Dominus in Refugium

A SERMON

PREACHED IN QUEENS' COLLEGE CHAPEL

AT THE

COMMEMORATION OF BENEFACTORS

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BY

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I TAKE as my text three words of Latin—words which should have much meaning for us, since they are graven on the very foundation-stone of our College. They are these:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, 'The Lord shall be for a refuge.'

It was on 15 April 1448 that the stone in question was laid with much pomp and state by Sir John Wenlock, chamberlain to Queen Margaret of Anjou. And since this was to be not only a royal but also a religious foundation, the first stone, the *primaria petra* as the Queen herself called it, was laid at the south-east corner of the chapel and bore the inscription:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, 'The Lord shall be for a refuge to our Lady Queen Margaret, and this stone for a sign.'

In those days a foundation-stone *was* a foundation-stone, deep buried in the earth, not a mere block inserted in the wall to serve as an advertisement. And so it has come about that for centuries past no man has set eyes on the lettering of that memorable stone.

Accordingly (this being Cambridge) critics have got to work and raised doubts as to the authenticity of my text. It is pointed out that the oldest records of the foundation are two MSS. on paper preserved among the College muniments—one dating from the time of Queen Elizabeth

Widville, say 1470, the other written after the death of Andrew Doket in 1484. Both are in such agreement that they presuppose an older document, now lost. And both are said to read, not DOMINUS, but DOMINIUM. If so, the inscription on the stone would have to be rendered as Searle rendered it:

> 'The power of our Lady Queen Margaret shall be our refuge, and this stone the sign of her protection.'

As against this rendering, it should be noticed that both the MSS. give the word DOMINIUM in a clipped form, agreeing only in the first four letters. I should infer that the original transcript had a compendium for DOMINUS, and that a careless copyist imported the wrong termination from the following word REFUGIUM. At any rate we know that from 1655 onwards, when Thomas Fuller of Queens' wrote his *History of Cambridge University*, the inscription has always been cited in the nobler form. Probability is raised to certainty, when we remember that Margaret's design was avowedly religious. The parchment addressed by her to King Henry VI, and still to be seen in our archives, begs humbly for license and power to lay the first stone, that there

> 'may be founded and stablished the said so called Queens College to conservation of our faith and augmentation of pure clergy, namely of the empress of all sciences and faculties, Theologic.'

It would ill accord with the studied humility and piety of this petition and, I may add, of her extant instructions to Sir John Wenlock, if the young Queen had really described as our refuge her own precarious power, or indeed any power lower than that of the Most High.

No, the critics have been over-critical (they sometimes are), and the old text still stands:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, 'The Lord shall be for a refuge.'

But a refuge from what? When the words were first drafted, the plague was in Cambridge. That was the dread cause which seven months earlier had prevented Henry VI from laying the first stone of King's College Chapel. It may well have deterred his consort from attempting a similar task at Queens'. And, apart from the pestilence, anxieties were abroad in the land. The chronicle of our foundation opens with a sombre and pathetic preamble:

> 'The world waxeth towards old age, the virtues of them that dwell therein begin to fade, the wonted devotion of the folk to God groweth cold, and the sweetness of divine worship is slipping from us . . . These and other miseries of modern times have gotten them strength beyond their wont and forced themselves upon the purview of our mind. Wherefore we, Margaret, Queen of England and consort of our most Christian and devoted King, under authority apostolic and royal, do found a College in the town of Cantebrige for the use and housing of scholars that study the sacred page, to the end that virtues may increase to the glory of God and the stablishing of the church universal.'

Dangers indeed were rife, and were soon to culminate in the outbreak of civil war—a war that swept from the scene both Sir John Wenlock and his royal mistress. For he fell fighting on the field at Tewksbury; and she, disillusioned and dethroned, lived on as an exile in penury and positive want.

Amid such perils, physical, mental, and spiritual, there is to my mind something splendid and unshaken in the thought of that foundation-stone:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, ET LAPIS ISTE IN SIGNUM.

Since those distant days nearly five hundred years have come and gone—five hundred years of complex European history. How often during that long stretch of time, in periods of peculiar stress and strain, have men's thoughts here reverted to their palladium: 'The Lord shall be for a refuge.' The Renaissance in the fifteenth century with its fresh beginnings and its far horizons, the Reformation in the sixteenth with its deep searchings of heart, the whole struggle of King and Commons in the seventeenth, the French Revolution in the eighteenth, the menace of Napoleon in the nineteenth, the World War of our own day—these were tremendous happenings, fraught with vital issues to soul and body. And in them, and through them all, Queens' men bore a worthy part. I cannot attempt to tell the tale even in briefest outline. But read for yourselves, say, the record of John Fisher, scholar and saint, a great lover of learning and a valiant defender of the faith. He owned more books than any man then living in the land; but he was far from being a recluse sunk in his own studies. He was Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor, Professor of Divinity, and Bishop of Rochester to boot. As Master of Michaelhouse and as President of Queens' he was himself the head of two Cambridge Colleges; and, acting for the Countess of Richmond, he took the chief part in founding two more—Christ's College and St John's. In convocation he challenged Wolsey's great scheme for a subsidy in aid of the war with Flanders. More than that, he dared to oppose the King himself by denying the validity of Queen Catherine's divorce. Later, he was committed to the Tower for refusing to swear to the Act of Succession. But with unflinching firmness he fought the doctrine of the royal supremacy to the bitter end, and in 1535 was beheaded for conscience' sake. A man of iron purpose, in presence of whom we

feel ourselves to be a puny breed. Yet listen while he tells us the source of his confidence:

> 'Almyghty god is as a stronge toure for our defence agaynst all adversaryes . . . Whosoever may come within the cyrcuite of this toure none enemyes shall at ony tyme have power to hurt hym in body nor soule.'

Or read, if you will, the amazing story of Edward Martin, our Royalist president, who in 1642 after lending much money to King Charles and sending him the best of the College silver, was seized by Cromwell when actually at prayer with his scholars in the Chapel. Along with two other heads of houses he was tied to his horse and paraded through all the villages on his way to the Tower. Grossly ill-treated there for several months, despite an urgent petition from his College, and then (thanks to the intervention of an old pupil) transferred to Lord Petre's house in Aldersgate for a further term of imprisonment, he was in Aug. 1643 packed on board a small coal-ship and confined under hatches. The decks were so low that he could not stand upright. The auger-holes left for ventilation were deliberately stopped in order that the eighty prisoners might stifle one another. Ten days of such torture, and many of them died. It was seriously proposed to sell the survivors as slaves to Algiers or the West Indies! Finally Dr. Martin was transferred to the Bishop of Ely's house at Holborn, where he spent another five years in durance vile. Meantime he had been denounced as a malignant priest, all his property had been sequestered and all his preferments taken from him. In 1648 he contrived to escape to Thorington in Suffolk; and there for two years longer he lived in disguise. In 1650 he was recaptured and reimprisoned. Once more he got away and fled to Paris till the Restoration. In 1660 at

long last he returned to Cambridge and, a broken man in his eightieth year, was reinstated as Master. He devoted the two years before his death to the task of repairing the wicked damage done to the Chapel in his absence by that vilest of all Vandals Dowsing the iconoclast. A rare book in the University Library contains five letters written by Dr. Martin in exile. I have transcribed a passage in which surely patience had her perfect work: it is dated April 5, 1660.

> 'But we are all now, both King and Country, upon the wheel of the omnipotent Potter; and it shall be my continual prayer, that we all come off Vessels of some use and service to his Honour, Praise, and Glory . . . I cannot feel myself to have born any share of affliction at all, nor indeed to have suffered anything, save only in sympathy with those Heavenly, Gracious, and Divine souls (of whom neither our Island, nor this World was worthy) that for their Faith in God, and fear of his Name only, were destitute, afflicted, tormented.'

But after all no denomination has a monopoly of martyrs, and no century can make a corner in heroic hearts. Read again, in the privacy of your room, certain letters that reached you, not so long ago, from young friends at the front. Read them, and reflect. Ancient or modern, men of that stamp had tested the strength of their foundation and known the Lord to be their refuge.

And today we are met in a simple human way to remember their doings and give God the thanks. We do well to bear in mind that, beside the great foundation-stone, other stones are needed to build the fabric—some of outstanding eminence and merit, pillars of the structure, others of less show but no less strength, and a host of ordinary inconspicuous stones which yet, if well and truly laid, are equally essential to the whole. For we

all—as Fisher in his whimsical way expresses it—we all

> 'may be superedyfycate upon Cryst the very foundacyon.'

The College Commemoration is a service which (I suppose) appeals differently to different men, or even to the same man at different stages of his mental growth.

Those who hear it for the first time, with its long list of unfamiliar names and its quaint old-fashioned phraseology, are apt to listen half-amazed and half-amused. They regard it at best as a pedigree to be proud of, and at worst—well, a suspicion crosses their mind that all this is past history rather than present worship. On the whole they are left with a slight but pleasing sense of incongruity.

That is a mood which is characteristic of the freshman, with his inborn love of merriment and his quick appreciation of anything unusual. But the terms slip past—Michaelmas, Lent, and Easter—and by the time Commemoration comes round again he has got a glimpse of many things, his curiosity is stirred, and his humour is touched with imagination. Some names at least in our long list of worthies have leapt into life and become personalities to him. He has friends in the Dokett Building, he uses the Bernard Room, he has joined the St Margaret's Society, he may even have heard of Tom Smith's dinner, or sat in Milner's chair,—and these names inevitably bring with them an atmosphere of their own. Again, he writes home on paper with the College crest and perhaps puzzles over its quarterings. Above all, he begins to perceive that we are living in a very wonderful abode. I do not envy the man who can pass through our Great Gateway and move, with blind eyes, from Court to Cloister.

The fact is, every nook and corner of the College has a story to tell, and a story well worth the telling.

Look past me to the east end of this Chapel and you see two empty niches. Look back to the organ-loft and you read two initials, B and M. These are the merest hints. But look up as you pass under the College Gateway, and on the groyning you may detect the effigies of St Bernard and St Margaret. That is because Andrew Doket, our first president, was originally head of St Bernard's Hostel, a home for non-collegiate students, which stood between Corpus and St Botolph's—a convenient situation for Doket who was first vicar and then rector of that church. But Doket was a man of energy, who believed in expansion and constant progress. In 1446 he obtained from King Henry VI a charter of incorporation, which transformed his Hostel into a College, the College of St Bernard. It was to be built on the site now occupied by St Catharine's Lodge. Doket was to be President, and along with him were four Fellows whose names are on record. But even before the new college could be established Doket had secured a still better site. The King revoked the charter and in 1447 assigned to the College of St Bernard the ground now occupied by our Old Court and the Cloisters adjoining. That same year Queen Margaret begged leave herself to found the College under the joint names of St Margaret and St Bernard.

Nor was this the final foundation. Elizabeth Wydeville, who on May-day 1464 was married to King Edward IV, had formerly been one of the maids of honour to Queen Margaret, and must long have known both the College and its president. Doket. wisely as ever, secured the new queen's patronage; and Elizabeth willingly carried on the work which her predecessor had begun. You may have noticed in our Front Court that the

College arms above the entrance to the Hall rest, by a happy thought of the designer, upon the two queens' heads as their carved supports. Their portraits in the Lodge, by a yet happier thought, are set side by side beneath a single canopy—surely a sermon in itself. After all, the red rose and the white can thrive in the self-same garden. And at College, if anywhere, we should realise the truth of Aristotle's dictum that organic unity implies the harmony of diverse parts. Andrew Doket, who brought about that unity, lived on for another twenty years—long enough to see the College enriched by many benefactions and more than trebled in size. He was buried, by his own desire, in the choir of the old Chapel 'where the lessons are read.' The *Magnum Journale* under the year 1564 records that a picture of Master Andrew Dokett (that is, a brass) was placed on his grave at a cost of two shillings and sixpence. The slab of grey marble and traces of this effigy could be seen as late as 1777, but much worn by the feet of chapel-goers. And nowadays no indication of his actual appearance is left us, except the clever idealising portrait which adorns the Dokett Building.

I have said that the first-year man feels the quaintness of the old pre-Victorian ceremony. The second-year man begins to appreciate its wealth of historic interest. Am I wrong in thinking that the third-year man is already touched by a deeper mood—that of sheer gratitude for all that the College, past and present, has meant to him?

And indeed there is cause for thankfulness. The conditions under which men acquire knowledge are easier now than at any period of our history. In old days accommodation was of the roughest. Few rooms in College had a fireplace, men warmed themselves in the

common Hall. No water was laid on: the whole suppy for drinking and washing came from the Pump Court. Each fellow or bachelor had to share his room with two or three students, for whom small cupboards were partitioned off to serve as separate studies. One such is still to be seen in the Lodge. And remember that, when instruction first began, neither teacher nor taught had printed books. All alike used manuscripts. The Library of Jesus College still possesses one that belonged to Andrew Doket. He it was who drew up the first Catalogue of our Library in 1472. It then contained close on 300 volumes, mostly in manuscript. Printed books were as yet expensive rarities and were fastened by chains to the bookcases. The blacksmith's bill is extant in the College accounts.

Students were expected in those stern days to rise at five, go to Chapel, and then attend lectures from six onwards. And mediaeval lectures often lasted much more than the conventional hour. They were delivered in Latin, and a curious find made last year on staircase G showed the fly-leaves of a printed book filled with some student's lecture-notes. The lecture was on Greek Grammar. The notes were all in Latin. At 10 a.m., or later at 11, dinner was served; after which came a short interval for exercise and relaxation. At 12 or 1 lectures and disputations began again. Supper-time was 5. There were but two regular meals in the day; and Latin had to be spoken at both.

It must not be forgotten that men in College were, if not the lineal descendants, at least in some sense the successors of monks in Monasteries. The cap and gown that still mark the undergraduate were evolved from clerical costume—the cap with its tassel from the biretta with its tuft, the gown from the tabard or informal cassock. Hoods of fur, worn for warmth, were part of

the ordinary clerical attire; hoods of silk were a summer alternative.

Accordingly, the recognised amusements of secular society (jousts and tournaments, hunting and hawking) were for long deemed unclerkly and were forbidden by the Statutes. Bathing was strictly prohibited in 1571 by a decree of the Heads entitled 'That no one goe into the water.' The danger of drowning in the weed-encumbered river was all too real. Football, forbidden in 1574, was allowed in 1580, though only within College precincts. Queens' had Archery-butts in the garden outside the Gateway till 1587, and later in the field on the west side of the river. The earliest Cambridge Bowling-green was that in our Garden, first mentioned in 1609. Cricket is not recorded till 1742, and even the oldest College Boat Clubs are barely a century old. As to the minor sports, a sixteenth-century statute describes the paraphernalia of Tennis and Fives as 'indecent instruments,' the introduction of which would generate scandal against the College!

Small wonder that the students, in desperation, took to illicit amusements at Vandlebury on the Gogmagog Hills (bull-baiting, bear-baiting, cock-fights) or, worse, indulged in poaching and taverning, breaking heads and breaking hearts.

The marvel is that any work was done worthy of the name. And yet it was. Broadly speaking, we may say that education in the College has passed through three well-marked phases—Scholastic, Classical, and Scientific.

At first of course Theology was all in all, and Philosophy was pursued so far as men could pursue it within the theological framework. But education conducted on these lines was at once too dogmatic and too disputatious. Its crowning vice was the imposition of authority, and the freedom denied to original thought.

This baleful influence lasted longer than we might suppose. Rashdall records that in the middle of the seventeenth century a Doctor of Medicine was compelled by the English College of Physicians, under threat of imprisonment, to retract a proposition which he had advanced against the authority of Aristotle!

But the Renaissance had long since pointed the way to better things. It is our proud boast that in 1530 Sir Thomas Smith for the first time taught Greek in England, taught it in his own rooms at Queens'. And Greek literature enabled men to enter and explore a great bygone civilization founded and built up on unfettered human thought. It meant the death-blow to all dogmatism, whether sacred or profane.

But, alas, as the centuries passed, the new learning—like the old—hardened by degrees into a rigid system and largely lost its contact with reality. Translation and composition pursued as an end in themselves might imply scholarship, but they tended to be barren accomplishments out of touch with life. Even the rediscovery of ancient Art in the eighteenth century failed to arrest a growing sense of sterility. Books had been put in the place of things, and men cried out for facts.

Again it is to the lasting honour of Queens' that she early responded to that cry. In the reign of Mary Sir Thomas Smith made a serious study of metallurgy and even attempted to transmute iron into copper. He tried his hand at chemistry too: Strype tells us that he 'had apartments in his house for stills and laboratories, which were going to his great cost.' In 1730 Richard Bradley, Professor of Botany, lectured on the Materia Medica, discoursing at large on the collections deposited in our College by the Veronese chemist Vigani. Fifty years later, Joseph Milner of Queens', elder brother of the famous Isaac, also lectured on Chemistry.

John Michell of Queens' in the Philosophical *Transactions* of 1760 made the first satisfactory announcement with regard to the stratified structure of the earth's crust, and shortly afterwards became Woodwardian Professor of Geology. He had himself investigated the strata between Cambridge and York. He had written too a notable 'Essay on the Cause and Phenomena of Earthquakes.' Later he invented an apparatus for weighing the earth with a torsion-balance. George Cornelius Gorham of Queens', who in 1812 preached the last of our sermons against witchcraft, was likewise geologist enough to contest the Professorship with Adam Sedgwick. Slowly but surely Science was winning its way, and to-day there is no department of serious study that does not aspire, in method at least, to be scientific.

For all that, there is a danger lest Science too, like her predecessors, should harden into a rigid orthodox system and should rashly deny the validity of experiences beyond her control. Such denial spells scientific dogmatism and is of course the very negation of Science. Our ablest thinkers are fully alive to the peril. I suspect, they would subscribe to the view that Theology is indeed (as Queen Margaret said) the empress of all sciences and faculties. Only, they would insist, and rightly, that its empire must be the goal, not the starting-point. The manifold lines of human learning, through centuries of confusion and error, *are* converging upon truth, upon *the* truth, upom Him who is the Truth. Brothers, if that be so, if the paths pursued so painfully lead home at last, what is this but to vindicate yet again, on the intellectual level, our great foundation-text:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, 'The Lord shall be for a refuge'?

I take it, then, that this Commemoration service makes an appeal, though a differing appeal, to all our students. But what of their seniors? What of us who

have heard the same words ten, twenty, thirty, it may be forty times? Well, we too can share their feelings. We can smile, perhaps somewhat grimly, at grants that are given by one monarch and 'resumed' by the next. We too can appreciate the interest of our history and even read sermons in stones. Again, we—if any one—should be grateful. It is not a small thing, as life goes on, to find ourselves still members of a family, dwelling together in the ancestral home. Outside we might be ploughing a lonely furrow. Here brother-man is working at our side. And the crop that we raise is seed-corn for the world.

But I suspect that, at times like this, there steals over *us* a mood which must needs be foreign to youth and strength—a sense of autumn and falling leaves, a touch of Ecclesiastes: 'One generation goeth, and another generation cometh . . .' Human transience! Is there no escape from that inexorable law? Matthew Arnold speaks of 'close-lipp'd patience.' But the heart of man hungers for something better than a negative. And how pathetic have been his poor positive efforts! The Egyptian steeped his dead in natron to preserve the familiar features. The Roman would be remembered by a marble bust. But tangible memorials, however treasured here, are little worth. The silver soon tarnishes; the stained glass in the end gets broken. And in any case to be remembered, if that be all, is cold comfort.

Others have realised that the individual life, if it is to survive, must somehow be plunged in and identified with a larger life than its own. And that is surely true of our Collegiate existence. I have known men so merged in the wonderful continuous life of a College that, in a sense, they have outlived themselves and become veritable partners in its vitality.

Yet even that is not the ultimate satisfaction. A College changes: we need the Changeless. All ends in failure, unless we can somehow rise above the flux of circumstance and lay hold on the life that is life indeed. I do not scruple to assert that on this possibility depend all our hopes both here and hereafter. For only in proportion as we can become identified with the Eternal shall we be sharers in his eternity. But *can* we? Is such inward union *possible* for men? To demonstrate its possibility, nay more, to make it possible for us, Christ lived and died. 'And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.'

As we grow older, we tend (I speak from experience) more and more to let go the formulas and fringes, and to lay stress on central truths—the reality of self, the reality of God, the possibility of apprehending him and loving him and in some measure coming to be like him as we assimilate the character of Christ. I have no wish to belittle or decry intellectual effort; but these *are* the things that count first, these *are* the things that count last. And if that be second childhood, I cannot forget that the kingdom of heaven is promised to the child.

The Kingdom! Where else should we be wending? It may be, fellow-travellers, that our journey has been long and devious. It may be that on the wide ocean of thought Euroclydon has caught us and driven us for many days without sun or stars. But hope is strong within me. There lies the land, and we shall reach it—some clinging to the battered hull, some on the wreckage of their own ideals, some even on fragments of their former faith. For these, for those, and for us all there remains one hiding-place from the wind, one covert from the tempest:

DOMINUS IN REFUGIUM, 'The Lord shall be for a refuge.'