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To J. C., My Boyhood Teacher, With Love

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To J. C., My Boyhood Teacher, With Love

When your stick beat my blue-inked knuckles red,
I knew your hand did beat without a heart.
I now confess I often wished you dead
When your swift stick attacked to make me smart.

“God gave two ways to learn,” you used to say,
“The mind may choose to follow Godly tacks;
but if Beelzebub leads lads his way,
Then they must learn through skin by timely whacks.”

Was reason in me eyeless—wouldn’t it see?
Couldn’t tender hands have nudged me toward the goal
Of perfect, disciplined humanity?
Were there no subtler prods to self-control?

Today I say I was not spoiled by sticks
That stung; they did not wilt—or wet—a flower.
I kicked, but, learning, not against the pricks
And numbly bowed before unhuman power.

Mike Vanden Bosch

Forgiving

“Forgive the woman. Your hurt is an itch
Beneath your skin; don’t wear it like a badge,
For many a golden name survives a glitch;
Don’t think you own the world’s first sacred grudge.
Your heart should be a hearth with flaming love,
Not a brick monument to private spite
That scorns a meek forgiveness. Court the dove!
For honor’s star will rise from love, not might.
Since Cain men haled hate as Sunday’s feast—
When slapped, few faces smiled forgiving grace;
But turn your stinging cheek and still the beast
That burns for hell; trust God for saving face,
For wounded pride will suck a saint’s blue blood
And sacred spite is Satan’s whited hood.

Mike Vanden Bosch