

**A BRIEF EXPOSITION
OF ST PAUL'S EPISTLE
TO THE ROMANS**

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EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

BY THE LATE
REV. WILLIAM MARSH, D.D.,
RECTOR OF BEDDINGTON, HONORARY CANON OF WORCESTER.

WITH A PREFACE, BY HIS DAUGHTER, THE AUTHOR OF THE
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PREFACE.

THIS brief exposition of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans was commenced by my beloved and revered father, during a lingering illness, towards the close of the year 1862.

His mind had for a long time dwelt much on this Epistle; and as the attacks from which he suffered increased in severity and danger, his anxiety not to leave this little work unfinished increased also.

Most touching was it to see him, during the intervals of comparative ease, exerting himself to dictate a few sentences at a time—for his *last* opportunity of spreading through the press the knowledge he loved so well, of the gospel of the grace of God. Several times he pursued his labour, which to him seemed only a mental recreation, until palpitation of the heart put an end to it for the time; and so earnest

was his interest in this work, that his medical attendant suggested his life might be prolonged by the energy of his desire for its completion.

It was ever one of the distinguishing features of his mind, alike intense in its tranquillity and tranquil in its intensity, to desire to accomplish, at all hazards to himself, any work which he undertook in order to promote the interests of the kingdom of Christ. It was this "spirit of a man sustaining his infirmity" which constrained him, during a temporary rally in the course of that illness, to attempt to resume his habit of preaching the afternoon sermon on Sunday. This he did with an energy and power which astonished his hearers, and caused a young officer in the army, who was acquainted with the risk of life which he thus incurred, to exclaim as he left the church, "Well, I never saw such pluck! That old veteran would march up to the cannon's mouth, at the order of *his* Commander-in-chief, without giving a thought to danger!"

But the effort, in the midst of unconquered illness, was too great; and after one more repetition of it, a return of those attacks of the heart ensued, and he was again laid by, to enter his pulpit no more;

although to the last he continued to give Scriptural addresses from his sick-bed, or his wheel-chair in the Rectory or its grounds, where on different occasions from two hundred to five hundred persons assembled to hear him.

Towards the close of the first week in January 1863, his illness alarmingly increased. From eight o'clock on Monday evening of the second week, until noon on the following day, his family, with his doctor, watched around his bed, believing that each hour would be his last. It was the week which had been set apart by many Christians, throughout the world, for special prayer. In London, amongst other places opened for a similar purpose, a daily prayer-meeting was held at Freemasons' Hall. To the chairman of this assembly a note was forwarded from Dr Marsh's family, to ask the "Christians gathered together there to plead with God that, *if* it would best promote His glory, and the good of His Church, that lovely and beloved life might yet be spared for a season, with a measure of restoration to health."

This petition was read, and one who was present at the time wrote, "Your request seemed to find a

response in almost every heart there. The 'Amen' from countless voices would have borne up your fainting spirit, had you heard it."

From that hour he began to revive. "Women received their dead raised to life again." And although it was a return from the very gate of Heaven, and from the rapture of having had glimpses of the glory within, making "his face as it were the face of an angel," yet was he thankfully content to linger on earth for a season, as soon as he knew that it was the will of his Lord.

"It will be delightful," he said, "to serve my Master and Saviour here a little longer, and to make my beloved ones happy again;" adding in his own cheerful tone, and with the sweet sunshine of his playful smile, "And now I can finish my Romans!"

It *was* finished, early in the summer of that year; but was kept beside him for occasional enriching with some fresh thought or quotation. He never wearied of looking over it, from time to time; having it locked up for two or three months, and then taken out again, that he might read it, improve it, and, above all, pray for great blessing to accompany it.

The sunlight glow of the cloudless summer of this

year seemed to be reflected about him. Never had we seen his face so brilliant in colouring and expression,—never had the charm of his conversation been more flowing and sparkling,—never had his heart of love so poured forth its heavenly warmth and tenderness. Did he foreknow the treasure he was laying up for us—of looks and tones and words and ways—almost too lovely for earth? It may be so. It may be, also, that there mingled a solemn yet joyful presentiment that it was his *last* anniversary, with the simplicity of child-like gladness with which he looked forward to his ninetieth birthday, and arranged the programme of the gathering of his parishioners of all classes for that day—and for a conference on the day before, of clergy and laity, with reference to the subject of the Second Advent of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.* For half a century this glorious anticipation had occupied his thoughts, and had been the joy and rejoicing of his heart; and he had bestowed much time and study upon books connected with the subject, and especially upon the diligent search of the prophetical part of the Word of God.

* Forty-three years ago, he published his "Plain Thoughts on Prophecy."

The brief but faithful record of the words which he spoke on those two days has been already published.* None who heard will easily forget that clear testimony to the blessedness of resting on the finished work of Christ, and of looking for His coming glory; nor the sudden burst of sacred song with which he closed his first address—nor the pouring out of his soul in prayer.

Thus ended the sixty-six years of his public ministry in the gospel of Christ.

Yet there remained one more solemn pulpit for him to enter—his deathbed. And not even his long life of faith upon the Son of God could bear witness with such force to the nearness and all-sufficiency of a Saviour. Those who entered that chamber of death felt it was holy ground—knew there was a Presence there, fulfilling the promise, “When thou passest through the waters, I WILL BE WITH THEE.”

A year and a half earlier, he had exclaimed, after quoting the lines,—

“But timorous mortals start and shrink
To cross that narrow sea,”

“*Why should they?* They may go over Jordan dry-

* “The Last Birthday of the Rev. W. Marsh, D.D.” By M. C. J. T.