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F A R E W E L L

TO THE

First Congregational Church

IN NORWALK, CONN.,

SABBATH, APRIL 29, 1855.

BY REV. EDWIN HALL, D.D.

AT THE CLOSE OF HIS LABORS AS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH FOR
TWENTY-THREE YEARS.

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NORWALK, *May* 2, 1855.

TO REV. E. HALL, D. D.

REV. AND DEAR SIR :—At a meeting of the First Congregational Society of Norwalk, holden at the Lecture Room, on Monday last, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to convey to you their unanimous acknowledgment. that, during the long period you have been their Pastor, you have preached to them the Gospel in its fullness and purity ; that your pastoral duties have been performed with kindness, faithfulness, and impartiality ; that your daily walk, as a man and a Christian, has been eminently such as to win their confidence and esteem and that of the community at large ; and to assure you, that entertaining these sentiments, and regretting the partial loss of health which has induced you to separate from them, they shall ever hold your services, and intercourse, and character, in grateful and affectionate remembrance ; and pray that length of days and temporal happiness, and the peace that passeth all understanding may attend you in the new relations you are called to sustain.

We were further charged with the duty of conveying to you the unanimous request of the Society, that you will favor them with a copy of your Farewell Sermon, for publication.

Hoping that a compliance with their request will be consistent with your views and feelings, we are

Very truly and sincerely

Your friends,

THOMAS B. BUTLER,
STILES CURTIS,
L. HYATT,
CHARLES LOCKWOOD,
A. E. BEARD,
IRA GREGORY,
HENRY I. HOYT.

FAREWELL SERMON.

2 COR. XIII. 11.

“FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL. BE PERFECT, BE OF GOOD COMFORT, BE OF ONE MIND, LIVE IN PEACE; AND THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU.”

THE apostle having, in two long epistles, set forth to the Corinthian brethren the whole scheme of Christian doctrine, with every exhortation to holiness, comes, at last, to a point where his labors for their good must close. In a few brief words he sums up the amount of all he would say, and bids them a final farewell, “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

“BE PERFECT.”—The word in the original, for *Be perfect*, is used in Mark, i. 19, where James

and John were “*mending*” their nets ;—repairing whatever was defective or unsound ; making them whole, complete, and serviceable. It is used in Gal. v. 1, for *restoring* one who has been overtaken in a fault. It is used in Luke vi. 40. Every one that is *perfect* shall be as his master ; *i. e.*, every one that is a *complete, finished* disciple, shall be of such a character as Christ. If the original idea of *mending* is retained, every man wholly *restored* from his sins, and made a *complete* Christian, shall be like Christ. The word is used, Heb. xiii. 21, “The God of peace ——— *make you perfect* in every good work, to do his will.”

Be perfect :. be complete Christians ; having a symmetrical and finished Christian character. Let your whole mind, soul, spirit, and life be wholly imbued with Christianity, and completely under its power.

Some Christians content themselves with one or two traits of Christianity ; and, overlooking other important requisites, grow up sadly out of shape. Some, who lay great stress on devotional frames of mind, and who, perhaps, excel in spiri-

tuality and prayerfulness, forget to be active in well-doing—in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoners, and endeavoring to lead souls to Christ. Some, who are in repute for devotional piety, strangely fail in honesty or in liberality,—become hard men to deal with, or have an unpleasant temper, and fail in kindness and love. It should seem hard to explain how such qualities can exist together ; but man, when he is renewed, has two natures : he delights in the law of God after the inner man, but he finds a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin and death. While he watches and cultivates one part of his character, the evil breaks out unnoticed in another, and he may be all unconscious of it. Some are active in the church, but self-sufficient and self-willed. Some fail in direct activity, who are yet even in their course, and much to be relied on in case of need. Some run well in other respects, but fail in the graces of forbearance and patience. They cannot bear a slight injury, or a disrespectful or

disparaging remark. They lack the charity that *beareth* all things ; not considering that in this sinful world whoever would possess his soul in patience, *must* bear many things, which would not need to be borne if the world were not in a fallen state : and not considering, perhaps, that they themselves are not fit for a better world. Some do well till they are injured ; and then they show they have not yet attained the grace of the Saviour, who, when he hung upon the cross, instead of speaking one word of rebuke, by which his enemies would have withered up and perished, only said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. Some do very well in prosperity, but when troubles come they faint, and forget to profit by the words which are written for our comfort, and which describe the Lord as our Rock, our Fortress, our High Tower, our very present help in time of trouble. It requires many and many a lesson, and much severe discipline, to take a poor, fallen creature, whose depravity is not only innate, but strengthened by long habits of evil, and to make him in all respects a *complete, perfect*

Christian. But this is what we are to strive for, to be perfect ; to be as kind, as just, as true, as pure, as merciful, as forbearing, as patient, as zealous in doing good, as meek, as humble, as prayerful, as full of piety to God, as heavenly-minded, as strong in the faith, as hopeful, as far raised above all improper despondency or gloom, as Christianity requires. This is what we are to strive for to be perfect, with every sin subdued, every defect in our character removed, and every ornament, and grace, and excellency in us in full perfection. All this is a great work for a poor, feeble, wicked worm of the dust to undertake, but this it is to undertake to be a Christian. It is wonderful what time, and pains, and prayer, and the grace of God will accomplish in one who earnestly sets about the work. Who of us doing it? Who of us will endeavor to fulfill the apostle's injunction, BE PERFECT?

“BE OF GOOD COMFORT.”—This is a world of trial. In addition to the ordinary troubles of life, Christians, in the days when the apostle wrote,

suffered from the hostility of the world. There are also spiritual afflictions ; when the child of God feels his infirmities, and is distressed with his sins as with the body of death. Hunger, cold, want and the fear of want, are not the only trials of life ; no, nor is one's own sickness or distress, nor one's own calamity or death. Many of our keenest afflictions arise from our purest affections ; as when we are called to part with our children, or our dear friends ; or when we are afflicted with their sorrows. One may have reached a point where all anxiety for himself ceases, yet his care for the welfare or for the afflictions of those who are nearest to him, may greatly oppress his heart. But whatever be the trials of the Christian, whether outward distress or inward sorrow, it is always his privilege and his duty to be of good comfort. The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice : much more the children of God ! Have you cares ? Cast them on the Lord. Are you afflicted ? Pray. Are you troubled with anxious forebodings ? Take no thought for the morrow. The Lord only calls you to bear the evil that he lays upon you

to-day. Do embarrassments and trials surround you? Count it all joy. They are the trial of your faith and patience. They are exercises of the grace of submission; light afflictions, but for a moment, working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Are you anxious for Zion? Are you grieved for the afflictions of Joseph? The Lord loves Zion more than any of her children love her. He may be preparing the richest mercies in ways that seem the darkest. Or if what seems adverse is a chastisement, that may be more needful than anything else; the richest blessing, in the end, that a faithful God can bestow. With the throne of grace open before him; with a kind Father—a Faithful God for his rock and refuge, his very present help in time of trouble, the Christian may well be of good comfort. Cast away gloomy, desponding, thoughts. Trust in God. Seek his face. Repose in him; and Rejoice ever more; and again I say, Rejoice.

“BE OF ONE MIND.”—Where age, and taste, and judgment, and temperament, and interest, cause

men to differ so much, it would seem almost impossible that a large community, or church, can in all things long continue unanimous. Unadvised speeches, little misunderstandings, party feelings, and sin in a thousand forms, all tend to get them out of patience and out of confidence with each other. Then all men love to have their own way. The world would stagnate if the views, feelings, and tempers of all were alike. If all material objects were of the same chemical character, the world would die. It would be a dull world indeed, if all things were of one color. Music would be a wearisome monotony, if all were one note. God made men to differ. Their looks differ ; their complexion, their gait, their minds, their voices ; and so with their views. God meant it so. There is use in it. But as all nature in its infinite variety blends in harmony and beauty, so it should be with the differences among men. Expect differences. Never demand that all shall feel and think alike. Yet remember how some of our dearest interests depend upon union ; and how necessary these very varieties of thought

and temper render it, that people should be conciliatory, and sometimes yielding. It is seldom allowed to people to be so unanimous in feeling that all may have their own way. Yet in public interests there is room for great agreement. Christians have similar principles, tastes, hopes, experiences. They have one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. It is rather natural that there should be a good degree of unanimity in things pertaining to their spiritual interest : and it is wonderful how readily people can agree when they earnestly desire to do so, and when no one is determined to drive on his own way or else abandon Zion. Ah, they are bad people who will forsake public worship, and break their covenant, because they are a little displeased, and because their views and feelings have not been so much regarded as they think they should have been. I said they are bad people ; I recall it. Good people are sometimes left to act very badly. I would rather say, it is bad conduct, of which no child of God should ever allow himself to be guilty. *Be of one mind* ; be reasonable ; be conciliatory : and there is no rea-

son in the world why the harmony, which has been so well-nigh unbroken among you for more than twenty years, may not last as long as any of you live. At all events, this is a divine injunction, Be of one mind.

“LIVE IN PEACE.”—O what wars and fightings have attested the fallen nature of man! What animosities have arisen even in the churches of Christ, and destroyed their peace! How brethren have been separated by feuds! How members of the same church or the same family have embittered their whole lives, ruined their usefulness and their character, by quarrels arising often from mere insignificant and unworthy causes! How natural it is to fallen man to have wrath or bitterness rise up in his heart, upon ill-usage, or even to be stirred up to revenge! How deadly these quarrels are to piety! How they drive away the gentle Dove, the Holy Spirit! What folly people perpetrate in anger! What advantages they give to Satan! Now as it is necessary to fallen man never for a single day to omit

the petition, Lead us not into temptation, so it is necessary, everywhere, perpetually to repeat the exhortation in churches, Live in peace. What house divided against itself can stand? But where Christians determine that they will live in peace, it is wonderful how easily they accomplish it. There is one remedy for the worst evils—save for departure from the truth, and for such unrighteousness as it is sin to tolerate; and that remedy lies in the single word FORGIVE. Suffer long. Be patient. If nothing else will suffice, then bear, and forgive. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace to them that make peace. Peacemakers shall be called the children of God.

If these injunctions are complied with, then under a divine warrant the apostle promises the divine blessing. “AND THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE SHALL BE WITH YOU.”

As Christ is the Prince of Peace, so God is the God of Peace. He loves those who study the things that make for peace. The God of love loves them who live together in love. When he giveth peace, who then can cause trouble? What

can disturb us when the peace of God, which passeth knowledge, shall keep our hearts and minds? In the world we may have tribulation, but in Christ we shall have peace. Calm trust, hope, consolation, a blessing from God that cheers the heart; that maketh the soul rich and addeth no sorrow: rich reward for them that keep the commandments of God! Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.

And now, dear brethren, I come to the words which, on account of their home application, pain me more than any words that I have been called to utter these three and twenty years, "FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!"

Finally! Long have I preached the Gospel to you; and I have the testimony of a good conscience that I have endeavored to preach it simply and purely. Ye are my witnesses that I have not preached myself, but Jesus Christ. And now standing before you, perhaps for the last time, perhaps never to meet again with some of you till we meet at the Judgment, I testify to you that the Gospel which I have preached to you

is true. Oh, how many of the fathers and mothers in Israel have I attended on their death beds, and seen the hope and comfort which this Gospel gave them in a dying hour! And I entertain no doubt that many of these dear friends of my youth are now rejoicing in heaven. Many of your sons and daughters I have attended on their death-beds. And they have felt that the hope of this Gospel robbed death of its terrors, and the grave of its gloom. I have seen the power of this Gospel in times of revival, when many were inquiring what they must do to be saved. I have witnessed its power when God was striving with the solitary sinner alone. You have in many and many a case, witnessed its transforming power. Brethren, the Gospel which has been preached in this church for more than two hundred years, without one discordant voice or note, is true. Other foundation can no man lay than is laid. The soul and its eternal interests are things of too great moment to trust to any other than to the chief corner stone, elect, precious, which God hath laid in Zion.

It grieves me that some to whom I have preached the Gospel from the beginning of my ministry here, are yet without its consolations, and without any part in its eternal benefits. Dear friends, you ought not so to be. You have no right to withhold your souls from Christ and from the truth, for a single hour. You need not. Where will this neglect of the Gospel end? When will you at length believe and obey the Gospel? Shall I ever hear concerning you, the joyful intelligence that such or such a one is rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God?

“*Finally!*” After so many years, at last comes the end of my labors here. They have been years of more peace and comfort, of more forbearance and kindness on the part of the people, than I ever expected to enjoy in the ministry of the Gospel; for which, first, I thank the Lord; and then you, my kind friends, whose forbearance and kindness have relieved me from so many of the shades that have fallen upon so many others in the ministry of the Gospel; and from which I had no reason to expect an exemption. Nor do

I thank you alone. My heart goes out in grateful remembrance to the fathers and mothers of many among you, who are now mingled with the dead. As I have thought of leaving you, and my heart has been very sad, my thoughts have wandered over these pleasant valleys and hills, and entered dwelling after dwelling, and recalled the pleasant and profitable hours which I have spent in the society of these ; or as my ears have again seemed to hear their voices in our meetings for prayer, my soul has been full. There is not a dwelling in this congregation where, from the beginning down to the present hour, I have not felt at home. There is not a soul among the living or the dead, whom I have not been able to regard as a friend ; not one among you, whom it will not give me pleasure to see once more, if the Lord shall ever allow me to revisit the scenes where the best part of my life has been spent ; or if I shall hereafter be permitted to see any of you in the place which I expect hereafter to call my home.

But this is a changing as well as a dying world.

Few among you have not been called to partings which have concerned you more nearly than this. Here none of us has a continuing city. Let us not deceive ourselves with that word "*Finally*." This is not the end. We are certain to meet once more ; I to give an account of my stewardship, you of the profit you have made by the Gospel. If we part, then, it is indeed *final*. The Lord grant that we may all be in readiness for that day.

But, *Finally, brethren, farewell*. My wishes, my prayers for your welfare are sincere ; as I doubt not are yours for mine. What lot is before any of us in this world we know not. It is a world of trouble ; it is a world of death, because it is a world of sin. Our best wishes for each other's welfare all fulfilled, may not secure us from sorrows. Let us gird ourselves for usefulness. Let us quit us like men, and be strong. Let us bear trials and endure sorrows in patience ; and then our lot will be well, for all things work together for good to them that love God. There is a better world. Let us all try to meet there.

Let us mind not present sorrows, but look at the end, and anticipate a happy meeting in Heaven. Any path is well that ends there. Let us trust in God, and he will bring us safely through, and that by the best path, though it should not seem to be the smoothest.

Children of the Sabbath School; and you teachers,—helpers in the work of the Gospel,—with much affection, I bid you farewell.

Members of the choir, and you who have been so in years that are past—I bid you farewell. I cannot part with you without recording a fact singular in the history of choirs, that for many years not only have your posts been filled with uniform regularity,—not only have you cultivated sacred music with a success which I have not observed anywhere to be surpassed, but for many years we have been almost entirely free from troubles and difficulties on account of, or among, the choir. The Lord reward you and bless you. From the heart I bid you an affectionate farewell.

To the members of the church, and of the Society,—to the few aged survivors of a genera-

tion who are mostly gathered to their fathers,—to those of my own age, who have here advanced with me, step by step, from youth up to the borders of age,—with kind wishes, with prayers for your future good, and for your eternal salvation, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

O, our God! whom we have imperfectly served, and against whom we have sinned,—whose patience has not been exhausted, nor whose mercies clean gone for ever,—we thank and praise thee for these years of unbroken harmony. We thank and praise thee for the spiritual blessings granted to this congregation, till now the years of its history are numbered by centuries. We commit ourselves, we commit each other, we commit our beloved Zion to thee, and to the Word of thy grace. Thy hand shall lead us, thy right hand shall hold us, during the remaining days of our pilgrimage. When these are over, then let us meet in Heaven, to praise thee for our redemption, for ever and ever. *Amen.*