

## The Parting of Friends



This is the published text of John Henry Newman's farewell sermon, his last as an Anglican priest, given at Littlemore on the morning of 25th September 1843, the seventh anniversary of the consecration of the church. [*Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*, sermon 26, reprinted London 1902]

*'Dr. Pusey, [J.B.] Morris of Exeter and some others sobbed aloud, and the sound of their weeping resounded throughout the church.'*

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**'Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.'** [Psalm 104, v.23]

When the Son of Man, the First-born of the creation of God, came to the evening of His mortal life, He parted with His disciples at a feast. He had borne 'the burden and heat of the day;' yet, when 'wearied with His journey,' He had but stopped at the well's side, and asked a draught of water for His thirst; for He had 'meat to eat which' others 'knew not of.' His meat was 'to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work;' 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me,' said He, 'while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.' [John iv 6, 34; ix 4] Thus passed the season of His ministry; and if at any time He feasted with Pharisee or publican, it was in order that He might do the work of God more strenuously. But 'when the even was come He sat down with the Twelve.' 'And He said unto them, With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer.' [Matthew xxvi 20] He was about to suffer more than man had ever suffered or shall suffer. But there is nothing gloomy, churlish, violent, or selfish in His grief; it is tender, affectionate, social. He calls His friends around Him, though He was as Job among the ashes; He bids them stay by Him, and see Him suffer; He desires their sympathy; He takes refuge in their love. He first feasted them, and sung a hymn with them, and washed their feet; and when His long trial began, He beheld them and kept them in His presence, till they in terror shrank from it. Yet, on St. Mary and St. John, His Virgin Mother and His Virgin Disciple, who remained, His eyes still rested; and in St. Peter, who was denying Him in the distance, His sudden glance wrought a deep repentance. O wonderful pattern, the type of all trial and of all duty under it, while the Church endures.

We indeed today have no need of so high a lesson and so august a comfort. We have no pain, no grief which calls for it; yet, considering it has been brought before us in this morning's service, we are naturally drawn to think of it, though it be infinitely above us, under certain circumstances of this season and the present time. For now are the shades of evening falling upon the earth, and the year's labour is coming to its end. In Septuagesima the labourers were sent into the vineyard; in Sexagesima the sower went forth to sow; - that time is over; 'the harvest is passed, the summer is ended,' [Jeremiah viii 20] the vintage is gathered. We have kept the Ember-days for the fruits of the earth, in self-abasement, as being unworthy even of the least of God's mercies; and now we are offering up of its corn and wine as a propitiation, and are eating and drinking of them with thanksgiving.

'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' [1 Chronicles xxix 14] If we have had the rain in its season, and the sun shining in its strength, and the fertile ground, it is of Thee. We give back to Thee what came from Thee. 'When Thou givest it them, they gather it, and when Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good. When Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled; when Thou takest away their breath, they die, and are turned again to their dust. When Thou lettest Thy breath go forth, they shall be made, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.' [Psalm civ 28-30] He gives, He takes away. 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' [Job ii 10] May He not 'do what He will with His own?' [Matthew xx 15] May not His sun set as it has risen? and must it not set, if it is to rise again? and must not darkness come first, if there is ever to be morning? and must not the sky be blacker, before it can be brighter? And cannot He, who can do all things, cause a light to arise even in the darkness? 'I have thought upon Thy Name, O Lord, in the night season, and have kept Thy Law;' 'Thou also shalt light my candle, the Lord my God shall make my darkness to be light;' or as the Prophet speaks, 'At the evening time it shall be light.' [Zechariah xiv 7]

'All things come of Thee,' says holy David, 'for we are strangers before Thee and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.' [1 Chronicles xxix 15] All is vanity, vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit. 'What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever; the sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down; ... all things are full of labour, man cannot utter it; ... that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.' [Ecclesiastes i 3-15] 'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven; a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up; ... a time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away.' [Ecclesiastes iii 1-6] And time, and matter, and motion, and force, and the will of man, how vain are they all, except as instruments of the grace of God, blessing them and working with them! How vain are all our pains, our thought, our care, unless God uses them, unless God has inspired them! how worse than fruitless are they, unless directed to His glory, and given back to the Giver!

'Of Thine own have we given Thee,' says the royal Psalmist, after he had collected materials for the Temple. Because 'the work was great,' and 'the palace, not for man, but for the Lord God,' therefore he 'prepared with all his might for the house of his God,' gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, and wood, 'onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance.' [1 Chronicles xxix 1, 2, 9] And 'the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly; ... and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.' We too, at this season, year by year, have been allowed in our measure, according to our work and our faith, to rejoice in God's Presence, for this sacred building which He has given us to worship Him in. It was a glad time when we first met here, - many of us now present recollect it; nor did our rejoicing cease, but was renewed every autumn, as the day came round. It has been 'a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.' [Esther ix 19] We have kept the feast heretofore with merry hearts; we have kept it seven full years unto 'a perfect end;' now let us keep it, even though in haste, and with bitter herbs, and with loins girded, and

with a staff in our hand, as they who have 'no continuing city, but seek one to come.'  
[Hebrews xiii 14]

So was it with Jacob, when with his staff he passed over that Jordan. He too kept feast before he set out upon his dreary way. He received a father's blessing, and then was sent afar; he left his mother, never to see her face or hear her voice again. He parted with all that his heart loved, and turned his face towards a strange land. He went with the doubt, whether he should have bread to eat, or raiment to put on. He came to 'the people of the East,' and served a hard master twenty years. 'In the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night; and his sleep departed from his eyes.' [Genesis xxxi 40] O little did he think, when father and mother had forsaken him, and at Bethel he lay down to sleep on the desolate ground, because the sun was set and even had come, that there was the house of God and the gate of heaven, that the Lord was in that place, and would thence go forward with him whithersoever he went, till He brought him back to that river in 'two bands,' who was then crossing it forlorn and solitary!

So had it been with Ishmael; though the feast was not to him a blessing, yet he feasted in his father's tent, and then was sent away. That tender father, who, when a son was promised him of Sarah, cried out to his Almighty Protector, 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee!' [Genesis xvii 18] - he it was, who, under a divine direction, the day after the feast, 'rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.' [Genesis xxi 14] And little thought that fierce child, when for feasting came thirst and weariness and wandering in the desert, that this was not the end of Ishmael, but the beginning. And little did Hagar read his coming fortunes, when 'the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs, and she went and sat her down over against him a good way off; ... for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.'

So had it been with Naomi, though she was not quitting, but returning to her home, and going, not to a land of famine, but of plenty. In a time of distress, she had left her country, and found friends and made relatives among the enemies of her people. And when her husband and her children died, Moabitish women, who had once been the stumbling-block of Israel, became the support and comfort of her widowhood. Time had been when, at the call of the daughters of Moab, the chosen people had partaken their sacrifices, and 'bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.' Centuries had since passed away, and now of Moabites was Naomi mother; and to their land had she given her heart, when the call of duty summoned her back to Bethlehem. 'She had heard in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.' [Ruth i 6-8, 14, 15]

Forlorn widow, great was the struggle in her bosom, whether shall she do?- leave behind her the two heathen women, in widowhood and weakness like herself, her sole stay, the shadows of departed blessings? or shall she selfishly take them as fellow-sufferers, who could not be protectors? Shall she seek sympathy where she cannot

gain help? shall she deprive them of a home, when she has none to supply? So she said, 'Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me!' Perplexed Naomi, torn with contrary feelings; which tried her the more, - Orpah who left her, or Ruth who remained? Orpah who was a pain, or Ruth who was a charge? 'They lifted up their voice and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.' [Ruth i 14-17]

Orpah kissed Naomi, and went back to the world. There was sorrow in the parting, but Naomi's sorrow was more for Orpah's sake than for her own. Pain there would be, but it was the pain of a wound, not the yearning regret of love. It was the pain we feel when friends disappoint us, and fall in our esteem. That kiss of Orpah was no loving token; it was but the hollow profession of those who use smooth words, that they may part company with us with least trouble and discomfort to themselves. Orpah's tears were but the dregs of affection; she clasped her mother-in-law once for all, that she might not cleave to her. Far different were the tears, far different the embrace, which passed between those two religious friends recorded in the book which follows, who loved each other with a true love unfeigned, but whose lives ran in different courses. If Naomi's grief was great when Orpah kissed her, what was David's when he saw the last of him, whose 'soul had from the first been knit with his soul,' so that 'he loved him as his own soul'? [1 Samuel xviii 1-3] 'I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan,' he says; 'very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.' [2 Samuel i 26] What woe was upon that 'young man,' 'of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to,' and 'cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters;' [1 Samuel xvi 12, 18] when his devoted affectionate loyal friend, whom these good gifts have gained, looked upon him for the last time! O hard destiny, except that the All-merciful so willed it, that such companions might not walk in the house of God as friends! David must flee to the wilderness, Jonathan must pine in his father's hall; Jonathan must share that stern father's death in battle, and David must ascend the vacant throne. Yet they made a covenant on parting: 'Thou shalt not only,' said Jonathan, 'while yet I live, show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not; but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever; no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David, every one from the face of the earth ... And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.' And then, while David hid himself, Jonathan made trial of Saul, how he felt disposed to David; and when he found that 'it was determined of his father to slay David,' he 'arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month; for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.' Then in the morning he went out into the field, where David lay, and the last meeting took place between the two. 'David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, till David exceeded. And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the Name of the Lord, saying,

The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the city.' [1 Samuel xx 14-42]

David's affection was given to a single heart; but there is another spoken of in Scripture, who had a thousand friends and loved each as his own soul, and seemed to live a thousand lives in them, and died a thousand deaths when he must quit them: that great Apostle, whose very heart was broken when his brethren wept; who 'lived if they stood fast in the Lord;' who 'was glad when he was weak and they were strong;' and who was 'willing to have imparted unto them his own soul, because they were dear unto him.' [Acts xxi 21, 22. 1 Thessalonians ii 8; iii 8. 2 Corinthians xiii 9] Yet we read of his bidding farewell to whole Churches, never to see them again. At one time, to the little ones of the flock; 'When we had accomplished those days,' says the Evangelist, 'we departed, and went our way, ... with wives and children, till we were out of the city; and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again.' At another time, to the rulers of the Church: 'And now behold,' he says to them, 'I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore, I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God ... I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; ... I have showed you all things, how that so labouring he ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' And then, when he had finished, 'he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.' [Acts xxi 5, 6; xx 25-27, 33, 35, 36-38]

There was another time, when he took leave of his 'own son in the faith,' Timothy, in words more calm, and still more impressive, when his end was nigh: 'I am now ready to be offered,' he says, 'and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.' [2 Timothy iv 6-8]

And what are all these instances but memorials and tokens of the Son of Man, when His work and His labour were coming to an end? Like Jacob, like Ishmael, like Elisha, like the Evangelist whose day is just passed, He kept feast before His departure; and, like David, He was persecuted by the rulers in Israel; and, like Naomi, He was deserted by His friends; and, like Ishmael, He cried out, 'I thirst' in a barren and dry land; and at length, like Jacob, He went to sleep with a stone for His pillow, in the evening. And, like St. Paul, He had 'finished the work which God gave Him to do,' and had 'witnessed a good confession;' and, beyond St. Paul, 'the Prince of this world had come, and had nothing in Him.' [1 Timothy vi 13. John xiv 30] 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' [John i 10, 11] Heavily did He leave, tenderly did He mourn over the country and city which rejected Him. 'When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.' And again: 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children

together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.' [Luke xix 41, 42; xiii 34, 35]

A lesson surely, and a warning to us all, in every place where He puts His Name, to the end of time; lest we be cold towards His gifts, or unbelieving towards His word, or jealous of His workings, or heartless towards His mercies ... O mother of saints! O school of the wise! O nurse of the heroic! of whom went forth, in whom have dwelt, memorable names of old, to spread the truth abroad, or to cherish and illustrate it at home! O thou, from whom surrounding nations lit their lamps! O virgin of Israel! wherefore dost thou now sit on the ground and keep silence, like one of the foolish women who were without oil on the coming of the Bridegroom? Where is now the ruler in Sion, and the doctor in the Temple, and the ascetic on Carmel, and the herald in the wilderness, and the preacher in the market-place? where are thy 'effectual fervent prayers,' offered in secret, and thy alms and good works coming up as a memorial before God? How is it, O once holy place, that 'the land mourneth, for the corn is wasted, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth, ... because joy is withered away from the sons of men?' 'Alas for the day! ... how do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture, yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.' [Joel i 10-18] 'Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down; Sharon is like a wilderness, and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits.' [Isaiah xxxiii 9] O my mother, whence is this unto thee, that thou hast good things poured upon thee and canst not keep them, and bearest children, yet darest not own them? why hast thou not the skill to use their services, nor the heart to rejoice in their love? how is it that whatever is generous in purpose, and tender or deep in devotion, thy flower and thy promise, falls from thy bosom and finds no home within thine arms? Who hath put this note upon thee, to have 'a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts,' to be strange to thine own flesh, and thine eye cruel towards thy little ones? Thine own offspring, the fruit of thy womb, who love thee and would toil for thee, thou dost gaze upon with fear, as though a portent, or thou dost loathe as an offence;-at best thou dost but endure, as if they had no claim but on thy patience, self-possession, and vigilance, to be rid of them as easily as thou mayest. Thou makest them 'stand all the day idle,' as the very condition of thy bearing with them; or thou biddest them be gone, where they will be more welcome; or thou sellest them for nought to the stranger that passes by. And what wilt thou do in the end thereof? ...

Scripture is a refuge in any trouble; only let us be on our guard against seeming to use it further than is fitting, or doing more than sheltering ourselves under its shadow. Let us use it according to our measure. It is far higher and wider than our need; and its language veils our feelings while it gives expression to them. It is sacred and heavenly; and it restrains and purifies, while it sanctions them.

And now, my brethren, 'bless God, praise Him and magnify Him, and praise Him for the things which He hath done unto you in the sight of all that live. It is good to praise God, and exalt His Name, and honourably to show forth the works of God; therefore be not slack to praise Him.' [Tobit xii 6] 'All the works of the Lord are good; and He will give every needful thing in due season; so that a man cannot say, This is worse than that; for in time they shall all be well approved. And therefore praise ye the Lord with the whole heart and mouth, and bless the Name of the Lord.' [Ecclesiastes xxxix 33-35]

'Leave off from wrath, and let go displeasure; flee from evil, and do the thing that is good.' [Psalm xxxvii 8, 27] 'Do that which is good, and no evil shall touch you.' [Tobit xii 7] 'Go your way; eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth your works; let your garments be always white, and let your head lack no ointment.' [Ecclesiastes ix 7, 8]

And, O my brethren, O kind and affectionate hearts, O loving friends, should you know any one whose lot it has been, by writing or by word of mouth, in some degree to help you thus to act; if he has ever told you what you knew about yourselves, or what you did not know; has read to you your wants or feelings, and comforted you by the very reading; has made you feel that there was a higher life than this daily one, and a brighter world than that you see; or encouraged you, or sobered you, or opened a way to the inquiring, or soothed the perplexed; if what he has said or done has ever made you take interest in him, and feel well inclined towards him; remember such a one in time to come, though you hear him not, and pray for him, that in all things he may know God's will, and at all times he may be ready to fulfil it.