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* The "Plea for the Middle Classes" was the document which led to the foundation of the large groups of "Woodard Schools" which now (1884) include 3 in Sussex (Lancing, Hove & Pierpoint & King's) 1 in Staffs. (Deerstone) 1 in Shropsh. (Ellesmere, dependent on Denstone) 1 in Somerset. (Taunton) & 1 I think in Yorkshire. J.G.T.

> * a Plea for the Middle Classes (Conf. to Rev. W. Woodard).

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A SERMON,

PREACHED AT ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BRIGHTON,

ON ST. LUKE'S DAY, 1858.

BY THE

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VICAR OF HURSLEY,

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S E R M O N .

“In this rejoice not, that the spirits are made subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.”—ST. LUKE X, 20.

I need not tell you, my Brethren, for it is in every one's mouth, and wherever we go, we hear and read it, that we are living in an age of progress—an age of intellectual research and discovery, of mechanical and social activity, increased and increasing. Making all allowance for the tendency which is in us to think most largely of what is nearest at hand,—the men of every successive generation accounting their own times more marvellous than any which have gone before, some for better, some for worse, according to their several tempers and opinions,—making allowance for this, the coolest and least imaginative and best informed judgments agree to call this truly a wonderworking age: All of us observe it; all who know the Scriptures are hourly reminded of the prophetic warning, they can hardly help saying to themselves “Many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increasing:” and if they are thoughtful, and have a deep sense of their own and others responsibility, must they not also call to mind the other prophecy connected with this—“There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even unto that same time.”* And will not this make them very anxious, full of prayer and religious forethought, lest they themselves, and those whom they can influence, should be unawares bringing on that time of trouble, by some evil use of this time of progress?

I make no question, but that the part of God's creation in which man's present lot and trial is appointed—this earth on which we are now abiding for a time—is daily becoming more and more comfortable, in bodily and outward things, for mankind to abide on. And this I suppose is what people principally mean, when they speak of the spread of civilization and commerce, of a certain degree of law,

* Daniel xli, 1.

and order, and refinement, among all nations and races. They speak of these things hopefully and thankfully, as they ought to speak of all the good gifts of God, whether pertaining to this world or to the next. But a Christian who knows his Bible, will not be able to separate his thankfulness from a deep sense of awe and alarm, when he considers that, after all, this outward civilization, if men are content to look no higher, does but make the world more perfect and intense in its attainment and enjoyment of those things with which, as we know for certain, it will be taken up when that time of trouble shall come. They will be "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building," when "the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in Heaven, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and wail because of Him."

Any one who thinks seriously of this, will surely be drawn to watch and pray against those temptations in particular, which such a time of progress brings with it. I will specify one to which the services of the day (as I shall by and by shew you) direct our attention.

Knowledge, we are often told, is Power: a time therefore of diffusing and increasing knowledge is a time in which the sense of Power, or the yearning after it, may in one way or another become a dangerous snare to men. For almost all of you, I suppose, would own to a natural craving for power, each in his several department which he has chosen for himself, or to which he has been called: the power, I mean, and the skill, of doing what you wish to have done, or of getting others to do it for you. Men covet this power and skill, they long to have it, they long to feel that they have it; and now that it is put so much more within their reach, they naturally long and crave for it more than ever. They are, perhaps, more impatient than ever of not seeing the fruit of their works: and this not only in secular but in spiritual things, and of this comes a double evil: we mistake great and showy works for good ones; and when the work is really good, we too often mar and blemish it, if we do not altogether spoil it, by hurry and display. This is the evil—the undue love of power, and the consciousness of power, which tempts us in our time of progress. Let us see how the Gospel, which is the unerring cure of every evil, deals with this.

What says He who is Lord of all power and might? Here is He engaged in the greatest work of all, that of converting the world to Himself: and it is His pleasure in this work to employ instruments living and willing instruments; and He chooses out a number of persons, seventy, as you heard in the Gospel this morning, and sends them before Him into every city and place whither He Himself would

come. He sends them before Him with the same message with which He had sent St. John Baptist at the first—"The kingdom of God is at hand." Only their credentials are more ample than those of St. John the Baptist, for he did no miracles, but they are to heal the sick: so giving an earnest of the fulfilment of the marvellous promise, "he that is least in the kingdom of God" is in some sense a greater prophet—has greater power and knowledge to do God's work than St. John who was as great as the greatest of the old Prophets.

With such power Christ sends them forth as He does the humblest of His ministers now: and at the same time, by this way of instructing them, He prepares them for disappointment, or at best for only partial success. He makes them aware that there will be cities where they will not be received, and adds the fearful mysterious notice, which might well cause them, or any man, to shrink from such a mission, were it not enjoined on them by Himself. That their failure would bring on those who should reject them worse things than were prepared for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrhah.

Thus He speaks, as He has been speaking by His Prophecies all along to His Church; and as the Church since, so the Seventy then, went out and had wonderful success: and what next? "They return again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Well may we imagine how it must have lifted up their hearts, to find that they had in some measure the command even of the invisible world. They had been sent out with power to heal the sick: but it is not that of which they speak, it seems to have been in their eyes a small thing in comparison to control the powers of nature for the healing of men's bodies: but as when our Lord (you heard it this morning) first began His own scenes of public miracles by casting out a devil in the synagogue at Capernaum, there came a fear on all, and they spake one to another, saying, "What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out." even so it was here; and so it has been always. So far as men have believed and realized the existence of the unseen world, and that they themselves live and move among angels good and bad, so far they have ever felt it a more marvellous thing, a mightier power, to command those spirits and to be obeyed by them, than to work any other miracle. It could not be otherwise: and this is why witchcraft, real or imaginary, has ever proved such a deadly snare. Nothing else so flattering to our inborn love of power, and satisfaction at finding ourselves able to do great things.

It was but natural, then, that the Seventy should express themselves as they did. They do but say what any one of us would be moved to say in the same case. The sense of power in them may have been for the moment stronger than the sense of the responsibility which power brings along with it.

Observe now our Lord's reply. Does he depreciate their doings? Does He tell them it was a mistake to think highly of the power which He had given them, and to report to Him with joy and thankfulness what He had enabled them to accomplish? Far otherwise. He magnifies their work and their office, giving them to understand that it was, as it were, a portion of His own great economy, the end for which He came into the world, "To destroy the works of the devil." What they did, they had been doing under Him, or rather He had been doing it by their means. So he signifies to them, in saying, "I beheld (or rather, I was beholding) Satan, as lightning, fall from Heaven:" while you were on your progress, and working these wonders of which you are telling Me, I was looking on and watching you: it was in mine eyes an additional move or step in that great transaction, for which I came forth from the Father, the casting down and binding and final overthrow of Satan. And more: your portion in that great work was in all this only just beginning. It is to go on: "behold I give unto you"—a commission—"power," and authority to do much more in the same way—"to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy."

Thus He magnifies the power which He had given them, and which they valued so very highly, and promises them more and more of it. But having done so, mark well what He says next:—"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." He does not grudge them their dutiful gladness at finding themselves enabled to do great things by His Name: but He would not have them rest in it, or depend upon it. He tells them plainly that, in comparison, casting out devils is as nothing, but the ordinary common-place privileges of the christian life, which they share with every baptised person, *they* are every-thing. It is more, infinitely more, to be a member of Christ and a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven, than to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, to cast out devils; more than to command the elements, to discern spirits, to foretel things to come: yet these powers are granted only to a chosen few, but the former are the portion of every little child whom our Lord, the One Heavenly Baptist, has taken up into His arms, and poured water on him by

the minister's hand, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such a child is assuredly in a state of grace, a state in which if it die it is undoubtedly saved : which of the two would you rather choose for yourselves, and for those whom you love ; to live and die such as that little child now is, or to be the greatest Prophet and worker of miracles, to have the very devils subject unto you, but to be uncertain whether you have the privileges of that little child ? No one who considers in earnest what eternity is, can doubt about the answer, however commonly, alas ! we make the wrong choice both for ourselves and for those who depend on us. Thus you see what plain truth,—if we may say it reverently, what “common sense” our Blessed Lord was speaking to His disciples when He bade them “rather rejoice that their names were written in Heaven,” than in the highest spiritual endowments and wonder-working powers.

In this I take it for granted that having “their names written in Heaven,” means “being in a state of grace,” a state in which if a man dies he will be saved. This we may gather from other places of the Holy Scriptures where the book of life and the names written in it are mentioned : as* when St. Paul speaks of “Clement and other his fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.” This did not necessarily mean that they were so predestined to eternal salvation, as that it should be simply impossible for them to fall away. For elsewhere we read* “Whosoever sinneth against me, him will I blot out of my book ;” and in the Psalm, “Let them be wiped out of the book of the living ;” and in Revelations “He that overcometh, I will not blot his name out of the book of life.” The name must have been in the book, else it could not be wiped or blotted out of it. The scriptural mark then of final Predestination is not that a man's name is now in the book of life, but that it continues there after his trial is over, and is found there when the book is opened in the last day.

Plainly then, as I said, our Lord's meaning, when He bade the Seventy rejoice, not so much in their power over the spirits, as in their names being written in Heaven, was to move them and us against the sin and snare of so valuing God's special gifts, as to set them above His ordinary graces. His gifts, such as Tongues, Prophecy, Miracles, in the early times ; eloquence, learning, skill to win and convert others, in all times, are indeed most precious, if rightly used, as they are freely given, for the good of our brethren ; but for our own final good they will avail nothing, except we so use them

* Philipians iv. 3.

by charity and humility, as that our names shall continue written in Heaven; that we fall not from our state of grace. Whether others profit by these our gifts or no, may be known in this world; whether we ourselves have profited by them, none may know but in the world to come. When the judgment is set and the books are opened; when the dead, small and great, stand before God, and are judged out of the things that are written in the books, every man according to his work; when the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem are finally closed against every one who is not written in the Lamb's book of life; then and not till then shall it be fully understood which was the most excellent way, and who were in it.

Thus our Lord teaches, and he proceeds immediately to exemplify what He was teaching. In that hour He himself rejoiced in spirit, and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Seldom indeed do we read of His rejoicing. Through the whole of His mortal life, it pleased Him to be eminently "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This once only, we are told, He rejoiced: this once, just when He had been telling His disciples how He would have them rejoice. And what is it He rejoices in? His Father's favour, shewn, not to the wise and prudent, but to babes—to those who are as little children still in the happy state to which they were called by Baptism.

The whole passage is a lesson in true christian joy. The joy of the Seventy disciples returning from their first circuit, happy in the consciousness of His favour, which had enabled them to do so great things; this was good and innocent as far as it went, but it was no more than natural joy. He in His most merciful indulgence, far from reproving, accepts and encourages it, but at the same time instructs them how to turn it into true, spiritual, heavenly joy. And lastly, He condescends to become Himself their pattern in this as in all other graces: thankfully rejoicing, before His Father, not in those who knew most and did most; not in those conspicuous for energy and talent, and for producing great effects in the world, but in those whom He calls babes, and elsewhere little children: in those who come to Him for rest, and are willing to learn of Him to be meek and lowly of heart.

Now, my brethren, if there be a page in Christ's gospel which, more than any other, may seem to belong to the men of this century, of this generation, it is surely that which I have been endeavouring

to unfold to you : and not least, as I will try and shew you presently, are those concerned in it, who enjoy such providential helps as are vouchsafed to you, my brethren, who are providentially called to worship in this church.

Generally, wherever we go, and whatever we read, talent, ability, genius, intellectual excellence, by whatever name it may be known, is apt to be accounted the principal thing: not so, if you desire to have the mind of Christ: you will not then be elated by the sense of power, nor too much cast down if you find yourself inferior to others; but you will strive and pray to go on simply in your duty without consciousness; or to acquiesce in your own want of talent, as good poor men do in their want of worldly substance. And to help you in this difficult point of self-control, you may apply to your own case what our Saviour said of riches: you may use yourself to say in your heart, "How hardly shall they that have secular and worldly wisdom enter into the kingdom of God." And again, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for one wise and able as the world counts wisdom and ability, to enter into the kingdom of God."

This being the Great Master's general will in respect of talent of all sorts, the memories of St. Luke's day would seem to apply it more especially to those who excel in literary, professional, or artistic talent, or taste. It is no new observation, that the traditions which are come down to us concerning that holy Evangelist, may well teach us the right christian use of what are called accomplishments, and the danger of abusing them; for St. Luke, we know, was a very accomplished person: he is called "the beloved Physician," and the natural meaning of "beloved" in that place, is that he was welcome to all, and necessary to all; all were thankful to have him within reach. There is a well-known tradition of his having been a skilful painter, and his historical writings, his gospel and the "Acts of the Apostles" are, if one may speak after the manner of men, very skilfully composed.

I suppose there are few of us but would feel some temptation and danger in all this. Besides the ordinary perils of vanity, and of idolizing the work itself, instead of sacrificing it altogether to Him who qualifies you for it; there is need to be on your guard against fastidiousness and false delicacy; against an impatience of homely things, persons, and duties; most unworthy and unbecoming in the servants of Him, who vouchsafed to spend the best years of His early life in Nazareth, as a Carpenter, and a carpenter's son. The holy St. Luke is set before us, as an example of one who subdued all these temptations. What was to him, his art and science, his skill

and success in historical composition, in painting, or in medicine, compared with that devotion to Christ and his Saints, of which we heard this morning, in St. Paul's farewell letter? "Only Luke is with me:" are we not quite sure that it was far deeper joy to the blessed Evangelist to have this testimony of his being still one of Christ's little ones, than when he returned with the other seventy, reporting that the very devils were subject unto him, through Christ's name? Others of that favoured number, it is said, were not proof against the temptations of their high calling; like Balaam, they "knew the knowledge of the Most High," and in their measure did His work in their day; and yet, after all, they fell back with their eyes open, into the portion of the Evil One. O, my Brethren, beware! depend upon it the like danger is not far from you; when God seems to be giving you energy and power, skill and success, in any work, intellectual or spiritual, so as to distinguish you among your Brethren; at such times you may be quite sure that he who fell from heaven by trusting in God's gifts, and not in God Himself, is close at hand, watching how he may tempt you after him, as he once tempted a Prophet, and afterwards an Apostle: Balaam first, and then Judas. The temptation may steal upon you, as I have said, on the side of refined intellectual delight, knowledge, taste, and skill in literature, in eloquence, or in art, as one might well enquire of any one, at this very place, and at this very time, rejoicing in the glory of Churches and Church Services—holy music, holy hymns, holy buildings, holy lessons and liturgies—and unawares allowing himself to rest in some or all of these, which after all are but as means to the great end of self-sacrifice and devotion of souls to God. Or it may come, still more persuasively, in the shape of active spiritual power and influence. Imagine a person more or less like St. Paul—largely endowed with the best helps for preaching the Gospel, and what perhaps is still more rare, for governing the souls which he may have won—keeping alive and quickening the flame which he has kindled. What a deep sense must there be in such an one, all along, of God's special presence! how thoroughly must he accustom himself to rest upon the conviction, that Christ is all and himself nothing; how resolutely determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that he may not be exalted above measure through the abundance of the Revelations! And accordingly it is our Father's merciful way to counterbalance that sore trial with some special humiliation and disappointment; as in the case of St. Paul with the thorn in the flesh. And it might be a wise prayer in any of us, when we go about God's work, that we may have success without knowing it ourselves, except so far as to keep

us from despondency: success like that of the beggar Lazarus, whose task was to lie at the rich man's gate full of sores, and longing for broken victuals, and most likely seeming to himself as if he did no good in the world; but what is the result? He is one of two, in whose favour the Eternal Judge has anticipated the sentence of the last day: declaring him by name to have his portion in Abraham's bosom; as to the other He said, "Thou shalt be with me in Paradise." And so the beggar Lazarus is known to all generations of the Church as an eminent winner of souls, by the silent preaching of his example after his death. In this sense the spirits are subject unto him,—men's hearts are influenced by him for good,—without any danger of undue elation on his part: which danger always exists more or less, when frail men on earth are allowed to see the good that they do. What better portion dare any of us hope for, what more glorious success, than this of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom?

And Church History is full of such examples: I will just mention one—our own Bishop Ken—with whom, at the time, the old Church of England might almost seem to have died out. Humanly speaking, that holy man appeared almost thrown away on his own generation. But who shall say how much of any subsequent revival which our Lord may have vouchsafed in any measure to this portion of His Church may be owing to the remains and memory of that holy Bishop? and the same may be said of Bishop Wilson in his sphere. O! well shall we have prayed, and happily will our prayers have been answered, if it prove hereafter that we have won a grace and a success at all comparable to theirs.

In the meantime, let us not grudge to cast our bread upon the waters, making up our minds not to find it until after many days; most likely not until after all our appointed days on earth. In no case despond: it were a kind of presumption to do so: it would be as if one thought oneself entitled to share in the incommunicable prerogative of Christ. For as "God alone is what He would be;" so of Christ only is it written "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." He only can do nothing in vain, nor yet be unaware of any thing that Himself doeth.

Leave all to Him, my brethren, both your work and your reward. Be humble and constant in keeping His plain commandments. Abide by the Creed, the Ancient Creed, with all its old Articles, and no new ones. This is the way of Faith: by this the Saints overcame the world: and by this, and Prayer, you shall overcome also, through the grace, mercy, and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and one God, be all praise and glory, all might, majesty, and dominion, now, henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

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