

originate, combine, expand, or modify existing schemes of education, and thus to establish an institution *sui generis*. With prophetic foresight and scholarly discrimination, he selected for his first group of professors, in several large departments, men of known ability and world renown. Such a nucleus drew students from the ends of the earth. Mr. John D. Rockefeller of New York, as well as a noble body of Trustees, stood close to

the President, and supported his broad and expansive plans, and gave the University a standing almost from the very first. Dr. Harper's position at its head gave him a prominent place in the educational councils of the country.

As teacher, scholar, administrator, or man, Dr. Harper was of those who occupied the chief seat in American educational annals of the last twenty-five years.

The Treasure Committed to your Charge.¹

BY THE REV. A. E. BURN, D.D., RECTOR OF HANDSWORTH, BIRMINGHAM.

'Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord.'
—Ezra viii. 28, 29.

THE weary years of captivity are ended. The party of exiles whom Ezra is about to lead back from Babylon to the land of their fathers is ready for the toilsome march across the desert. The king, Artaxerxes, is well disposed. He has restored the holy vessels which had been taken from the Temple more than a century before. He and his nobles have given princely gifts of money for the treasury of God. Shall they ask him for a guard to protect them against the marauders of the desert, the wandering Bedawin, at all times quick to hear of so wealthy a caravan, to swoop, and conquer, and vanish, leaving but a few dead men, whose bones shall soon bleach by the wayside forgotten like so many more.

A sad end this to their high hopes. But there is another point of view. To ask for a guard would be to show lack of faith in the God of their fathers. They are about to engage in what is uniquely God's work, to carry back the holy vessels to the restored Temple, and to give a new stimulus to the direction of the national life of the people which shall have, please God, an influence on the lives of generations yet unborn. Let them trust God to protect His ministers.

In Ezra's own words: 'I proclaimed a fast

¹ A Sermon preached at the September Ordination in Birmingham Cathedral.

there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.' Do you say: 'A quixotic resolve'? 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.' The final preparations are made. A picked body of twelve priests and twelve Levites receive the charge of the holy vessels and the treasure in the words which I have chosen for my text. They make the venture of faith.

We will not follow them in imagination on the march, nor to their joyful arrival in Jerusalem. All subsequent Jewish history was in part moulded by their influence in answer to the prayers of Ezra and his little company. Great issues were at stake on that day of decision. But we must not stay to enumerate them. I wish to make of this graphic picture of the halt by the waters of the Ahava, of the dedication of these ministers of the sanctuary, a starting-point for our meditation on the solemn

service in which we take part this morning. We have to do with history not legend. But we are fully justified in making of it a parable. The Church of Christ delivered from worse than Babylonish captivity, the company of Christ's redeemed, is continually advancing through a life of temptation as through a wilderness. And at every crisis in our lives each one of us is tempted to forget that we must walk by faith not by sight. The arm of flesh seems stronger than the sword of the spirit. But Christ's victories must be won in Christ's way. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' The conviction of Christ's Apostle is the same conviction which had steeled the heart of Ezra centuries before.

To the ministers of Christ's Church is committed a charge not less weighty than that which devolved upon the priests and Levites of the restored Temple in Jerusalem. To be watchful in the performance of all duties of their sacred calling, to guard the treasure of the riches of Christ which faith has brought to us by grace—this is our calling through all the years of our toilsome wilderness journey; out of weakness made strong, we may go from strength to strength, until in the unveiled presence of the God of gods in Zion we lay down the sacred burden which only His grace enables us to carry or to guard for time and for eternity.

To our brothers who offer themselves to-day for ordination to the office of a deacon in the Church the words of Ezra must come weighted with profound spiritual meaning: 'Ye are holy; the vessels also are holy. . . . Watch ye, and keep them all the days of your earthly ministry.' If it is the Lord's will that they should proceed to the office of the priesthood, the charge will not be less, but more solemn. Perhaps some of you who have witnessed an ordination of priests as well as deacons will feel that this service to-day is shorn of much of the solemnity which before impressed you. Make the measure of that solemnity which you felt the measure of the earnestness of your prayers for our brothers, that they may prepare diligently for the higher calling.

1. There is another respect in which the parallel which I have drawn is complete. The venture of faith which our brothers make to-day will not be made without forethought. The Ember Days have called a halt on life's journey, have offered a precious opportunity of quiet communing with

God, like the fast which Ezra proclaimed for self-afflicting before God to seek of Him a right way, and deliverance from the hand of the enemy.

The better observances of Ember Days has had a great deal to do with the progress of the Church of Christ during the last half century. Yet one fears that in this great congregation there may be some who have turned a deaf ear to the invitation to make this preparation for this solemn service.

It is my duty to preach to you declaring the duty and office of such as come to be admitted deacons. How shall I begin if your hearts are not in sympathy with us in self-humbling, in self-abasement, before we dare to think of the spiritual reality which those solemn words of the Bishop will presently teach, 'Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration, to serve God for the promoting of His glory and the edifying of His people?' My brethren, 'if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God,' ay, confidence that He will so bless our brothers in their new calling that at the end of their diaconate they will say what, thank God, many of us have said before: 'It has been the happiest year of my life.'

Let me attempt for a moment to analyse that happiness. It is a profession which continually exercises sympathy, and in the healthy exercise of sympathy is one element of happiness. Nor is there in it any clashing of our interest with the interest of our neighbours. The two are identical. But above all elements which make up our joy in the ministry we must reckon the satisfaction of putting first things first, giving to all things their true proportions. We go in and out amongst our people, ready to share their sorrows as well as their joys, not afraid to enter where the shadow of Death is passing, because we are continually made conscious in the ordinary exercise of our calling that this life is only a probation; and in our dealings with all sorts and conditions of men we are led to see, farther than was possible in home-life, or school-life, or college-life, how much depends on the use of opportunities throughout life here, and we are drawn on by the logic of Bishop Butler's great argument to consider how marvelously adapted this world is to be the scene of probation for another life. We see into the mystery of life, and it gives point to the ministry

among the young, which is a large part of the work of a deacon. Even the recreation in which deacons, I suppose, take part with the lads of their Bible classes is enjoyed with new zest. What we enjoyed at school and college without thinking is now seen in its true relation to the development of the whole man, created to glorify God in body, soul, and spirit. Each day as it comes brings a varied routine of worship, and study, and work, all begun and ended with prayer. It is indeed a happy life, for it is crowned by a purpose; and the prayers and lessons of the daily services, and the special message of each Sunday and Holy Day, seem to blend with the experience of the daily toil till we begin to realize the highest aim of human life as we never realized it before, that work should be but an incident in the life of praise. Again and again at our Sunday Eucharists we can thank God who has thus called us to serve Him: 'O God! my heart is ready, my heart is ready. I will sing and speak praise with the best member that I have.'

Happy vocation, indeed, which taxes every faculty that a man has,—mental, physical, spiritual,—yet reveals more and more how, in the joy of self-sacrifice for others, the yoke of Christ is easy and His burden is light!

Is there, then, no drudgery in the work of the ministry? Is this a fancy picture which I have drawn? Believe me that I speak from experience. It is not the deacon, as a rule, who minds the drudgery. It is later on in the ministerial life that all kinds of work tend to become at times drudgery, and we need all the elasticity which faith alone can give to character to keep us cheerful and buoyant in hope. The deacon has youth, and freedom from the cares and anxieties which press so heavily upon many an overworked incumbent. Age and positions of responsibility must bring burdens, but we are not called to think about them now: 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

So much, then, of the office. I am directed also to declare how the people ought to esteem them in their office.

2. There is but one qualification which is essential, and which never fails in the end to win esteem, and that qualification is holiness. Remember the charge of Ezra: 'Ye are holy; the vessels also are holy.'

Men bring into the ministry many varied gifts

and talents. One is musical, another is promising as a speaker and preacher, another has a gift of influence over children, another has a lifelong interest in the study of Holy Scripture, which he desires to cultivate and to use. All gifts poured into the treasury of God can be used if, and only if, being freewill offerings, they are sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The more marked a natural gift the more danger there is in the using, unless the still small voice is heard which stifles conceit, and warns in success, and encourages in failure.

Ezra's charge points us to the deep underlying spiritual unity between the Old Testament and the New. Ezra, himself a Levite, profoundly conscious of his own sinfulness, and no doubt fully alive to the frailties, shortcomings, not to say more open sins of the band of priests and Levites whom he is leading, yet with confidence in the fulfilment of God's purpose through them, does not hesitate to say: 'Ye are holy.'

Thus also St. Paul, writing to the sin-stained, quarrelsome Corinthians, and to those in authority over them having gifts of prophecy, or tongues, or government, makes one appeal to all,—which is the appeal of the Holy Spirit to us all to-day: 'Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.'

Thus is presented to our contemplation the perpetual miracle of God's grace in the world continuously in conflict with the wayward wills of men.

The ideal set before Ezra was dim and distant. Before us glows the brightness of the Light of the World that shone in the perfect holiness of the life of Christ. Not less strenuously but more must Christians strive in the battle against the powers of darkness, which, through all possible avenues of temptation of the world, and the flesh, and the devil, seek to mislead, to cajole, to conquer the soul. St. Paul cherished no illusions. He knew that we ministers of Christ, by our folly, our selfishness, our sins, seem too often in the eyes of the world deceivers. We profess to be holy persons, and fail. St. Paul takes up the challenge. Ay, but in spite of failure we succeed by grace. 'As deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.'

The paradox is repeated from age to age. We approve ourselves as the ministers of God not by our pureness or our knowledge, but by the Holy Ghost, by the word of truth, by the power of God.

3. My brothers. I have tried to speak plainly to the great congregation of the office which you seek. 'Ye are holy; the vessels also are holy.' Every time that it is your privilege to bear the Cup of the Lord to faithful communicants, pray to be sanctified in Christ Jesus. Remember the watchword of the primitive liturgies which it was the deacon's function to proclaim: 'Holy things for holy persons.' My final message to you is summed up in Ezra's searching words—Watch and keep. Watch (i.) for opportunities of learning your business. The task does not grow easier as the years pass. Think how times have changed since in the Ordinal were written the words about searching 'for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the parish, to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell, unto the Curate. . . .' The writer of these words never dreamed of such overgrown, overwhelming parishes as we see around us to-day in Birmingham, where as things are it is an impossibility to overtake the arrears of pastoral work needed. Try, then, to realize the complexity of the social problems of to-day. Feel—your hearts must be turned to stone if you do not feel—the pathos of the fact that poverty, darker, deeper poverty, dogs the heels of progress. But distrust remedies which claim to be easy remedies. The disease in the body politic is deep rooted. Read, and think, and pray.

Again I say watch for opportunities (ii.) of learning about yourself. As the great poet puts it:

'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead men to sovereign power.'

Pray that you may know yourself, your limitations, your weakness, your besetting fault. Remember that what you do, in your first years of work especially, is much less important than what you are.

And once again watch for opportunities (iii.) of service to others in the Lord's spirit of humility, but with the Lord's own boldness of speech. He who said, 'I am among you as one that serveth,' never shrank from witness to the truth. St. Paul's words in the Epistle for this service ring in our ears. 'They that use the office of a deacon well

purchase themselves a good degree, and great boldness of speech in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.' This teaching leads on to my next point. While you watch, so must you guard. Keep the faith which is in Christ Jesus. There is no greater danger to any soul than to lose faith; for to lose faith is to lose courage, and to lose courage is to lose all. There is no mental misery more wretched than the misery of a man who bears the holy vessels of the Lord and has lost faith in Him.

Do we not need the most solemn stirring of our common conscience in this matter? Men call it a shame that by ordination vows we should sign away our liberty. Can we hope in the future to escape doubts? No, but we know in whom we have believed, and we know how doubts may be solved. Again and again the doubts which are raised in the study, and raised in current literature, and raised in society small talk are solved in the familiar round of pastoral work. We learn to rely on our creed, because we find that, as in every age since Christianity began, faith in Christ Risen is the foundation on which new life in a soul is built up, which without it is like a barque storm-tossed on a sea of doubts and fears, so that life solves the problem of thought, and our theology is truly the analysis of our experience. In the hour of sore temptation triumphed over, by the sick-bed when the cross is patiently borne, by the open grave faith is not lost but triumphs, for 'the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Life lies before you with manifold opportunities, a new life enriched by new graces. Look in—that you may renounce all tendencies, passions, prejudices that may abase your standard or imperil your salvation. Look up—for that help which no one ever claimed in vain.

'He giveth more grace.'

Look on—to the exceeding greatness of the reward. 'Ye are holy; the vessels also are holy.' Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them, the full amount of the treasure committed to your charge, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, before our merciful and faithful High Priest, and before the glorious company of all apostles, priests, and deacons who have finished their course with joy, while their ministry, which they received of the Lord Jesus, testifies the gospel of the grace of God.