "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

"FAREWELL!"

This word reminds us of the mutual good will toward each other, and Christian well-wishes for each other, with which we part.

The word is not in itself sad. Indeed its original meaning is positively cheerful. It is a salutation: "Be joyful—be happy—a blessing be upon you." So the original form of the English word farewell: "May all go well with you when we are separated."

Religiously the word is a prayer and benediction on the way. In the text it *has* a religious sense, and to us it also has. It is not the farewell of one worldling to another. Then it would mean: "May you get along well in your worldly, sinful course—may you enjoy the present life."

This is the substance of the word in its irreligious sense. But how vain are such farewells! In the perilous pilgrimage of this life, we need more than vain, worldly well-wishes. We need the grace of God as well as the favor of men. We need a religious farewell on our way.

Such the one before us is. It is to "brethren" in Christ Jesus that this farewell is spoken. Only when Christ, and His grace, are with us, can our life lead to a happy end, and a glorious hereafter.

When I now speak this farewell to you, I mean: "Christ be with you, and be ye with Christ." This is the absolute condition of fareing well. Without it, all hopes in life are uncertain; even prosperity is the way to adversity; joy the path to sorrow; and life the highroad to hopeless and everlasting death. If you, who are not yet Christians, would fare well, become Christians. My farewell to you means: "Become Christians!" To this I have often exhorted some of you. To this I exhort you now again—and perhaps for the last time. Become Christians as the only way to true happiness in this life, and of eternal glory hereafter.

I have already shown that, in the case of Christian brethren, there is no real sundering of Christian ties possible. It is only outwardly and temporarily that we part. The family tie of the household of faith remains. We separate only that we may the better unite in carrying forward the interests of the one, great, glorious kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one—
Our comforts and our cares."

Yet the breaking of these outward, temporary ties is not without its sadness, as this is always a part of our earthly experience. As related to these temporal ties, the word "farewell" has a lonely sound. It calls to mind the perishing nature of all earthly things. It makes us think of the last farewell to earth. It suspends—perhaps for life—the pleasant social communion of long and well-tried friends. And yet the very word reminds us, also, that their prayers and best wishes go with us. It tells us that we shall be

kindly and gratefully remembered by them; while it points us forward to the triumphant hope of the Christian, and reminds us that all that have been one in Christ Jesus on earth, shall again be one forever in heaven.

Then, "finally, brethren, farewell!" To you, and to him whom you, divinely directed, shall choose, and above all, to our covenant Father in heaven, I commit the peace and prosperity of St. John's Church. I shall always regard it an honor to have been its first pastor. Of my own labors here I do not speak. Perhaps it may appear hereafter, that my work has been rather to sow than to reap. Wherein I have failed to meet your wishes or expectations in regard to outward success, you may perhaps be able to call to mind some other causes beside my own failures. We may remember, that numbers are not always power, nor apparent success sure and abiding prosperity. Our Saviour gathered only one hundred and twenty disciples in three and a half years; and yet His work was successful, because he laid foundations for the future. I do not claim to have done even this. I claim nothing—but leave my brief work to your kindly decisions and memories, to the judgment of God, and the test of its own future history.

If any of you have been instructed, if any have been comforted, if any have been led to choose, for the first time, or more fully and finally than before, the ways of life eternal, give God the glory, and show your gratitude by honoring His Church.

To the pastors and members of sister churches, I return my thanks for every courtesy and kindness received at their hands. Circumstances also justify me in publicly acknowledging the generous and warm-hearted kindness of my venerable ministerial Father, now sitting before me in the altar,* with whom I have enjoyed the pleasantest intimacy from the first day of my sojourn here, and whose open-hearted and catholic Christian friendship shall be to the last gratefully remembered by me. Leaving his charge at the same time

* Rev. H. S. Miller, Pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Lebanon.

with myself, in the name of his many friends among all denominations, I invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon his venerable head!

To the members of my own flock, I can make no adequate acknowledgment in words for their many and varied kindnesses. I shall endeavor to do it in grateful silence. Many of your acts of good-will were done in secret. Pleasant and cheering is the song of the nightingale, even though the bird that makes the music, and sheds abroad the gladness, is itself hid in the hedge. So have I, and my family, been cheered in our way by quiet marks of generous, disinterested love, from week to week, and from year to year. All these things—and all your cheerful friendships in seasons of joy, and all your faithful sympathy in deep and dark tribulation, shall come to me in every hour that memory loves—shall be as an oasis in the desert of life—shall assure me, whenever beset by storms of human selfishness in the future, that there is such a thing as pure friendship, which flames cannot consume nor floods destroy.

If I have enemies—as Christ had—as Paul had—even as St. John, the lovely disciple, had—and as a thousand better men than myself have had—and as thousands of others will hereafter have—I hope they may fare well in life, and find their way to heaven. There the evil in myself at which they are offended, or the evil in them which may have caused their offence, will be removed forever. There the dissension between Paul and Barnabas, when “the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other,” has long since been adjusted; for God Himself has decided who was in the right and who in the wrong.

Members of St. John's congregation, may the choicest blessing of our heavenly Father rest upon you, and abide with you—may it rest upon my, as yet unknown, successor—upon the consistory—the choir—the Sunday School—upon all the young members whom I have confirmed—on all the children whom I have baptized—upon all the families with whom I have spent so many pleasant hours! The Lord guide you all by His counsel, and afterward receive you into his heavenly

glory. In the language of St. Paul: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

Many thoughts and feelings crowd in upon me in this solemn hour! To me the present parting is not merely a parting from St. John's congregation, but a parting with the actual and active duties of the pastoral office. A certain feeling of loneliness comes over me, on the eve of leaving its long familiar paths. I am officially to leave behind the pulpit, the altar, the direct spiritual care of families, and the nurture of the lambs of Christ's flock.

After a little more than twenty years of pastoral life and experience—which, with all its lights and shadows, has been to me steadily its own exceeding great reward—I am called to return to those halls, whence I then went out with the ardor, but also the inexperience, of youth. I enter there as I did the first time—a learner—perhaps a little farther from the *beginning*, but little nearer the *end* of the sublime mysteries of our faith. O! the heights and the depths into which the angels desire to look! Who is sufficient for these things?

Whilst I feel the solemnity of what is involved in this transition—whilst I look back tenderly and gratefully on what I am leaving, and forward tremblingly on what is before me—I am not without the sense of strong Providential support. The call that has come to me, as I have said, has not been of my own seeking. It is the united call of my brethren and fathers in the ministry and eldership. To the Church of my fathers belongs my life, and its labors—and I but obey her voice. By God's grace, to the last,

For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end.

Besides, there is a pleasure in the thought of full and free devotion to the highest and divinest of all sciences. But, above all, infinite is the consolation of the ascending Saviour's

promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

But the text reminds me again of the end! "Finally, brethren, farewell!" Farewell!—

"A word which hath been—and must be,
A sound that makes us linger. Yet, farewell!"

Thanks for every word of cheer—for every word of kindness—for every warm pressure of the hand—for every feeling of sympathy in sorrow—for every kind wish that shall accompany me—for every prayer in which I shall still have part—for every pleasant remembrance of you that the holy angels shall bring me when I am gone; and still higher thanks for that blessed hope, which shall stand as a bow in the cloud of every sorrow, assuring us of a permanent, beautiful and cloudless shining beyond.

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives,
And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil, and pain,
And sin, we shall be free;
And perfect love and friendship reign,
Through all eternity."

"Finally, brethren, farewell!"