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“CAST IN MEAL;” OR, THE POISON
RENDERED HARMLESS.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY

THE RIGHT REVEREND

SAMUEL, LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

Lord High Almoner to the Queen,
and Chancellor of the Most Noble Order of the Garter,

ON THE OCCASION OF

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE OF THE COLLEGE
CHAPEL OF S. JOHN'S, HURSTPIERPOINT,

ON TUESDAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER, 1861.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Sermon, now published by request, was preached at the laying, by the Lord Bishop of Chichester, of the foundation-stone of a Chapel to be built at the College at Hurstpierpoint, Sussex. This College is one of the institutions which mainly through the indomitable zeal of the Rev. N. Woodard, and the hearty support he has received from the present Bishop of Chichester, have risen during these last few years in Sussex to supply the chiefest lack of the education which has of late years been provided by the Church of England for her youth. Since the beginning of the present century she has made gigantic efforts to supply the great labouring class with a sound, useful, and religious education, and her great success in this work is attested alike by all the statistics collected by the late Royal Commission, and as the result of all other inquiries. It is not too much to say that THE education given to that class has been given by her. The highest ranks of society in England have also been trained exclusively by her. But for many years past the education of the middle class of society has been far less provided for by her. This has re-

sulted partly from the gradual failure of our grammar schools, and partly from the increasing independence of the class itself; which has parted their children as effectually from their richer as from their poorer brethren.

It is to the supply of this great omission in the work of our Church that the efforts of Mr. Woodard have been directed, by founding colleges in which the very best education, founded on the highest principles, can be procured at moderate terms.

To none of her many benefactors in past time is our Church and our nation more deeply indebted than to the founders of her ancient schools and learned universities. May God grant that a grateful posterity may inscribe in that imperishable roll the name of the Rev. N. Woodard.

A SERMON.

2 KINGS IV. 41.

“BUT HE SAID, THEN BRING MEAL: AND HE CAST IT INTO
THE POT.”

THIS chapter contains the record of divers miracles wrought by the prophet Elisha. To one of these I would this morning bespeak your attention, rather for its mystical and parabolic, than for its more direct application. The narrative is full of the wild and graceful simplicity which everywhere characterises the unaltering East. The mighty Prophet, on whose shoulders had fallen from his very car of fire the mantle of Elijah, halts in one of his rounds at the school of the sons of the Prophets, at Gilgal. It was with them at that moment, as it so often must be where the harvest of the year is the year's supply of food, a time of biting dearth. Instinct with the powers of his prophetic office, the seer bids his servant prepare (as though it were a time of plenty) to feed the gathered company; and as the preparation proceeds, “one” goes forth “into the fields to gather herbs” for the seething pottage.

From ignorance, or carelessness, or self-will, he gathers the gourds of a poisonous root on which he lights; and unsuspected by others casts them, in his self-sufficiency, into the boiling pot. Nor was it until they were already eating of the pottage, that the presence of the deadly elements was ascertained; and then, in the blank terror of men who knew themselves to have been poisoned, they cried aloud to the seer, "Oh, thou man of God, there is death in the pot!" Then said he, "Bring meal: and he cast it into the pot." And, this done, the power of God, acting through the Prophet's hand, imparted to it such a healing quality, that it changed the deadly mass into a wholesome food, and there was no longer harm in the pot.

Here is the narrative, eminently picturesque in its own simple record of superhuman power issuing forth, in this material world, like the fountains of the desert, from the hand of God's chosen servant, but containing, as it seems to me, beyond this, a parable of all life, eminently suggestive of the thoughts we need to-day. For we are to lay the first stone of a Chapel in which the inmates of this College are henceforward to gather to hear God's Word, to listen to His Truth, to bow before His Presence, to worship at His Throne, and to receive His most blessed gifts of grace in the great Sacrament, which is the special memorial of our Master's death, and the special instrument of conveying to us the communication of His Body and of His Blood, to be the spiritual food of our souls.

Now in making this provision for worship, what are we doing but what the Prophet did of old?

Look somewhat closely into it, and see the strictness of the parallel.

By the law of succession under which our race is laid, the coming generation must, in some mode or other, be trained by that which has preceded it. It must succeed to the conquests or defeats, inherit the thoughts, and be stamped with the impress of that which goes before it. From which one of two consequences must follow; either that all parents must give themselves up to the training of their own children, in which case all pursuits must be hereditary, and the attention of all must be given merely to keeping what had been already acquired, and not to the making acquisitions; from which must soon result utter stagnation and decay; or that it must be the special business of some to teach the young, and under these professed teachers the pupils from different families must be gathered, for a common instruction. Accordingly, every land which has had any claim to be civilised has had its schools. This was true even of the old heathendom. What those schools were we may gather from the plays of Aristophanes and Terence. Nor can we wonder at what we there see of their condition; for the old heathendom could not comprehend the value of the soul, or educate what she scarcely knew to exist.

Schools, therefore, and colleges, in the highest sense of those words, are among the many blessed fruits of Christianity. Elisha's presence at Gilgal in the school of the Prophets in the days of dearth was a faint image of the coming in of the CHRIST into these barely fed and straitened companies of

pupils. That voice stirred the fainting earth to action. New sounds broke upon its barren stillness. How must the mother's heart have throbbed under the sound of "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not!" And the echoes of these first voices were multiplied from hill to hill when, under the afflatus of the SPIRIT, the Apostles took up the note, and repeated, "Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy;" "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD." And then education was lifted from the dust unto the heavenly heights themselves when its new basis was proclaimed in such an exhortation as this: "Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether ministry, let us wait on our ministry; or he that teacheth, on teaching."

It was indeed a mighty change; and we may trace the effect of it in every school, college, and university with which, from that day to this, Christendom has been overspread.

We may see the fruits of it not only in the time-stained walls of our Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, but in the newest of these quadrangles, with which the faith, and zeal, and wisdom, of one honoured man, supported by the faith and liberality of his Bishop, is so richly furnishing our own Sussex. And yet let no man gather that because this is so, the strife is over or the warfare accomplished. There is evil as well as good in every movement of fallen man: great efforts for good afford of themselves opportunities of evil, which but for them would never have existed. Elisha's unlooked for supply of

the necessities of the perishing sons of the Prophets at Gilgal, gave occasion for one to go into the field to gather herbs and to take the wild vines' poisonous gourds and shred them into the seething pottage. And evermore this too is repeated. The storing of the human mind in education; the banishment of the old starving barrenness; the mighty discoveries of science; the keen subtleties of logical accuracy; the winding intricacies of metaphysics—all of these have given occasion, as at different periods the great seething human intellect has been stirred from its inaction, for one and another to go forth as if to gather wholesome herbs, and in the stead of them to bring in poisonous fruits a whole lapful, and to shred them unawares with all their poisons in them into the mighty reservoirs of education and of literature, from which the nations are fed. And then from time to time breaks forth the despairing cry, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot." "Better were it for us to bear our old dearth, than drink in death from this poisonous abundance."

And so because, when unstable souls have fed upon the deadly gourds of the wild vine of the wilderness, the awakening of the human intellect has been from time to time an occasion of the spread of unbelief, or has subverted old dynasties, and has covered with the bloodshed and the flame of revolution lands in which after long repression the stammerer first lisped the sweet song of liberty; because of such gathering of gourds as these, the reproachful cry has sounded again and again, "There is death in the pot." "Things were far better in the old days of ignorance. This schooling and this

teaching is working our ruin. Give us back the blessed days of darkness and of slumber; let us rather groan in our old dearth than die in your poisonous plenty." And yet the cry has been but the shriek of unfaithfulness. To listen to it is destruction, is to yield to a death more awful than any which ever mowed down by mere bodily starvation a helpless, indolent, inactive population. It is to renounce our intellectual and spiritual heritage, the freedom of our FATHER'S house; it is to deny the goodness of His gifts, the greatness of His purposes for us.

For man is not made to perish by hunger of the mind any more than by hunger of the body; to grope in the darkness of the spirit any more than in that of the body: somewhere or other there must be for him, if he will seek it, the deliverance that he needs. It cannot be that he need cry out in helpless terror, "there is death in the pot," and so sit down and perish. But then the remedy for the poison must be found somewhere else than in going back to the old starving time. Then bring meal, saith the voice of the ancient prophet; and he cast it into the pot, and the whole was healed. And can we not see that the very act was significant? It was not by throwing away the Prophet's first gift, when it was poisoned by the strange intrusion of the evil which through man's carelessness, or ignorance, or self-will so often steals into such heavenly portions, but by adding to it a new gift from the Prophet's hand, that the wrong was to be redressed. And so it is evermore. It is not in a wretched despairing retrocession, but in a

believing, loving progress that there is hope for man. It must be in calling out more abundantly that power of GOD which at first brooded with life-giving energy over the lightless, soundless chaos, calling order and beauty out of its shapeless and tumultuous heavings, that the work of the new creation must be accomplished. It must be the adding the Divine element to the mingled and tainted mass which will work its renovation. And even as that which the Prophet cast in was not some strange and unknown drug, but the common food of all, even so must it be with us too in our day. It is not by mixing with the mighty powers which move the human intellect some rare correctives, such as only the most highly educated can appreciate and receive; but by bringing in anew from the hand of GOD'S might that which is the common spiritual food of all, that the work is to be wrought.

And here, brethren, it seems to me that we have reached the great principle which is at once to animate our efforts,—leading us with a will which shall vent itself this day in earnest prayers and in large offerings to build this chapel, and which is also to direct you who are the inmates of the College in its after use. For here is the answer to the question, How shall we secure the great work which is to be done here from being poisoned by the inevitable intrusions of evil? How shall we keep the high education we would give here from poisoning souls through the infusion into it of such wild gourds as developed selfishness, as carnal ambition, which is bred so readily of keen competition,

as doubt, and speculation, and unbelief, and despair, which will, like the gnats of the eventide, fly in at the opened windows of the intellect? How is all this to be effected? I answer, "Then bring meal." Cast in to your life of study, and of competition, and of growing intellectual power, the common element of Christian training and Christian action, and there shall be "no harm."

The promise of CHRIST standeth sure. "If any man will do" (i.e. willeth to do) "His Will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD."¹ Settled distinct acts of religious obedience are the conditions of our safety, and our safeguard against poison. And what is real Christian worship but at once the highest and the most common of these acts? For the essence of *act*, so far as concerns the doer, is in the doing, and not in the thing done. And where then can we find the very essence of act so present as in worship? for in it, the soul which is inwardly conscious of doubt, or distance, or impurity, or infirmity, but which willeth not to doubt and question and speculate, willeth not to remain at a distance, willeth not to grovel on in its impurity, willeth not to go on evermore bowed down by the spirit of its weakness, but willeth to come to GOD, to reach to Him, to be cleansed, to be delivered by Him; willeth not to gaze upon the Trinity in Unity as a dark enigma, or to handle it as a curious question, to be wrangled over, but to come and to adore, and to be satisfied, and to be blest, and set free; willeth not to abide in darkness, but to draw near to the Everlasting FA-

¹ S. John vii. 17.

TH^ER through the SON revealing Him, and sheltering us, by the HOLY GHOST breathing within us, crying from within our own souls after Him, the Rock of our Salvation, and lifting us up to the ineffable communion of our spirit with our GOD.

Here is not hearing about religion, but practising it: not dreaming about purity, but seeking it: not resolving our GOD into a formula of belief, but finding Him; knowing Him by converse; by the very secret touch of the spirit of the man, which draweth virtue out of the ever present LORD, and proves to the cleansed rejoicing soul that He can make the sick whole. Here is that, the fruit of which goes back with us to common life with a most enduring influence. Here surely then we can see is the highest of all acts, and yet this is the very "meal" of the Prophet, that whereon the commonest soul may feed. For though worship does refine and elevate the highest parts of man's fearful nature, even as the plainest food nourishes the highest and subtlest of the nerves and tissues of the body, yet is it still common food within the capacity of all. The least gifted boy within this college, if he reaches forth after GOD, may worship Him in the power of the HOLY GHOST as truly as the most highly endowed: for as the low figures of an arithmetical formula disappear wholly from an equation when you introduce infinity into it, so do the less and the more of the intellect vanish when you set it beside GOD. Here is the very wonder of our being, that the poorest spirit of the least instructed man can reach up through CHRIST by the HOLY GHOST to the contemplation and the know-

ledge of his GOD in holy worship; whilst the possessor of the loftiest intellect, which seemed to tower high above that of all his brethren, can do no more. This then, is what we would do; "bring meal and cast it in." In the mighty, spiritual moral and social experiment which, thank GOD, has been tried now for years in this place, THIS is the central point of all. The Christian life, in all its other acts, must evolve itself from the central act of ever renewed Christian worship: the chapel must be the inner ring whereof the schoolroom, and the hall, and the whole life of study and of action, gathered here, are but outer and concentric rings; they must in all the life they nourish be the outer circles of that innermost circle which is the life of worship. The confessions and absolutions of the service of this chapel, its prayers and intercessions, its thanksgivings and praises; its aspirations under GOD'S Word read and preached, its mysterious unfolding of souls through the blessed Sacrament of the Body and Blood of CHRIST, even into Oneness with Himself, "we dwelling in Him, and He in us," these inward spiritual acts must leaven all the life here if it is to be free from the poison of the earth; these must heal that taint which evermore is sure to be brought into all human institutions by some careless or daring hand gathering his lapful of the gourds of the tangling wild vine of the wilderness around us, and casting it in as if it were wholesome food into the seething mass.

This, then, is to-day's question. Will you by earnest prayers lay deep and true the strong foundations of this future chapel? Will you, by liberal

offerings, make possible its full and seemly completion?

And for you that are to use it hereafter, here too is the very point to notice. The whole of your lives will take their most real character from what passes within it. Here the subtle poison of the world is to be counteracted for every one of you; here not by your working yourselves up occasionally into extraordinary fervour, but by the common meal of daily worship: by the continual bowing of your spirits in adoration; and so through their being cleansed from their daily stains, by the blood of sprinkling, refined by the Spirit of burning and brightened by the inpouring of the uncreated light. Here you are to lay down your daily burden, win strength against daily temptations, gain daily graces, and learn daily to rest your spirit on God. Thus you will come to know by the inward converse of your souls with Him that He is present with you. And then all is peace; for neither taunts, nor sneers, nor days of darkness, nor any other temptation, can make you doubt of what, by His grace, you know, in the still deep of your souls, with so calm and settled a knowledge, that the surface ruffle of the waters cannot reach down to stir or cloud it. Only settle it from the first in your hearts, that your lives in their every action will be real or unreal as you are real or unreal here. And oh! that the blessed Spirit of our God may thus reveal to many of you in that future chapel the secret of His Presence, and teach you so to hide yourselves within it, that amidst the daily increasing strife of tongues, and the growing pertur-

bations of this aged and reeling earth, you may know the blessed calm which holds in perfect peace the spirits of His chosen ones; and after the pilgrimage of this life may you each one appear before your GOD in Zion, to spend yourselves for evermore there where the open vision of His glory is vouchsafed to the perfected, in that blissful worship of eternity, the first secrets of which your spirit learned within these uprising walls.

And now to GOD the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX.

By the kind permission of the Bishop of Oxford I am allowed to append to his sermon the following statement :

The New Chapel at S. John's, Hurstpierpoint, is a work urgently needed ;

First, because the present temporary chapel is required for school room to meet the wants of the increasing number of boys.

Secondly, because the present temporary chapel is itself of barely sufficient size to allow for further increase of numbers.

Thirdly, because in an institution of the size and dignity to which S. John's has now attained, it is a requisite of chief importance that the Chapel should be an edifice capable of representing the due relation which the public offices of religion, and the worship of Almighty God should bear to the other duties of the place.

The numbers for whom provision must be made, and reasonable regard to the becoming dignity of the Chapel require a large and substantial building. The length of the choir is to be 125 feet, the breadth 37 feet, the height to the wall plate 45 feet. No attempt at unnecessary effect is contemplated. The building will be impressive only by dimensions and proportions, but cannot be constructed at a low price.

The foundations which are in have cost about £400, including the preparations for the stone-laying.

The next contract will be for building the carcass of the choir and roofing it. The lowest tender for this is £3900 ; and this

only provides *temporary* windows of a rude and unsightly appearance.

About £2000 has been collected or promised. It has been raised in small sums, with the exception of a donation of £500 from one of the Fellows, and £100 from the principal landed proprietor of the parish.

S. Nicolas College can do little as a body for this work. It has to pay this month 6000 guineas for a site for its cheap boarding school, near Balcombe, about £700 at the same time for some land at Hurstpierpoint, essential to the College there, and to carry on its building at Laucing.

The school itself, though prosperous, can never from its small earnings undertake works of such magnitude as this Chapel; and accordingly we have nothing to look to but that happily large body of friends in the country, who tell us of the interest they take in our work.

The parents of the boys have contributed upwards of £200, and more is forthcoming from this source. The masters here will raise another £150, independently of the gift already referred to. The east window, representing an outlay of £250, is being taken up by the sisters of the boys; two side windows of £72 each are under the patronage of a body of young ladies; and a benefactor has come forward who offers at his own expense to put in four more at the same price.

We still need £2000 to get us into the building. This must be raised by donations and annual subscriptions. £500 per annum for four years is what is now asked; and the object of this appeal is to beg of all who are interested in the welfare of S. John's College, Hurstpierpoint, to send their names as annual subscribers of 10s. or £1 or donors of larger amounts, to the Rev. N. Woodard, New Shoreham; the Rev. Dr. Lowe, or Rev. J. Gorham, at the College, Hurstpierpoint; or to H. Tritton, Esq., the Treasurer, 54, Lombard Street, for the Hurstpierpoint Chapel Building Fund.

EDWARD C. LOWE.

Michaelmas Day, 1861.

