

ADDRESS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR AMPLEFORTH SEPTEMBER 1877

Bishop Hedley

YOU ARE GOING TO BEGIN WORK, THEN ; and being here this morning to wish you a happy and hearty beginning, I think I cannot do better than say a few words on the character of good and real school-work. The first and most essential quality of all real work is purpose. By purpose I mean the notion of what we are aiming at in our work. The great thing for a boy at school is to have the idea that his life at school has a purpose at all. Many boys whom I have known had no purpose, except, some vague and hazy general aim. There are numbers of fairly creditable boys who do not sufficiently see the ' why ' of many things.

Let me mention a few classes, whom most of us have met. There is the boy who looks on school-life as stupid. This word is one of those vague and interjectory boy-adjectives which chiefly serve as labels for whatever is in any way objected to. These words, hardly rising above the line of inarticulate cries, are, to boys and young men, a great saving in the expensive article of ideas, and are not ' slang ' only because slang expresses conceptions, however objectionably, but these words, like a howl or a squeak, are mere nervous force transformed into sound. But the boy who labels his school-life as ' stupid,' has generally, to do him bare justice, a more or less definite idea of what he means. His feelings are much the same as those of a busy man who has to wait two or three hours at one of those junctions where the lines join but the trains are far apart. School seems sheer loss of time. He looks round and he sees nothing that interests him. Companions, books, work, masters, all are wearisome and irritating. He does not want them. What he wants is something else. When there is a world outside where people go to and fro, do things, have things, and enjoy themselves, why should uncomfortable fate fix him a prisoner here ? Why should rules threaten him, tasks intrude upon him, boundaries keep him in, bells ring him about ? What he wants he does not clearly know. It is impossible that he should. The work, the bustle, the pleasures of the world, such as they are, are not for him, even should he manage to get away from his desk and his task. But he does not understand this, and therefore he is oppressed with the ' stupidity ' of school life. He ought to think for a moment whether the stupidity is not chiefly the result of having no idea what purpose he is at school for.

Then, again, there is the boy who thinks school not only ' stupid,' but unjust. This boy makes his objections more personal than the other. To him school is a prison, masters tyrants, rules slavery. He is hot, quick, and shallow, and therefore is often found railing at persons and things, protesting against points of discipline, and loudly avowing his intention of not working or not obeying. Of course there is no such boy, save in that limbo where abstractions are stored and types kept in stock. But many boys conform to him in a degree, and pass through a good deal of their time with a feeling that a large part of their work and discipline is useless, and therefore tyrannical, invented by grown-up people to embitter the existence of the young, These again fail in understanding purpose.

Then, thirdly, there is the boy who takes school life quietly enough, without fuming or

chafing ; but who looks upon it merely as a time to pass over, a state to be lived through. To use a second railway illustration, he is like one who waits at a level crossing for a long goods train to pass by. The train does not concern him, except that it prevents his going through the gates. Its length, its make up, its variety of noise, its whole appearance cause a languid interest, but the chief thought is ‘ How long it is in going by !’ So, to such boys, the fact that school-time passes very slowly is the chief fact in their life. They take no interest in their work as a whole, but only in a bit here and a bit there. If they are naturally sleepy and easygoing they mope ; if they are lively they snatch at every amusement that comes in their path. They lose, without even a pang of remorse, a hundred golden opportunities every day. The best faculties of their mind and heart lie asleep, or, from, want of exercise, never grow strong. And, since the mind and heart must be filled and fed in some way, evil comes to seek them whilst they neglect to go in search of good. To these again what is chiefly lacking is the notion of purpose. What I would wish to urge upon even the youngest boy here is this—that in school life there is such a noble and important purpose to aim at, that any boy who thinks school ‘ stupid,’ must be stupid himself; and any one who looks on his school either as a prison or a mere necessary evil, is like a man who keeps his shutters closed in broad day, and then goes on grumbling that the sun won't rise.

There is no nobler work, and no more essential process than education. In one sense, a man is being educated till he has breathed his last breath. But the education of school has a most important character of its own. To educate is to cultivate, develop, and polish all the faculties—physical, intellectual, moral, and religious ; and to give to a boy's whole nature its completeness and perfection, so that he may be what he ought to be and do what he should do ; to form him as a man, and to prepare him to do his duty in life to those about him, to his country, to himself ; and so, by perfecting his present life, to prepare him for the life to come.

This is a formidable description. But really no other conception of education is at all an adequate one. This is the duty which fathers and mothers owe to their children, and this is the duty which masters of a school like this have undertaken towards those committed to their care. And as for those whom I am now addressing—I mean the boys present—this description should let them understand what is the aim and the purpose of the work which they are beginning to-day. The work is, to educate themselves ; and to educate themselves, means to aim at what I have very briefly tried to express. It is their work. Parents and masters have their share in educating a boy, but he must educate himself. He is not a piece of marble, which a man may cut away with a chisel till he puts it into shape ; he is not a canvas on which a painter can put colours and rub them out as he pleases. He is a living thing, with a free will; he can push himself on, and he can control himself ; and whether he thinks of it or not, he is always growing or altering for better or for worse. So that a parent or a teacher has no chance with a boy unless he tries to educate himself. Is it not the same all through life ? No one can do to another anything worth naming unless that other does it also to himself.

My object, then, is to make you begin the year's work with the aim and the purpose of educating yourselves. Let every boy who has come to the use of reason use his reason, and say to himself I intend to make myself ! The expression is a true one. We do make ourselves—always pre-supposing the grace of God. Just as one of you may make a walking-stick out of a hazel branch, so a boy in his young years is only the raw material of what he ought one day to become. He has to be bent and persuaded, and polished, and

carved, before he is what God wants him to be. Presuming that every one of you is anxious to begin at once to make himself, I think I hear some of you inquire, What must we do ? For, of course, it is very evident you cannot be called upon to invent a whole plan of education, each one for himself. Very few men, even with the experience and reflection of maturity, have the power to originate or work systems of education, let alone a boy who is as new to the task of making himself as a novice to his breviary. But no boy has to do this.

What is this college for – what are the books hidden in those desks for, what is this array of reverend masters for, except to show you the way ? Boys have lived before you ; wise men have tried systems innumerable ; failures have been made ; successes have been achieved ; schoolboys have grown up and lived to analyse, in advancing years, the secret of the happy issue, or the disastrous issue, of their early training. And the results of much experience of the past, and of much thought in the present, are seen in the organisation of a well-conducted college.

Therefore, my advice is this : Work under your masters and with your masters; but work cordially and intelligently. Fall in with the routine and the order of the school, but understand the reasons of things. Do not allow yourselves to be mere pawns upon a chessboard—mechanically pushed about by rule and regulation. Let each one be an intelligent atom of a great organism, entering with understanding and good will into all the work of the place. And it is not too much to say that to a boy who has an intelligent idea of what he is at school for, there is not an hour of his school life which he may not turn to account in the making of himself. Study time and play time, class work, books, games, conversations, all do their part in the great process of education. A boy is ignorant, incapable, and rude, and what he wants is, information, capability and culture.

As to information, though it is not by any means the whole of education, yet it occupies a very prominent position in the routine of school. Our minds, when we are young, are like blank paper—and, indeed, it may be said that the paper itself has to be manufactured. At school this paper, such as it is, gets written upon ; the empty pages get filled with impressions from without. We are brought into contact with the past and the present. We have to learn what men have thought, what they have said and how they have said it, during the centuries that went by before we were. We have to note and remember the things that have happened, and take to heart the touching histories, the dramas of hate and love, the play of passion, the evil and the good, that have followed each other across the surface of this ancient world. We have to study the world itself—its earth and water, its plants and its beasts, its climates and its skies. We must know something of the forces which work the changes of the hours, or of the centuries.

There is nothing which exists at this moment when we ourselves exist, or which is in contact with us through records made in days gone by, which we might not know; and nothing which we can know without work ; and no work which can be efficient or sound unless, in some sense, it begins at school. Unless necessary toil prevents him from learning, an ignorant man is a disgrace and a failure ; and, in ninety cases out of a hundred, an ignorant boy means an ignorant man.

The boy with a purpose, therefore – such as I am sanguine enough to presume each of you has – wants to learn, tries to learn, and is glad to take the means to learn. He follows his classes carefully, is avaricious of his time, explores well the innermost interior of his study-books, and does not object to turn even his recreation to account in picking up information. And so he becomes in time a well-informed man, which is a good deal, though

not all that he should be. But in reality he learns, as he goes on from class to class, much more than mere information – more than Latin, history, mathematics, and physical science – he learns one or two of those mighty secrets which, like weapons, multiply a hundredfold his power for aggression or for defence ; he learns by his experience that the hardest things may be mastered by industrious labour, by repetition, by the process of little by little, by attention, by intensity, by docility.

Furnished with such weapons as these, he can go forth, when he leaves his school, and conquer new realms of learning in divinity, physic, law, or practical work. But even this is not all that is required of him, nor all the work that lies ready to your hand at school. I do not wish to speak of strictly religious work, though it is true that where religious principle and practice are wanting, school-work is but a disorderly chaos, matter without form. But there are ‘ habits ‘ of the heart which stand under and sustain religion like the arches of a bridge; and we learn them at school. Large-mindedness and elevation of view mean the habit of treating trifles as really trifles, of appreciating lofty pursuits and noble motives, and loving what is true, good, and beautiful. This we may practise at school every day. Every hour we may habituate ourselves more and more to that sympathy and consideration for others which, springing from humility, and bringing with them carefulness of outward manner, are the truest description of what is meant by a gentleman.

All these different matters – the acquisition of information, the formation of mental capacity and culture in its highest sense, are part of the school work. They all go to prepare, form, and make the man. There is no such thing as a good citizen, a good neighbour, or a good man, unless these things are attained somehow ; and grace, prayer, and sacraments being supposed, they are the exercises which prepare us for our eternal destiny. Such is your work. It is truly a work which may bring impulses of soberness and seriousness both to masters and to learners. It is a disastrous and even a horrible thing to educate a child wrongly, to spoil his mind or heart, whether by neglect or by severity, by indulgence, or by evil teaching. Such a thing is not to be suspected here.

Even, if you and I did not know by experience what sort of bringing up boys receive here, we should be inclined to take it for granted that Benedictines know their business. I believe in the Benedictine tradition. Without claiming perfection for any system which is administered by men, and without wishing to institute inapt comparisons, I am quite sure that there is something in the school-life of a genuine Benedictine house which belongs to itself alone, and which notably helps and suits a large number of young people. In a Benedictine house the school is still, in a sense, a part of the cloister. When you visit, in its ruins, or in its transformation, some great English abbey of Black Monks, such as Durham, Westminster, or Gloucester, you may remind yourselves of the many generations of young boys who have sat, book in hand, on the stone benches of those glorious cloisters.

A monastery is a family, and, in a family, interests are common, the members play into each other's hands, and every one works for the good of the whole. It is one of the marked features of the Benedictine tradition, founded on a well-known passage of the rule, that even the youngest members of a community have some kind of a voice in the concerns of the whole house. Now, it is most essential for education that each boy in a school should be treated, not as a mere unit, but as a definite individual, with special strong points and special weaknesses.

But whereas in most schools single masters or tutors have single departments, and no one superior has the right, or the requisite information, to treat a boy with due reference

to the whole of his character, this weakness in schools is to a very great extent obviated in a Benedictine school, because, in some degree, the whole teaching staff know something and care something about every unit in the school. Not that there is any formal comparison of notes, or holding council on boys' characters, or foolish and fussy interference ; but the effect is sufficiently produced by that beautiful community life of which St Benedict drew the lines. And not only does each small plant stand a chance of being treated as it needs to be treated, but it seems to me that in a house like this the plants take kindly to growing.

The theory in such houses is, that education means growing, coming out, developing ; and not repression or keeping down. Nothing can grow without warmth and geniality. If boys be kept at a distance, or chilled by severity, or subjected to a too unvarying drill, you may make them hide some of their vices and faults, but neither their minds nor their hearts will grow. If the training given be chiefly negative – you shall not do this, not desire that, not imitate the other, then the boy enters the world as Daedalus launched himself upon the air, with wings ready to melt off at the first heat, and with nothing to stay his foot between himself and the depths of the sea.

But a Benedictine house is a house which fosters rather than represses, which encourages the exuberance of nature whilst it does not omit to prune and to guide. The effect on a boy's heart is, that he has simple views about spirituality, holding for his main and guiding principle that the perfect man is he who most perfectly gives God his whole heart, and trusts to God's help and light for each hour as it comes. In a Benedictine house the problem of how to make boys love religion is grappled with and fairly solved. The monastic choir, resounding at all hours with the divine praise, the slow and solemn vesper, the festivals of dim and far off saints who lived simple lives and ruled men in their day, are fitted to attract young hearts. The noblest biblical education is to learn how to give God one's whole heart; and in a monastery the whole routine of life should teach this lesson, not as from pulpit or from desk, but as the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament His power and mighty works.

Doubtless, no school can go on without a well-understood and firmly administered system of punishment. But punishment may be used so as to heal and not to bruise, to help and not to harden. A monk understands, or ought to understand, the effects, psychological, moral and spiritual, of pain – how pain resisted makes us mere wild beasts, and pain accepted heats the heart to a fervour it had never known without it. How common a thing it is for a child to be misunderstood, and to be much worse on the surface than he really is.

And, therefore, the monastic teacher has generally two good qualities – he is patient, and he speaks. This latter quality in a tutor is so valuable that, it seems to me, if a parent could only be sure that his child would be duly spoken to, he need be anxious about little else. By speaking, I mean the art of saying a word to a boy when the word would do good – a word of warning, of chiding, of remonstrance, of encouragement. Speech is the appointed mode of true education. Machinery, routine, books, and exercises have their important place; but ever since the days of Quintilian it has been acknowledged that the spoken word is absolutely essential, even for imparting intellectual, and helping training, but much more for touching, guiding, and helping the heart in its earliest efforts, struggles, and miseries. To such work, to such teachers, to such a tradition I leave you. Love your work, trust your teachers, and be glad that you are where you are.