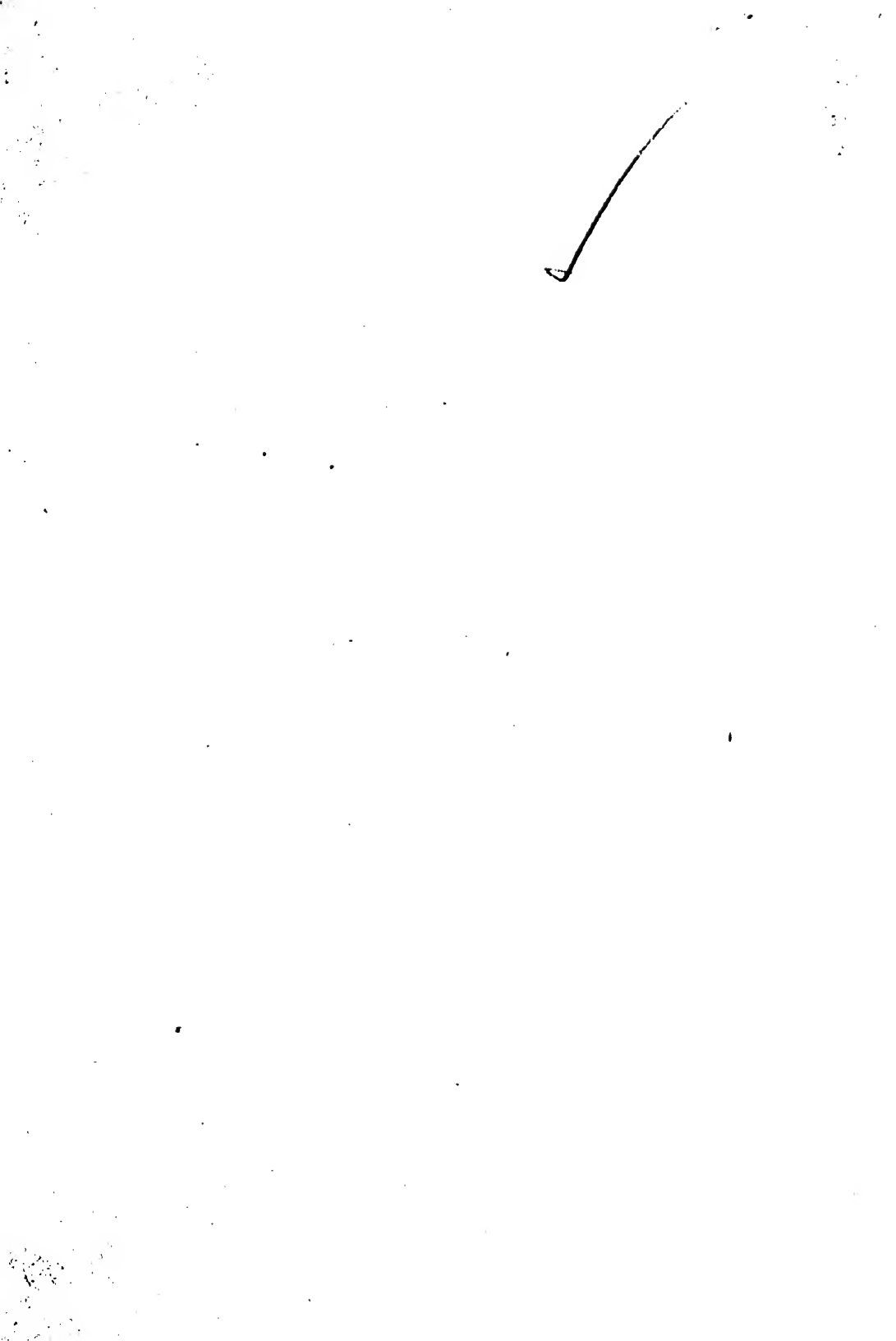






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THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A SERMON

Preached in the Chapel of St Mark's College, Chelsea,

ON ST MARK'S DAY, 1885,

BY

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He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.—EPH. IV. 11, 12.

THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLMASTER.

THE familiar words from the Epistle for the day which I have just read present to us a view of Christian work on which we must all look with devout thankfulness on such an occasion as this. They shew us how the effort of every labourer finds its source in a mission from Christ, and its end in the advancement of Christ's Body. In the vision of that sovereign charge all sense of personal weakness disappears : in the fulfilment of that absorbing service all comparison of different offices is lost in the unity of life.

The apostle is describing, as you will remember, the manifold endowment of the one Church consequent upon the Ascension of the one Lord. The one Lord had gone down to the lowest depths and risen to the loftiest heights of finite being. He had explored creation that He might fill all things; and in the consummation of His triumph He provided for the continuous and progressive accomplishment of His counsel of love: *He gave gifts unto men.* He gave gifts unto men, and the gifts which He gave were men, not primarily forms, or rites, or institutions, though these have their place, their necessary place, in a human society, but living men. *He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.*

There is, you will observe, one end set before the noble hierarchy of Christian workers, *the perfecting of the saints*. To this one end we must all bring every power which the Master has entrusted to us : but there is a twofold office to be discharged as we strive towards it, *a work of ministering*, while we watch with tender care the least member of Christ as if he were the single object of our solicitude, and *a building up of the Body of Christ*, while we raise our eyes to that magnificent whole in which each believer is a contributory fragment.

So it is that Christ prepares His Church for conflict and for victory. He gives it men, living men, to offer themselves for each and for all, with personal devotion and catholic faith, some, as at this very hour, to vindicate a divine authority and to unfold a divine purpose and to declare a divine message, *apostles, prophets, evangelists* : some to provide, as occasion arises, fresh lessons of truth for the guidance and support of those who have to do their part in the one life under new circumstances : *pastors and teachers*.

Such a view of Christian work must, as I said, fill us with devout thankfulness to-day. Our thoughts turn from the great Cathedral to the College Chapel, from the heavy charge of ruling to the happier duty of serving, and we feel the grandeur of Christ's ministry, the vastness of Christ's love. From age to age the relative importance of different forms of work changes, as we imperfectly estimate their worth. We do not indeed care to dwell on such contrasts, when all service is simple obedience to Christ's call. But at least no one can doubt the supreme importance for England at the present time of that peculiar office of teaching to which our thoughts are most naturally

turned here. And the difficulties of the office are commensurate with its importance.

It would indeed be hard to find, my student friends, an opportunity more rich in promise than that which is opened before you, more rich in promise or more weighted with responsibility. The masses of our countrymen, by a most significant coincidence, are committed to you and to your fellow-labourers for education at the very time when they receive the political power which will before long place the government of the nation in their hands. The sovereign masses will hereafter use their privilege according to the moral impulses which you first communicate, either as a trust for the common good, or as an occasion for selfish aggrandisement. With the schoolmasters therefore, I believe, more than with the clergy, rests the shaping of that generation which will decide in a large degree what the England of the future will be, turbulent, divided, self-indulgent, materialised, or quickened with a power of spiritual sympathy, striving towards the realisation of a national ideal, touched already with that spirit of sacrifice which regards every gift of fortune and place and character as held for the common good.

It is a momentous, an inevitable, alternative which I have indicated; and I confess that my heart would fail me in the prospect of the issues which seem to hang upon the labours of a single life-time, if I did not believe that Christ still gives men to His Church, *teachers unto the building up of His Body*: if I did not believe that you who have entered into the spirit of this College approach your office in the conviction of that faith.

In this confidence then let me ask you to consider with me some points in the circumstances, the principle, the embodiment of your work.

1. The circumstances of your work. I do not wish to dissemble or to underrate the difficulties which at present beset elementary teaching. I know how heavily the necessity of producing certain mechanical results presses upon those who feel that no examination test can measure the best results of their toil. I know what is meant by the 'rigidity of a code'. I know how hard it is to quicken and keep in healthy activity a spirit of energetic effort which is stunted and checked by the surroundings of home. I know how hopeless it seems to strive to do away with the inheritance of evil tendencies and traditions to which the children of the poor too often succeed, and to set them free from the vicious tyranny of the past. I know all this, and I sympathise with the unceasing struggle which such adverse forces entail upon you. I know too, and this is the most serious drawback of all, how early your pupils are withdrawn from your guidance, and how little provision is as yet systematically made for the encouragement and discipline of their after work. But our nature being what it is, we can never forget that difficulties make labour invigorating. Every image which describes the Christian life tells of the strain of the pilgrim, the athlete, the soldier; and in our hearts we should not wish it to be otherwise.

You have, indeed, an arduous task; but on the other hand you meet your pupils with singular advantages of sympathetic knowledge, of natural influence, of practical power.

You know by actual experience what are their temptations and difficulties: how their confidence can be won most surely: how their generous instincts can best be called into activity. You can interpret, by the help of associations not too remote, feelings which find at best awkward

expression. The lessons of your own school life—trials, disappointments, encouragements, failures, successes—the chequered discipline through which you found and gained your end, will come back to you when you face the old problem from a new position. You will move in a region which you have yourselves traversed, a region already marked, as I trust, by many memorials of blessing.

You have the knowledge which makes labour directly effective; and you deal with those who are most susceptible of impression. The freshest, fullest hope lies with the young. And if your influence is rudely interrupted in many cases by adverse influences at home, yet it is consistent and calculated, while the forces which act against you are negative and desultory. The promise of patience is on your side; the quiet persistency which never for one moment loses hold of that which has been gained, or loses sight of that towards which effort is turned.

And in this watchful, loving work, which often seems to linger, you will gain as much as you give. Living contact with the young is a spring of youth. As you enter into their thoughts you receive something of their freshness. The true teacher can never grow old. He always hears the children's voices and can understand them. Thus to him the benediction of entrance into heaven is presented as a perpetual reality. If, as some have most strangely said, elementary teaching becomes 'narrowing,' it is when all human interest has died out of it, when faith supports no enthusiasm, and hope sees no visions, and love rejoices in no sacrifices.

2. Meanwhile, as long as you have the happiness of becoming as little children, you can carry your inspiring principle into every detail of routine duty; and that principle

is shortly the endeavour to offer to every pupil a view of the whole of life which corresponds to the Christian Faith: to make the thought of heaven about us a distinct and abiding reality: to introduce, if I may so express it, a potential man, a child of God, to himself: to make him know himself: to help the feeblest and weakest to look forward to a divine destiny, and to acknowledge an immediate social duty.

While therefore you will loyally accept the conditions by which your work is at present directed—for they are, I think, a necessary, a transitional, expedient for ascertaining a fair average standard of attainments which may hereafter be used with responsible freedom—you will not allow measurable, technical results to modify your own ideal, still less to shape it. You will not admit to yourselves that you have simply to produce certain definite powers. You will resolutely maintain that you have to educate, and not to furnish: to call out effort, self-control, observation, reflection: to prepare your scholars for the great school of after-life: to fit them to be not faultless fragments in a perfect machine, but thoughtful, struggling citizens in a present kingdom of God.

It is obvious that as things are we all stand in sore need of this teaching. *That which is of the world*—that which can be gained or represented by perishable, material wealth—is assuming among us an almost unquestioned supremacy. We need to learn again that *the life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment*. We need to learn again the blessedness of the poor. We need to learn, as it has not yet been learnt, that it is the prerogative of man as man to think, and not of any particular class of men: to learn that right doing involves in its completeness

right reasoning : to learn that elevation of soul is for all : to learn that it is the prerogative of the spirit to transfigure its environment by the grace of God.

We have at least learned in theory the foundation truth. We have learnt the nobility of labour. Toil is not, as it was to Greek ears, synonymous with wretchedness or vice. But we have still to realise it in its moral beauty. There can be, as far as I see, no stable peace till it can be openly shewn on a large scale that the toiler with slender means may be rich in all that makes life worth living, filled with the joy of devotion to the good, and the true, and the beautiful and the holy.

3. I have myself good hope that this end will be reached : good hope that when all wealth is felt to be a trust, the blessing which lies in poverty will be recognised. I believe, whatever may be the power of selfishness, in the more effective power of great ideas. I believe that Christianity is a Gospel, a message which gives in the record of facts the greatest ideas to which the soul of man can attain, so that they are open to all men. And I venture to claim that you who have been called to take part in educating the masses of the English nation, as you have caught the inspiration of this place, should set that message as the foundation and the stay of your labours. You will have numberless opportunities for making your faith felt ; but above all you will be yourselves its most powerful commendation.

I have touched upon the circumstances and the principle of your work. Let me still say a few words on the embodiment of it. In the deepest and truest sense, in respect of all that gives a living power to education, the teacher's work is concentrated in himself. He is, as we have seen,

the spiritual gift. What he is his work will be. More powerful than any subject, or any words, is that force of conviction by which the true teacher insensibly conveys his own estimate of the worth of things. As we listen to him we feel that we are in contact with that which is real ; and his faith stirs ours.

This fact assures you of your inalienable religious freedom, of your inexhaustible religious opportunity.

It may be that you will not be allowed to give technically religious lessons. Exactly in proportion as you are religious men this restriction will leave your religious influence unimpaired, if not in some aspects positively increased. Your faith will shew itself spontaneously as a moving power. It will be seen translated into action. By your estimate of right and wrong, by your patience with the dull, by your delicate reverence, by the clear signs that you live as seeing the invisible, you will help others to acknowledge that which sways you.

The memory of my own school days keeps this truth ineffaceably vivid in my mind. It was through the Greek historian or the Latin poet that I was taught most impressively what our Christian Faith means : taught that there is a divine counsel being wrought out about us in daily duties : taught that words and deeds are true if partial revelations of an abiding character : taught that the least difference of form or expression has a meaning which we can often interpret and may never disregard : taught that there is a truth in the world to which we owe the service of complete devotion : taught that there are effects, correspondences, of human action reaching beyond all thought : taught that we can find rest only in GOD for whom we were made.

Such teaching in due measure lies within the scope of

all of you wherever you may be placed. To be enabled to give it is as high a privilege as man can receive.

If then you have followed me so far, I need not ask you to think highly of your call as true ministers of Christ: to thank GOD for the charge with which He has entrusted you at an epoch of change: to hold it as a life-work than which you could find none worthier.

It does not indeed offer any great material prizes. But it does offer something better: the prospect of taking no inconspicuous part in guiding the thoughts of the England that shall be.

And in this respect the absence of disturbing objects of ambition becomes an opportunity. What we need for the purification of society is, as was said long since, plain living and high thinking. You will have a position which encourages you to fulfil the type. Your work gives occasion for the exercise of the highest thought and the most disciplined judgment. Your moderate competence excludes the temptations of luxury. You can realise without affectation the social lessons which you will seek to enforce.

The ideal which I have endeavoured to suggest may appear to be exaggerated. It does not at least rise beyond my convictions. To strive towards it calls, I admit, for study, for devotion, for faith. But then without these the teacher's work must indeed be a weary round of drudgery; and the teacher whom I contemplate, the teacher whom this College moulds, is one who acknowledges and rests on his divine mission: who feels, even in the sight of failures, that he is sent *for the perfecting of the saints*, that he may make the harmonious development of consecrated powers a little more complete, who accepts as his duty *a work of ministering*, a responsibility of service which will cost him

pain, *a building up of the body of Christ*, in which his labour may be hidden in the slow progress of the mighty future.

Let nothing, my fellow-teachers, rob you of the spirit of this sure belief. Cherish it as your divine endowment.

Yet even so times of depression, of isolation, of discouragement will come to you as they come to all of us when we pause to measure what GOD has achieved through us with what He had prepared.

In such seasons of temptation call up again the noblest thoughts which GOD has ever given you: bring vividly before your minds the vast army in which you are enrolled: think of the nineteen hundred with whom you are bound by ties of brotherhood: deepen the sense of fellowship: strive to use the forces of a corporate life.

Therefore it is that days like these, days of refreshment, are given to us that in the strength of present sympathy we may recall our first hopes. Welcome them therefore gratefully and use them. We must commemorate our benefactors if we would enter on their inheritance. The very name of St Mark, as you know, calls before us the first Christian School, of which the influence after 1700 years is growing day by day. Turn then again year by year, when St Mark's Day brings back in its Services—in Collect, Epistle and Gospel—the familiar thoughts of resolute opinion, of consecrated service, of animating life—in presence, if it may be, and if not in spirit—to these walls within which you have dwelt upon your life's work in the preparatory discipline of meditation and prayer, and you shall know again, know with an assurance which no disappointment can shake, that your mission was Christ's gift; that He has given you to His Church, and that He will supply strength for the fulfilment of your office in union with Himself.

