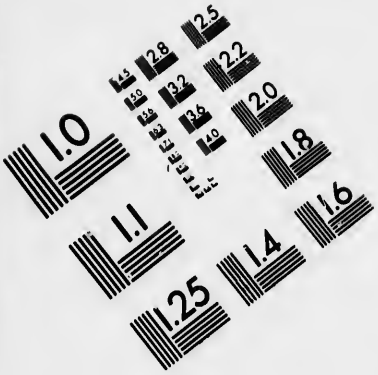

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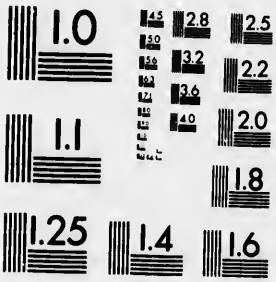

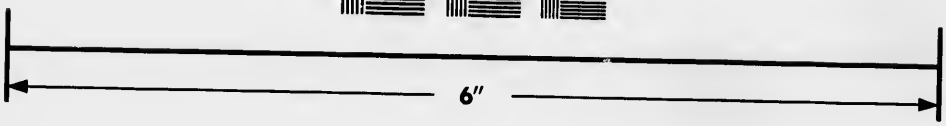

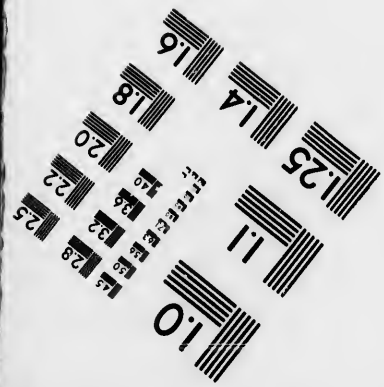

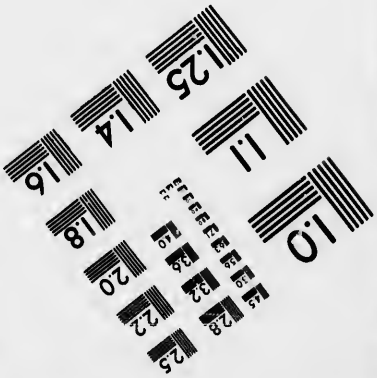

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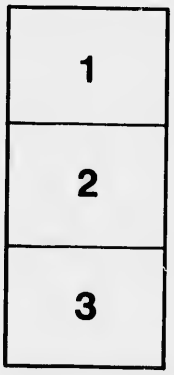

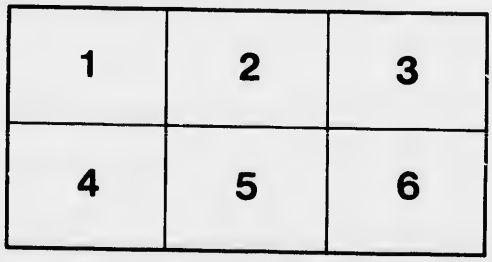

FAREWELL

SERMON,

TO THE

Congregation of St. Paul's Church,

WOODSTOCK,

BY THE

REV. ALBERT WHITMARCH.

WILLIAM WARWICK,
PUBLISHER.
1867.

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FAREWELL SERMON,

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Congregation of St. Paul's Church,

BY THE

REV. ALBERT WHITMARCH.

Subject,—The Unchangeableness of Christ.—Heb. XIII. 8.

"JESUS CHRIST—THE SAME YESTERDAY—TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER."

THE introduction of these words in the chapter before us is abrupt, and their position somewhat isolated: there is, seemingly, no immediate connection with that which precedes or follows. The faith and blessed end of their devoted Pastors had been referred to, and their example commended, when, as if by a sudden inspiration, the Apostle exclaims,—"*Jesus Christ—the same yesterday—to-day—and for ever.*"

What a grand and attractive object is this for our contemplation to-night! Far more so than any pyramid, however ancient, towering heavenward in some solitary place, but which, we know, must one day be displaced; far more so than the sturdy forest oak, that hath withstood the fury of many a wintry gale, but, ere long, will have to succumb to the laws of nature; far more so than the loftiest mountain on which the eye of man hath gazed, since when the trumpet of the last day shall sound, this will be laid low.

Magnificent as these pictures from the book of nature are, yet to the Christian Artist who is seeking, amid the fluctuations, the changes, the distractions, the agitations which surround him, something firm and stable—something that will not only stand the test of time but also endure throughout eternity—there is no object which can at all bear comparison with this, that is to say, which can fill his soul with such inward satisfaction and heavenly rapture or supply the longings, and the cravings of his inner life.

"Jesus Christ, the *same* yesterday, to-day, and for ever." My dear Brethren, how delightful a theme is this to talk about! Where shall we begin to speak of it? Or when

may we make an end? It reaches back to the beginning of all things, before even the Sons of God were born—and forward to a period which the imagination fails to comprehend. Gracious God, grant us the eye of Faith rightly to know and believe in Jesus; and give us a new and tender heart worthily to look on Jesus, and to understand this great truth concerning Him—*His eternal sameness.*

Consider 1st: The mutability of all earthly things as suggested by the terms of the text.

"Yesterday!" Where is *it*—with all its lights and shadows, its pleasures and pains, its promises and expectations, its omissions and commissions? What is it? Shall we call it a phantom? A shadow? A delusive dream? And whither, too, may we pursue it? It is gone, alas! Forever gone, into the abyss of the past, as much so even as the Yesterday of 500 years since! How *near* it seems! How *fresh* is our recollection of it! How warm our memory! But recall it we cannot—neither can we make up for its deficiencies—nor retract the errors we then committed. It is something like a golden coin which hath slipped suddenly from the hand and fallen down a steep declivity, affording no other consolation to the astonished owner than the tinkling sound produced in its descent, and the conviction that it lies concealed in the *debris* below. "*Yesterday,*" therefore being beyond our reach and leaving only slight traces behind, marks the *change* to which earthly things are subject.

But, "To-day!" What of it? It is now, this moment as we speak. Thus far we hold it in possession; it is ours. "To-day," I say, is verily ours. But, see, it flies! It eludes our grasp! Stop it will not. It may not tarry though we be ever so importunate. We seek to catch it as it passes; it is however too swift for us. Ere we can find time to say, "Here it is," behold! it is gone, and gone for ever!

"To-day," perchance, we revel in the apparent security of our person and goods, and believe that nothing can injure or destroy the one or the other. We pride ourselves on the various and manifold comforts which surround us, the result of much toil and arduous exercise. We look with complacency upon the accumulation of our worldly store,—the well-merited fruit of constant industry. We look with fond and parental delight upon the little ones, which like Olive Branches, gather round our table and help to cheer our solitude; and we feel that no small part of our earthly happiness is wrapt up in their interest; whilst the unpleas-

ant reflection is banished quickly from our minds that, any moment, sickness may take them away from us, one-by-one. So happy are we at intervals that, we foolishly wish we could abide always here; notwithstanding the sad experience of time's changes, and the melancholy havoc which death hath made in our midst. "It is good," we say, "to be here," and make an effort to build our tabernacle accordingly.

"To-day" we lay out our plans for the future; we build up certain imaginary castles in the air, and derive a kind of ecstatic pleasure in prospect of their fruition—and, yet, what is all this but vanity and vexation of spirit? What is it but wearying ourselves in vain, and putting ourselves to unnecessary anxiety and carefulness? What are all our calculations, our conclusions, our resolves, our purposes, our wills, as regards the future, but presumption. We forget that we are but Dust and Ashes. We forget that the life, which we are so careful to preserve and keep in being as long as possible, acts independent of us, and hangs on a cord of such a delicate and tender a nature, that a very small thing will snap it.

No sooner are our affections centred on things below than they gradually fade from our view, and we see them no more. As we count up our treasures and think of the benefits to be derived from their use; suddenly do they take themselves wings and fly away. As we drink in the beauty of the landscape and rejoice in the thought of its continuance, a convulsion of nature destroys it, or we are removed unexpectedly from its locality, or an infinite number of incidents and accidents change the aspect of the scene; so that we are constantly reminded that, "Here we have no continuing city." "To-day" is as changeable and uncertain as "Yesterday." Whilst, so to speak, we are in the attitude of stretching out our hands to receive its blessings, an unlooked for something deprives us of them. Here then is change.

And, now, what of "To-morrow?" For that remains to us. May we make arrangements for it? We may certainly, but are we *sure* that any one of them will turn out as we expect or be fully realized? If, only, the *present* moment is ours, how can we with any certainty pronounce upon the morrow? If the *past* in many of its features is inexplicable, how shall we begin to solve or read the future? "To-morrow!" *So near* to us, and yet it *never comes*. The day-light fadeth; we think on what we shall be and do to-morrow, we lay ourselves down to sleep, we take our rest,

we awake, but not to find "To-morrow," that is *gone*, it is only "To-day." Still do we find the morrow *future;* its anticipation leads us onward to the end of time. Thus, life, look at it from whatever side you will, is a perpetual change; an ever-varying and disappointing vision, an "Ignis fatuus," attracting, hurrying us on towards the borders of eternity!

But again; we see *mutability* inscribed on all around us. *We see it in every one we meet:* How altered is such an one we exclaim! And the common reflection of our mind, is, what a change a few weeks, months, or years may work. We find men changed in their opinions, their feelings, their modes of living, and, what is saddest of all, in their friendships, their loves and hates! Friends, or those we thought so, and received as such, become our foes; and foes, contrary to our expectation, our friends.

We see it in the Material World around us. Suppose, for example, after a long absence from the soil which gave us birth, we resolve to visit the haunts of our childhood. We search diligently for the traditional homestead, the once familiar foot-path, the antiquated stile or gate, the brake or briar; but how, alas! is it all changed! Old faces greet us no more—the new generation of children know us not—we are recognized with difficulty by the privileged few who have over-stepped the common age of man. Truly, the place, that knew us so long, knows us now no more! Disappointed and cast down we turn our backs upon the scene, and begin for the first time to realize most fully and practically the assertion so often made that, "All things earthly fade away!"

We see it, moreover in ourselves. The lapse of time tells upon us;—our step is not so firm and sprightly; our eye is not so bright; our spirit is not so elastic; grey hairs appear on some of our heads; the weight of years presses heavily upon others, and life becomes too often a burden too heavy to bear. We are not what we were a short time since. A shadow, so to speak, has come over our vision; we have not lived to *see* the realization of our day-dreams. We long for the re-appearance of the hours spent in childhood, when everything seemed to smile on us and beckon us onward! But there is no going backward; "Old things have passed away, and new things occupy their place." The period has changed, and we have changed with it. Our feelings, our thoughts and desires are strangely unlike the past; with our maturer years, our anxieties and cares

have multiplied; we are a living miracle unto ourselves, and seem not to see in the person of to-day, the healthy, happy, hopeful man of yesterday. How has the strong become feeble! The wealthy impoverished! The talented imbecile! The admired forgotten and neglected! Surely there is no change so great, so striking, so instructive as that produced in ourselves.

But again—*we see it even in our spiritual course.* There has not been that advance in piety which, at first, we had reason to look forward to. Advance, growth, increase there must be, or life may be doubted. Yet, I doubt not, with many of us, that growth has not been *equal*; rather, I should say, by fits and starts, in spite, notwithstanding, of fluctuation of feeling and experience. Yet, praised be God, an invisible hand has led and upheld us through all our wanderings, otherwise we had, long since fainted and fallen. *Where* let us ask is our *first* love?—The enthusiasm which filled our breasts when first we knew the Lord?—The fruitful joy of drawing nearer and nearer unto God? The "closer walk" we once enjoyed? The child-like simplicity of our infant faith? The purity and heavenly-mindedness of our early conversation? The virgin thoughts of happiness and heaven? Gone! or mostly gone; choked, and in a measure, smothered by the thorns and thistles of this lower world.

Such is life! within, without, and around us. Upon all we see, and hear, and know "*mutability*" is written. What saith the Bible about it—"Man continueth not in *one* stay." "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets?" He cometh up and is cut down, like a flower; His life fleeth, as a shadow, and the length of his day is, as a tale that is told,—as a dream when one awaketh, swifter than a weavers shuttle," or than clouds chasing each other in the wintry sky, doth his life seem to come to an end and his history to a termination.

Well can I fancy some of you who have met with nought but disappointment here, and are weary of so much change, sighing forth the earnest wish of your hearts, for something that *abideth*, that continueth *constant and true*, and hath nothing of *fickleness* about it. You desire a faithful friend, who knoweth how to counsel in prosperity as well as console in adversity. You want one who can hold you up, when in danger of falling, and pray for you when your faith faileth. One who will be the *same* to you when crossing the Jordan of Death as He hath already been to you in life.

Do you, *indeed*, seek such a friend? To-day, then, you may find Him, in the person of our adorable Lord and Saviour—"Jesus Christ, the *same* yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Permit, me therefore, with my last voice, and much earnestness and affection, to recommend Him unto you.

You understand, of course, that this friend is not a mere *man*, but God and man united together in one glorious and unchangeable person. He is "Alpha and Omega," the "First and the Last,"—the self-existent "I am," who had His existence before "John," before "Abraham," "before the World," "in the beginning." But what I am particularly anxious for you to notice at this time is, the "*sameness*" of this Divine and Human friend.

What He *was*, He *is*, and always will be. Let us see what he *was*, and mark first *His tender compassion in His loving works*: A funeral scene is before me! A certain poor *widow* is following sadly, to his last resting place, her only son. The mourning women are lifting up their voices in wild lamentation. There is deep sorrow there. All feel for the desolate one, but, like Rachel, she refused to be comforted. Through nature's tears, now falling fast) she discerns only a gloomy pall, and an open sepulchre; and her spirit sinks within her.

God's mercy and love are forgotten, and doubt begins to show itself, when, at the very crisis of her affliction, Christ, the sorrow-bearer draws near! His eye is fixed, with sympathising pity, on the lonely widow; her case needs His peculiar care, and soon the arm of His strength is about her. Gentle and tender are the words which He whispers in her ear, bidding her *still* hope and be of good comfort. He will not keep her long in suspence. With the voice of command He orders the procession to halt, and standing by the bier, saith, in language unmistakeable, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!" And he that was dead sat up, and He returned him, at once, to his half-weeping, half-rejoicing mother, who, not long before had thought her treasure irrecoverably lost! Without waiting for thanks or creature worship, or wishing further to intrude at so delicate a moment, during, *i. e.*, the mutual recognition of parent and child, Jesus passes on, is soon engaged in other labours.

Another scene: There was a cottage in Bethany whereunto our beloved Lord oftentimes resorted, more especially when wearied by His ministerial work, or fatigued by the length of His travels. He had formed a close intimacy with two sisters—Mary and Martha. It is said that He

loved them. We know that he spent the greater part of his spare moments in their retired dwelling. It so happened, in the Providence of God, that their brother Lazarus fell sick, which terminated shortly after in his death. Jesus heard of the circumstance, and absented himself wisely, from the family, lest the lesson, it was His desire to teach them should be lost. The burial being over, He appeared, unexpectedly, at the house of the mourners to condole with them in this their bereavement; but their only cry was—"Lord! if *thou* hadst been here our brother had not died." There seemed not to be one ray of hope left? Not one gleam of sunshine, beyond what the last day should reveal. They remembered not the present Divine Power of Christ, but were occupied chiefly in thoughts of His human friendship; and looked forward, at the best, to the future resurrection day. Jesus addressed the sisters, and said—"Only *believe*, and thy brother shall rise again." They lacked faith, and it was to *increase* this that they were thus tried. The furnace was *needful* for them; without it they were in danger of perishing. Oh! the love and mercy of our Covenant God, in thus dealing with the children of men. We *think* we know what is best for us, but we make a great mistake; we should, if we had our choice, too frequently take *poison* instead of medicine to heal our sickness. The healer is fully acquainted with the diseases of our fallen nature, and knows how and when to apply the necessary remedies. Hence in the case of Mary and Martha, he waited for the suitable moment to arrive before attempting a cure. Faith was wanting; resignation was necessary; an unquestioning obedience was required, ere those living words could be spoken—"Lazarus, stand forth!" But as soon as these even in their elements, were recognized by the searcher of hearts, the wound was as quickly healed, as before it had been opened. The brother met once more with a sisters fond embrace, and all hearts were made happy!

Again: So great was the desire to see Jesus that large numbers followed Him out of the cities into desert places without having a thought of carrying bread for the sustenance of their bodies. On one such occasion, when the Master was surrounded by a flock of anxious listners, and night-fall had well-nigh set in, the necessity of sending the company home suggested itself to the desciples, but the Good Shepherd who loved his sheep and cared for their *bodies* as well as their souls, ordered them to be seated and

fed them all with bread—thereby proving that His compassions fail not, and that in *His* hands,—or following His blessing,—the "Barrel of meal wasteth not, nor doth the cruse of oil fail."

Listen, once more, to His gracious language to a poor afflicted woman who had suffered from her infirmity twelve years, and had spent all her substance in trying to remove it. Having heard of Jesus—of His miraculous power, and kindness to the sick—she approached Him in faith, (yet delicately) and taking an opportunity of touching the firinge of His garment, she became, from that moment, free from her disease. Our Lord, perceiving that virtue had gone out of Him, turned and saw the woman who had been benefited standing behind Him trembling, but instead of rebuking her He said, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy *faith* hath made thee whole; go in peace."

What, too, was His compassion for *Jerusalem:* that ancient—that sacred—that renowned self-cursed city!—Forgetful, altogether, of himself, and of the cruel and unjust treatment which He had met with at the hands of the Jews, the gentle Saviour *wept*! His human sympathies betrayed themselves as He gazed upon that doomed place, which, for so long a time, had rejected His offers of salvation, and was now, with its Walls, its Palaces, its Temple, about to be destroyed. He wept, as He thought of the desolation that would follow, and the utter destruction of the people. "O Jerusalem," He cried, "Jerusalem, how *often* would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would not*; now, thou hast put it from thee, and thy glorious and beautiful temple will soon be left unto thee desolate."

Let these illustrations suffice to show what Jesus Christ *was;* and now, in few words, for what He *is*. The *same* universal Healer; the same tender and long-suffering Saviour; the *same* friend to the friendless; the same gracious restorer and deliverer; the same pitying Samaritan; the same merciful and sin-forgiving Lord; the same unwearying physician; the same seeker after souls; the same forgiver of injuries; the same intercessor for His enemies; the same advocate for publicans and sinners; the same unchanging and unchangeable friend and sympathizer; the same sacrificing Priest and Minister—Yesterday, to-day, and for ever!

Reflect, for a moment, at this stage of our enquiry, upon the immutability of His declarations as the Gospel Herald.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; to bind up the broken hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives; to open the prison door to those who are bound; to comfort all that mourn." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whosoever cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

These declarations are still in force; to the anxious enquirer after truth they are as *fresh* as the day on which they were spoken. What Christ *was*, He *is*, and hath given us His word ever so to be. In Christ is no variableness nor shadow of turning. He is not in the habit of saying one thing and meaning another. His promises are YEA and AMEN. His words are not *vain* words; but have, and will have, an healing efficacy so long as one soul remains unsaved. "Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us."

Is there not, beloved brethren, great comfort in all this? To be assured that amid "all the changes and chances of this mortal life," there is *one always the same;* as if to make up for what is hollow, uncertain, and variable in it. He is the sinners *only* friend; the *one* mediator between God and man; the Rock of Ages which eternity cannot alter or dissolve. Let me urge you to "Cast all your care upon Him for He careth for you." We know of no other who can be of such abiding service to you. In his right hand are the keys of life and death; His left, if I may so say, is ever outstretched to help the miserable and the outcast—the hopeless and the lost! He willeth not that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come unto Him and live. His eternal purpose was, and is, to save sinners.

Come then, brethren, one and all and make venture of Christ's love. He died to redeem you, and waiteth, at this moment, to bestow his mercy and grace upon you. Why will ye keep him standing outside the door of your hearts and knocking in vain for admission? "Seek Him while He may be found." "Call upon Him while He is near." Hear His voice calling you *now;* open the door unto Him *now;* and He will not only come in and sup with you, but abide as your guest for ever. "His is love beyond a brothers;" only make trial of it, and you will not be disappointed.

A word in conclusion. You have all heard that this is to be my last sermon from this pulpit, and you must have

observed throughout the discourse, (if worthy of the name), that I have simply preached to you about the *sameness* of Jesus Christ, and not about either my coming in amongst you, or my going out. The desire of my heart is that you *all* may be saved; and I would not lose this *last* opportunity, by any means, of shewing you the beauty of the Lord and endeavouring to draw you with the cords of love unto him. God Almighty grant that, I may one day, and at no very future day, behold the fruit of my labours in this place; and that I may have, as my joy and crown of rejoicing, the happy privilege of beholding many of you, especially the teachers and scholars of our Sabbath School, around the throne of our one common Father in heaven. Who can conceive the joy, or describe the exultation of a Minister of Christ, upon meeting, in the Home beyond, first one and then another of his earthly flock, for whom, perhaps he has often struggled in prayer, and devoted much of his time and thought! A surprise awaits us *all* beyond the grave! Not the pastor only, but the people. Christ shall gather together His jewels from every part of the world, and not one of them shall be lost. It will be a meeting to part no more! This formed, no doubt, a part of "the joy of Jesus" when bidding farewell to His disciples, and encouraging their troubled hearts by His own personal preparation of mansions for them in glory! This too, I fervently pray, will form the joy of *him*, who these many, many years, hath ministered unto you in this town, and will, I trust, continue so to do, until he is ready to utter the triumphant language of St. Paul—"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 glory which the Lord shall give me in that day."

Finally, brethren, farewell! Remember "Jesus Christ, the *same* yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Look upwards and onwards through the veil, and through the gloom, to His immutable throne of righteousness, around which may we all gather in His infinite mercy, and unite in praising Him throughout eternity.

I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, who is able to build you up and preserve you from falling. "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of *one mind*, live in *peace;* and the God of love and peace shall be with you and yours; and when the *Chief Shepherd* shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that

"FADETH NOT AWAY!" AMEN.

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