

THE HEART GIVEN TO GOD
AND THE WORK :

AN

Ordination Sermon,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1856.

BY

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LORD BISHOP OF RUPERT'S LAND.

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
SAMUEL,
LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD, LORD HIGH ALMONER TO THE QUEEN,
CHANCELLOR OF THE ORDER OF THE GARTER,
AND TO THOSE
ORDAINED PRIESTS AND DEACONS
IN THE CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
ON SUNDAY, DEC. 21, 1856,

This Sermon

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY ONE
WHO OFTEN, WHEN AFAR OFF,
THINKS UPON OXFORD AND THE PAST.

A SERMON.

“My son, give me thine heart.”—Prov. xxiii. 26.

OF the four appointed Ordination Seasons, the one which follows Whitsunday, and that which precedes Christmas, are, from their attendant circumstances, the most impressive. And even, if the former possesses its feature of distinguishing interest from being associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early Church, yet, viewed in every light, the latter has, perhaps, a larger number of recommendations peculiarly its own. We have preceding it the three striking preparatory Collects; the one, which, with the opening of the Ecclesiastical year, places us in the attitude of an expectant Church, looking out for the rapidly approaching Advent of our Lord; the second, which pleads for the fuller and deeper comprehension of that Word, which is the Church's peculiar treasure; and the third, which prays for a larger and more extended blessing on the Ministers of God. And then comes this intervening Sunday, set

apart with such suitable preparation for ordaining the heralds of the Cross. They go forth on their work and errand, to commence their labours, and open their high commission, with that which was the burden of the angelic announcement, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men."

Whatever, too, is gained by numbers, associated together with the same object and at the same time, is secured. It is the season most universally selected for the purpose over the face of England. In almost every cathedral the same solemn work is advancing this morning, and very large will be the multitude of preachers sent forth to-day, added to the number of those who are already witnesses for the Redeemer.* If, then, there be any efficacy in united prayer—in many voices urging the same entreaty on the ear of the Most High; if, even when two or three agree together as touching any petition that they present, there is a corresponding promise of an answer from above, then have we every reason to expect that some blessing may be poured out upon us in answer to the supplications offered, not only by those ordained, but by those connected with them, by family ties, or friendship, or ministerial bonds.

* By the returns of the week, the number reported was 293. Allowing for some omissions and including a few ordinations on the preceding Sundays and those abroad, the total would amount to more than 400.

Beyond this, in the providence of God, it is now permitted us to extend the range of our thoughts. Not only is it a season so closely linked with the welfare of each Diocese at home, it is that most commonly observed also over the widely extending field of labour abroad.* There, too, are others joining with us to-day, and could we bring into one view their position as similarly engaged, from the distant East to the remotest West, it would present the animating spectacle of simultaneous prayer for one common end—prayer for those who so deeply need it, the ambassadors of the Saviour throughout every region of a fallen world.

Now, besides these peculiar advantages of the present season, there is one which our ordinations in general possess, and which is almost limited to our own communion, the blending together of the two services for the different orders of the ministry. It is a matter of no little interest to find assembled together those who, for the first time, and it may be with trembling anxiety, lay hold of the Ark of the Lord; it is

* We have ourselves held seven ordinations in the seven years at this season; five of them as on this very Sunday; in 1853, for other reasons the ordination took place on Christmas Day; and our last was necessarily deferred for one week, until the opening day of the new year. In this way it has been our privilege, in the providence of God, to hold our ordination at the Red River on January 1, 1856, and on December 21 of the same year to preach the ordination sermon within the walls of our own University.

surely for their encouragement that others are presented along with them, who have put their hand to the plough, and would still go forward—who have essayed the work, and, after a period of trial, would now appear to testify that they serve a good and gracious Master—that they have felt enjoyment in His service, and are anxious to devote to it their lives. There ought to be something cheering to the very youngest, in the presence of others who come to renew and ratify their former pledges, while a sympathy must surely be felt by such as have purchased to themselves a good degree towards those who step in to occupy their places, and to fill up the probationary rank which our Church has so wisely retained.

The combination may, it is true, increase a little the difficulty of the preacher, in selecting his topics of address and making it exactly suitable for those at the very outset of their ministry, and those who have already tasted of its pleasantness, and, I must add, of its weighty responsibilities. Yet to both I trust that the words chosen may not be without profit. To all men, indeed, without any distinction of class, the voice of God appeals through the wise king, “My son, give me thine heart;” but if there be any whose portion is peculiarly the Lord, and who are in measure removed from the cares and business of life and separated to the sanctuary, to them surely the words of the royal preacher

would pre-eminently apply. May the good Spirit of God aid us in contemplating from the passage, the heart given to God and to the work, as the great foundation of ministerial usefulness.

The first and leading subject of thought thus presented would be the necessity of the heart being given to God by all who would labour with success in winning souls.

Now this would take us into a hidden sphere, and carry us deeper than anything which man can fully discover. The ministry is in its very nature a spiritual work ; its object is to exert an influence upon the human soul and produce a change within ; and before one can thus act upon another, before there can be any sufficient or adequate motive to lead one to plead with a fellow-creature regarding his eternal welfare, the heart must be entirely and unreservedly given to God. While there is much that is encouraging to-day in the circumstances with which you are sent forth—much that is calculated to fill your mind with deep and lively emotion, and on which you may reflect with advantage to your latest hour, there is beforehand a secret matter between you and your God—a preliminary question into which no previous examination can fully enter, which no friend, however familiar, can decide for you, but which you have, we trust, settled with your God. It has its appropriate prominence in our services. After all has been done during the week in the way of examination,

and of affectionate and earnest exhortation, the first question to be proposed this morning is couched in those searching and penetrating words, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost?" or as, with equal solemnity, and more closely bearing on our subject, to those to be ordained Priests, "Do you think in your hearts that you be truly called?" Here, then, is the direct appeal to your hearts in the presence of the heart-searching God.

The unchanged heart can surely, then, have no place here. It can only be the heart, converted by Divine grace and at peace with God through the blood of the Saviour, that can go forth in humble reliance on the promised aid of the Spirit. God may, indeed, vouchsafe to bless where all is otherwise, and the unworthiness of the minister does not, we are encouraged to think, restrain the operation of His free Spirit; yet how little claim can he have to expect a blessing from above, who has trifled with God at so solemn a crisis, and professed with the lip a dedication to God—an inward call of the Spirit, of which the heart was scarcely conscious?

Nor can the undecided heart advance with that filial trust, which can lead us to feel that our strength is in God. If the heart is still wavering between God and the world, the hesitation and uncertainty will soon appear in our actions and in our counsels. There will be a

want of definiteness and decision in our aim, and we shall run uncertainly as those who beat the air. Nothing great will be attempted, because the expectation will be small; and nothing great will probably be effected, from want of sufficient dependence on the one source of spiritual blessing.

It is thus the entire surrender of the heart which can alone secure for us the favour of God, and undeviating happiness in our own consciences, and in the various duties to which we may be called. If duly sensible of the glorious liberty of the children of God, we shall realise the encouragement which St. Paul gave to the youthful Timothy, when he reminded him that "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." And the whole course of our ministry will take its tone and complexion from that which marks its outset. How smoothly and successfully will your ministry proceed, though it may be with temporary trials and difficulties; yet how surely will it be blessed in its end, if you can each one of you listen to the voice which cries, "My son, give me thine heart," and make the unconditional surrender. Then, although you have "the treasure in earthen vessels, the excellency of the power will be of God."

But this would bring me to pass, by a natural and easy transition, from the heart so given to God to the heart given to the work. Now

the ministerial work is a life, demanding the whole man, even to the end, if we are to make full proof of our ministry, and therefore it is very difficult to analyze the work, and break it up into its component parts. Nor do our limits allow of our examining this life in detail. It may be sufficient to trace the action of the heart in the work, as called forth in study, in the house of God, and in parochial visitation.

We place even in the forefront the heart in study, because in this misapprehension is too often prevalent. It is sometimes imagined, that after the severer studies of the University are over, the necessity for such study has ceased. And yet, how different is the true state of the case! You are only furnished with the needful preparation, with the weapons with which you are to go forth and contend. The theory of our University system would be, that the previous period is devoted to storing the mind with the various branches of subsidiary knowledge, which now you are to direct to one great end. The languages of antiquity have been studied for the improvement of your taste, the sciences have been mastered with a view to accuracy of thought and reasoning, and the stores and treasures of theology have been opened; but as yet you have only entered the porch and gateway of the great master-science. It cannot be comprised within the narrow limits of a University course, nor grasped with the as yet undeveloped

faculties of the youthful mind. But a foundation has been laid, and on it you are invited and expected to build through life.

As then many of you have, we doubt not, entered with intense energy and full devotion of heart into the studies through which you have passed, and, perhaps, at the sacrifice sometimes of health and strength, been absorbed and carried away by them, so we affectionately ask of you a corresponding energy and devotion of heart in the yet nobler field which lies before you. Nor can you be at any loss to know what this field is. It would be the Bible and the heart of man. And this the services of the day would beautifully press upon you. It is the Bible—the Scriptures of the New Testament, or the full and complete volume of God—which is solemnly committed to each one of you; and in the address to those of you called to the Priesthood, you are earnestly exhorted to draw all your cares and studies this way: in the questions proposed you are asked, “Whether you will be diligent in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same?”

We cannot, then, imagine a devoted minister who is not an earnest student, growing in the knowledge of the word as in grace. And how vast the field! the word of God in all its parts—each separate book in its fulness and in its connexion with the rest of Scripture! This to be

a matter of daily study, of deep and prayerful consideration, so that you may bring out of your treasures things new and old. This word, too, in its infinitely diversified points of contact with the human heart, studying it continually as the physician would the various medicines adapted to each form of disease. Now a certain portion of well-planned study from the first will accomplish far more than even a longer period of mere desultory reading. If each were induced to commence on system from to-morrow's dawn, the amount of knowledge gained might astonish you at the year's end. But what I want to press upon you is, that you have only reached the starting-point; you have laid up something, which you are now to use and turn to account. In order to do so with effect, you must be ever replenishing the stores, and going to the great storehouse. And this is equally incumbent on you, whether your sphere be one of seclusion in the retirement of a lonely parish, or whether your intellectual powers are called out by the demands of a more refined congregation. In the one case, labour is necessary to meet the simplicity of the humble believer with the food convenient for him; in the other, toil and endeavour are no less needful to vary that which is presented, and yet to intermingle the great theme with every subordinate subject, to make Christ and Him crucified prominent throughout, yet to draw your teaching from the cere-

monies of the law, the foreshadowing of type and prophecy, or the fully developed lessons of the Gospel. At all events, the injunction of the Spirit by the mouth of the Apostle is one from which none can escape,—“Give attendance to reading;” and again, “Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all.”

If fed thus in study by communion with God and his Word — if the heart is ever getting fresh life from the fountain, it will manifest itself unequivocally in the house of God.

In prayer — in offering up and leading the worship of the congregation, there will be the breathing and outpouring of the heart. For this few rules are necessary; as few, indeed, can be given. In earthly things, we know the manner of the tender and affectionate child, repairing in full confidence to a parent’s bosom; and if we take off all that there is of human infirmity, and elevate our ideas to the throne of our heavenly Father, deigning to accept the prayers of those who are children of want, inviting them to pray, and promising unto them the Spirit of prayer and supplication, then may we arrive at the proper conception of what ought to be our manner of approach to God. That would be to our minds the highest excellence of the minister — his greatest praise, if all were led to pronounce of him that he prays from the heart. And what more fitted to call forth its highest

emotions than when a congregation unites together in the lowly confessions and earnest intercessions of the Litany, or in the exalted praise and adoration of the thanksgiving, and we feel that many hearts are all in unison with the expression of our lips — all sending the same incense heavenward!

How suitable this introduction of heartfelt prayer for that which follows, in which we stand alone; a single voice pleading with man for God! And here we have arrived at that in which the purest affections of the heart, and the noblest powers of the mind, have their highest development. Must there not be the heart in the pulpit, if by manifestation of the truth we are to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God? Why is it that God has committed the ministry of reconciliation to men rather than to angels? Is it not because the finer sympathies of our nature link more closely the hearts of those who speak with the hearts of those who hear?

Very far are we, therefore, from admitting the truth of the proposition sometimes advanced, that other professions present nobler fields for eloquence than that in which you now embark. We can never allow, that the interests of a fellow-creature connected with this passing life — his position, when he stands arraigned before an earthly tribunal with the one awful alternative at stake, can vie in importance with that issue, in

which is involved an eternity of happiness or misery beyond the grave, and his acceptance or rejection before the appointed Judge of quick and dead. Nor ought the events, however critical, which bear upon the rise and fall of the kingdoms of this world, the vicissitudes of war and peace, the fluctuations of wealth and commerce, to stir so deeply the fountains of the heart, as that which bears on the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the extension of the religion of peace among the millions now in darkness and the shadow of death.

We may fall beneath our subject; through the weakness of our nature and the mightiness of the task committed to us, we may not rise to the height of our great argument, but in the proportion of eternity to time, and the value of the soul in the world beyond to its shadowy existence here, must the great theme which is our treasure outweigh any other which earth can present. The constant familiarity with it may sometimes deaden our sensibilities, the repeated appeal may lose something of its effect on our own heart as well as upon that of the hearer: but against this we must strive as a temptation; and whenever we prepare for the pulpit, — whenever we stand up before the congregation, we must try to bring before our minds the thought of that coming day when we shall meet before our God.

An additional temptation, very naturally connected with this spot, may be the inducement to

merge the appeal to the affections in the closely-reasoned address to the intellectual powers. The abstract studies of the place gain an almost undue prominence, and, perhaps, acquire too great an ascendancy, even when the sacred day of rest comes round. And yet it is, if we mistake not, acknowledged by many, that the mind, which has been so fully strung during the week, and exercised in more abstruse speculations, hails with delight the recurrence of God's day, in order that it may be unbent, and welcomes anything which calls into lively play the warmer affections of the heart.

And what a range of subjects is offered to the preacher's choice! The soul, its being in time, its blessedness or misery through eternity; — the Saviour, His love in its length, and breadth, and depth, and height,—His glory with the Father, His agony on the cross, His joy over the redeemed; — Creation, its fair aspect as seen in Paradise, its marred condition since the fall, the future beauty of a regenerate world;—Satan, the author of misery in the world, the tempter of our first parents, the destroyer of man ever since; — the Holy Spirit, the source of new life in the soul, the Comforter of the children of God, the earnest and foretaste of heaven's eternal joy. What an exhaustless store of subjects to be applied to the heart of each one entrusted to your care — to be tasted first in their power and sweetness by yourselves, and then out of the

abundance of the heart to be imparted to others! Oh, surely coldness and the dryness of mere intellectual argument must here be insufficient, if we feel for others, having first felt for ourselves!

But the heart has yet one remaining sphere on which we can only touch for a moment. The word received on the Sabbath is to take effect through the week; if mixed with faith* in those who hear it, it is to assimilate with our nature, and tinge our whole life. And the minister who has thus spoken with tender affection from the pulpit, would pass with the same emotions of the heart to his parochial visitation. He would watch how the Gospel may be penetrating the life, and becoming visible in the daily conversation of his flock, how the leaven may be leavening the whole mass.

There must be an identity, a correspondence not to be mistaken, between the exhortations of the pulpit and the exhibitions of character, as witnessed by the people in the intercourse of the week. The conduct must be such as to give the impression of transparent sincerity† that we preach, not because the duty lies upon us, but because we long for souls; that we seek to lead

* Συγκραμένος τῇ πίστει. The metaphor, according to some of the best commentators, is taken from the process of the digestion of food; the spiritual being compared to the natural digestion.

† Εὐκρίνεια. For the meaning and derivation of this beautiful word, see Trench on the Study of Words. "He who to that Greek word which signifies 'that which will

men to God, not because it is our calling, but because we wish their truest well-being. A cheerfulness of Christian demeanour is therefore all-essential, such a cheerfulness as shall convey to others the undoubted persuasion that we are ourselves possessed of inward happiness, that we have succeeded in obtaining that joy and peace in believing, which we do not hesitate to recommend from our own experience. The influence of such an habitual serenity, in winning and attracting the weary and heavy laden, we can scarcely overrate.

And take the heart in other scenes of parochial life. How common the case of the burdened conscience, bowed down under the weight of depression, yet unable to find rest in God! This in many different forms, resulting at times from intellectual doubts, at others from the remembrance of cherished sin, now from the temptations of our great adversary, and then, it may be, from the temporary hidings of God's face; how difficult to discern each separate case, and distinguish by subtle analysis the cause and the appropriate cure! Yet here, the heart that has known its own bitterness, its own besetting sin,

endure to be held up to and judged by the sunlight, gave first its ethical signification of sincere, truthful, or, as we sometimes say, transparent, can we deny to him the poet's feeling and eye?" Carry up the idea to Him "whose eyes are as a flame of fire, whose countenance is as the sun shining in his strength," and "what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"

that watches the operations of the Spirit on itself and others, is in measure prepared for each case ; and, if we may say so with reverence, is able, from having been tempted, to succour those that are tempted.

And only, again, take the grand test and touchstone of what we preach. The visit has to be paid to the bed of the sick and dying ; to this you must be called at once, immediately on your passage into the ministry.* How vain to trust here to books or the labour of others ! how trying your position, unless you have fully contemplated death and feel that it is disarmed of its sting, and the grave of its victory ! But with the heart engaged in the work, how delightful to pass to the bedside, and find that the word spoken has not been in vain, and that the patient only requires the same affectionate attention a little longer, the same voice to bring forth the promises which are adapted to the suffering and the afflicted, and to offer up the petitions which may prepare for entering the swellings of Jordan ! How delightful to have been the instrument in guiding a fellow-creature to the Good Shepherd, and to be able to commit him in sure trust to that Shepherd, as he passes through the valley of

* This expression is a solemn and important one, and as such is dwelt upon in an "Address to the Graduating Class of the General Theological Seminary, New York," by Bishop Burgess of Maine, in which are many valuable and striking thoughts. See "The Passage into the Ministry." New York, 1850.

the shadow of death, fearing no evil! Far different, however, at times are such scenes,—a sick-bed without any of the comforts of the Saviour, a deathbed only full of the terrors of the world to come! And what shall enable you to bear up at such moments? what but the heart which draws its fulness of tenderness and love, as John did, from the Redeemer's bosom, and trusts that He, who welcomed the penitent thief in his expiring hour, may stand by us and give to us a word in season, which may prove, even in death, a word of life to the soul?

What then, in conclusion, is the consequence, the reward, when the heart is thus given to God and the work? It acts as a magnet to attract others, and, by a beautiful law of our spiritual nature, the minister becomes the heart and centre of operation. Look abroad in this way on many a parochial sphere, whether in town or country, and does not the life seem to gather around the minister, and every plan for active and energetic good to emanate from him? As this happy influence extends, the same zeal spreads, and is communicated to others, and he finds many helpers, many who are impelled by the contagion of example. To be thus the heart and centre of life of a parish, how rich a reward for any toil; but if the influence grow as has been described, who shall estimate the responsibility under which we lie, the power which we may possibly wield?

But before some whom I address a different

sphere lies open. You may go hence, not to enter at once on the cares and duties of parochial life, but to continue within the walls of the University, to instruct, either here or elsewhere, those who are to instruct others. Although, however, thus differing in sphere, your reward would be very similar to what has been described. Deficient, indeed, must be the teacher whose whole heart is not in the task, and who is not filled with enthusiasm in prosecuting his work. If labouring with such ardour, you will also soon become centres of life and influence. You will have the formation of character in your hands, the training of the Christian layman, the moulding of many a minister of God. Does not the school or the college often reflect thus one leading mind, which becomes the heart and centre around which all seems to revolve? To such an influence you may look, to such an ascendancy over those committed to you. Nay, we should rather say, from it you cannot escape, it is a very condition of your being; and if so, it involves also a responsibility, under which the very boldest may tremble. Blessed be God, your sufficiency is in Him.

And, rising yet another step, is not this University a heart of this mighty land, whose pulses beat and are felt to its remotest corner? She draws the youth of England to herself, and sends them forth again, filled with the life, and learning, and character acquired here. If, in this very book of Scripture, we are told to “keep the heart

with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," how diligently should we watch, how carefully pray, that the streams which flow from this centre might be such as to fertilise and bless the whole land! Nor it alone: the vast majority of her sons will of course pass to occupy fields of genial labour at home, but some few will have their duty in other climes; they will have to plant the standard of the Cross in the wilderness, amid the ancient superstitions of India, or the rapidly peopling islands of the South. And how pleasant, after some years of solitary wandering, to revisit the much-loved spot, to be greeted with kind and cordial welcome, and to find warm and youthful hearts ready to buckle on their armour and to do battle for the Lord! Not, therefore, as a stranger, but as one trained and nurtured among you, as one who remembers with gratitude the instruction of bygone years, would I ask you, beloved brethren, to give to God to-day that which alone you can,—the only thing which God will receive,—give to Him the affections of your hearts, the service of your lives. And may God grant the abundant outpouring of His Spirit, not only to you, but to all this day ordained, that labouring with hearts given to God, and hearts wholly in the work, you may have fruit of your ministry even on earth, and may have everlasting cause of joy and rejoicing, in looking back on that which you this day commence.