

15/8/86

CLARENDON HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
FOUNDERS' DAY SERVICE, 15 AUGUST 1986

MISS STUART-WATSON AND STAFF, MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE, PUPILS OF THE SCHOOL, PARENTS AND WELL-WISHERS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS A SINGULAR PRIVILEGE FOR MY WIFE AND ME TO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO SHARE YOUR FOUNDERS' DAY CELEBRATIONS THIS MORNING. OVER THE YEARS RHODES UNIVERSITY AND THE CLARENDON HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS HAVE ENJOYED THE CLOSEST AND MOST CORDIAL OF RELATIONSHIPS. FOR INSTANCE, THERE ARE AT PRESENT NO FEWER THAN SIXTY-FOUR FORMER PUPILS OF THE SCHOOL REGISTERED AS STUDENTS AT RHODES. THIS NUMBER, WHICH HAS RISEN STEADILY AND GRATIFYINGLY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, IS NOW EXCEEDED BY ONLY ONE OTHER SCHOOL, YOUR BROTHER INSTITUTION SELBORNE COLLEGE ACCROSS OXFORD

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STREET. OUR RELATIONSHIP IS, I AM CERTAIN, NOT A ONE-WAY STREET, FOR SOME OF YOUR STAFF, ALTHOUGH WITH BECOMING MODESTY THEY DO NOT REVEAL THEIR UNIVERSITY AFFILIATIONS IN YOUR SCHOOL MAGAZINE, MUST SURELY HAVE EARNED A QUALIFICATION FROM RHODES.

THERE ARE OTHER SIMILARITIES WORTHY OF MENTION. WE CAN BOTH LAY CLAIM TO BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDS OF PLEASING APPEARANCE AND DISTINCTION, IN WHICH WE CAN, AND DO, TAKE A PROPER PRIDE. IN AGE RHODES MUST AWARD THE PALM TO CLARENDON, BUT ONLY BY ONE YEAR. FURTHERMORE, BOTH INSTITUTIONS ARE NAMED AFTER INDIVIDUALS OF GREAT DISTINCTION IN THE PUBLIC LIFE OF OUR COUNTRY. AS THE ILL-STARRED MALVOLIO INFORMS US IN TWELFTH NIGHT "SOME MEN ARE BORN GREAT, SOME ACHIEVE GREATNESS, AND SOME HAVE GREATNESS THRUST UPON THEM". THE EARL OF CLARENDON MAY WELL HAVE HAD THE GENETIC ADVANTAGE, WHILE CECIL JOHN RHODES HAD TO TRAVEL A MORE

ARDUOUS ROUTE. IN ANY EVENT, A SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY IS FORTUNATE INDEED TO HAVE A PERSONAL RATHER THAN A GEOGRAPHIC APPELLATION, SINCE IT PERFORCE BRINGS CONSTANTLY INTO FOCUS THAT INDIVIDUALS, EVEN IN TO-DAY'S COLLECTIVIST OR MONOPOLISTIC WORLD, STILL DO MATTER, AND THAT THEY CAN INFLUENCE EVENTS. IN SOME PARTS OF THE WORLD SCHOOLS DO NOT EVEN HAVE NAMES AT ALL, ONLY NUMBERS. IMAGINE TRYING TO ENCOURAGE YOUR SWIMMING OR HOCKEY TEAM BY NUMBER!

THIS QUESTION OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE GROUP, OR GROUPS, TO WHICH HE OR SHE BELONGS AND OWES ALLEGIANCE, BE IT FAMILY, HOUSE, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY OR COUNTRY, IS A COMPLEX AND IMPORTANT ONE, AND WORTHY OF CAREFUL THOUGHT. INDIVIDUALS CAN EASILY BECOME SELF-SEEKING, AND OVERWEENINGLY AMBITIOUS OR ARROGANT. SHAKESPEARE,

IF ONE MAY APPEAL TO HIM A SECOND TIME, ON THIS OCCASION FROM MACBETH, PUTS IT SO SUCCINCTLY:

"... MAN, PROUD MAN,
DREST IN A LITTLE BRIEF AUTHORITY,
MOST IGNORANT OF WHAT HE'S MOST ASSURED,
HIS GLASSY ESSENCE, LIKE AN ANGRY APE,
PLAYS SUCH FANTASTIC TRICKS BEFORE HIGH HEAVEN,
AS MAKE THE ANGELS WEEP".

TO GUARD AGAINST THIS DANGER, IT IS CLEAR, YOU CELEBRATE ANNUALLY A FOUNDERS', AS DISTINCT FROM A PRIZE-GIVING DAY. YOUR HOUSE SYSTEM, TOO, I HAVE READ, IS STRUCTURED TO EMPHASISE THE CONTRIBUTION OF EACH GIRL, AND NOT JUST THE ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC STARS, TO THE SUCCESS OF

HER HOUSE. THESE ASPECTS OF YOUR SCHOOL LIFE ARE ABSOLUTELY PRAISE-WORTHY. THEY EMPHASISE INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT STILL, BUT WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF THE GOOD OF THE GROUP RATHER THAN THE ADULATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL. THERE ARE SOCIETIES, HOWEVER, IN WHICH THE CONCEPT OF GROUP SOLIDARITY CAN BE OVEREMPHASISED, AND OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT SUBTLY, IN SOME CASES NOT SO SUBTLY, DISCOURAGED. THE GOAL IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES IS TO MAKE A MODEST, BUT NOT AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION. THIS DENIGRATION OF EXCEPTIONAL PERSONAL SUCCESS CARRIES THE DANGER OF STAGNATION AND ULTIMATE DECAY. NO SOCIETY CAN REMAIN ABSOLUTELY STATIC: IT IS EITHER RETROGRESSING OR ADVANCING. AN ADVANCING SOCIETY DEPENDS CRITICALLY ON ITS TOP-RANK ACHIEVERS.

A CAREFUL BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALITY AND GROUP LOYALTY, A BALANCE BY NO MEANS EASY TO ACHIEVE OR MAINTAIN, IS THUS CALLED FOR. IN

DIFFERENT PERIODS OF HISTORY, AND IN DIFFERENT SOCIETIES, THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG, SOMETIMES IN THE DIRECTION OF EXCESSIVE EMPHASIS ON THE INDIVIDUAL, WHILE AT OTHER TIMES THE AUTHORITY OF THE GROUP, AND THE OBLIGATION TO CONFORM TO ITS NORMS, HAVE BEEN OVERSTRESSED. IN THE FIRST CASE CREATIVITY AND THE RAPID ADVANCE OF KNOWLEDGE ARE THE POSITIVE FRUITS. ON THE DEBIT SIDE, MISUSE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM CAN DEGENERATE INTO LICENCE, LEADING EVENTUALLY TO ANARCHY AND A LACK OF RESISTANCE TO MALIGN OUTSIDE INFLUENCES. IN THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE, SERENITY AND ORDER CAN PREVAIL, BUT THIS CAN, UNFORTUNATELY LAPSE INTO AUTHORITARIAN CONFORMITY AND STERILITY.

IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, WE MUST ACCORD PRIORITY OF IMPORTANCE TO THE INDIVIDUAL. THE INDIVIDUAL HAS A DIGNITY, A REALITY AND A SIGNIFICANCE THAT NO SOCIETY CAN CLAIM. THE INDIVIDUAL ANTEDATES ANY

SOCIETY. IF WE GO BACK TO THE CREATION STORY IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS WE READ "AND GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD CREATED HE HIM; MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM". THEN A LITTLE LATER IN THE SAME CHAPTER WE ARE TOLD "AND GOD SAW EVERYTHING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND, BEHOLD IT WAS VERY GOOD". HEREIN LIES MAN'S GREAT DIGNITY AND ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE, A DIGNITY AND SIGNIFICANCE TRANSCENDING THAT OF ANY HUMAN SOCIETY OR GROUP. HUMAN SOCIETIES RISE AND FALL, AND ARE DESTINED TO PASS AWAY. THEY ARE PART OF HISTORY. ONLY THE INDIVIDUAL HUMAN PERSON, NOT ANY SOCIETY, HAS AN ETERNAL DESTINY.

HOWEVER, WE DO NOT HAVE TO PROCEED MUCH FURTHER IN GENESIS, INDEED ONLY TO THE NEXT CHAPTER, TO NOTE "AND GOD SAID, IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE ALONE". THEREAFTER FOLLOWS THE ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION OF

EVE, AND ALL THE COMPLICATIONS THAT THAT INTRODUCED! THE POINT, NONETHELESS, IS THAT MAN HAS TO BE A PART OF A SOCIETY, HE IS A SOCIETAL BEING, AND HE CANNOT LIVE ALONE. HE HAS TO TAKE THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF OTHER PEOPLE INTO ACCOUNT. SOCIETY IS MADE UP OF THE INDIVIDUALS COMPRISING IT. IT EXISTS FOR THEIR SAKE, AND NOT VICE VERSA. OVER AND ABOVE THE INDIVIDUALS MAKING IT UP THE SOCIETY, ANY SOCIETY, IS SOMETHING OF AN ABSTRACTION, IF WE COMPARE IT WITH THE REALITY OF ITS MEMBERS. THE LAW ITSELF RECOGNISES THIS EXPLICITLY. COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS ARE LEGAL PERSONAE: ONLY YOU AND I ARE REAL PERSONAE.

TAKE YOUR SCHOOL AS AN EXAMPLE OF A SOCIETY. THE SCHOOL EXISTS TO SERVE YOU, THE PUPILS. IF THERE WERE NO NEED TO EDUCATE YOU, THERE WOULD BE NO IMPRESSIVE BUILDINGS OR PLAYING FIELDS HERE, AND NO STAFF

WOULD BE EMPLOYED. IN SHORT, THERE WOULD BE NO SCHOOL. BY WHAT AT FIRST SIGHT WOULD SEEM TO BE SOMETHING OF A PARADOX, THE SCHOOL CANNOT COMPLETELY FULFIL ITS FUNCTION OF EDUCATING YOU PROPERLY IN AN INTEGRATED SENSE - PHYSICALLY, ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY AND MORALLY - UNLESS YOU IN YOUR TURN WHOLEHEARTEDLY SERVE THE SCHOOL. TO BE SURE, YOUR HEAD COULD BE FILLED WITH A MORE OR LESS USEFUL COMPENDIUM OF FACTS, WITHOUT MUCH SERVICE COMMITMENT FROM YOU. THAT WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, BE EDUCATION, BUT ONLY A HOLLOW PARODY. ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FELLOWSHIP, MUTUAL CONCERN, GROWTH AS A PERSON AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE BEGINNINGS OF A REAL CULTURE, WHICH THE EXTRACURRICULAR SOCIETY, HOUSE AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES PROVIDE, WILL NOT BEAR FRUIT, UNLESS YOU, THE INDIVIDUAL PUPIL, SACRIFICE YOUR NATURAL PROCLIVITIES TOWARDS LAZINESS, HALFHEARTEDNESS AND LACK OF CONCERN. THE PARADOX IS RESOLVED WHEN WE REALISE WHAT THE

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INDIVIDUAL SACRIFICES TO SERVE THE SCHOOL IS THE FINITE, NEGATIVE, DARKER SIDE OF HER NATURE. THE LABOUR IS RETURNED A HUNDREDFOLD IN THE GROWTH WHICH YOU ACHIEVE, DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO YOUR EFFORT, AS A BEING MORE WORTHY OF YOUR DIGNITY AS AN IMAGE OF GOD.

IN THE COMPLICATED AND POPULOUS WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE THE PROBLEMS AND ISSUES SEEMS SO OVERWHELMING THAT WE OFTEN DESPAIR OF ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING WORTHWHILE AS AN INDIVIDUAL. PERHAPS PRIME MINISTERS AND PRESIDENTS CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BUT ONE CAN SOMETIMES BE FORGIVEN FOR BEING TEMPTED TO WONDER IF THEY REALLY DO. TO A LOWLY GIRL IN STANDARD SIX NO DOUBT THE HEAD GIRL OR THE HEADMISTRESS ARE AWESOME PERSONAGES, BUT HER PERCEPTION IS NOT MUCH AT VARIANCE WITH THAT OF THE ORDINARY CITIZEN CONTEMPLATING THE GREAT AND THE GOOD OF THE LAND. BOTH CITIZEN AND SCHOOLGIRL MAY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT

THAT THEIR EFFORTS DO COUNT. YET WAS IT NOT THE ORDINARY SHEPHERD BOY, DAVID, WHO SLEW GOLIATH?

IT IS IN FACT DIFFICULT TO DISCOVER ANY SIGNIFICANT AND WORTHWHILE HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT OR ADVANCE THAT IS NOT ULTIMATELY TRACEABLE TO THE INSPIRATION OR PERSISTENCE OF ONE PERSON. TAKE THE ARTS AS AN OBVIOUS EXAMPLE. I KNOW OF NO PAINTING, SCULPTURE OR SERIOUS MUSICAL COMPOSITION THAT OWES ITS ORIGIN TO MORE THAN ONE INDIVIDUAL. THE SAME IS GENERALLY TRUE OF WRITING, ARCHITECTURE OR DESIGN. ONE OF OUR STANDING JOKES DRIVES THE POINT HOME: A CAMEL IS A HORSE DESIGNED BY A COMMITTEE! THESE CREATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS, IT COULD BE AGREED, ARE BEYOND THE SCOPE OF ALL BUT THE MOST GIFTED INDIVIDUALS. THAT MAY WELL BE, BUT THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS DUE PRIMARILY TO PERSISTENCE RATHER THAN EXCEPTIONAL TALENT ARE SURELY NOT BEYOND THE GRASP OF EVEN THE MOST

ORDINARY OF US, PROVIDED WE DO NOT LOSE HEART. IT MUST HAVE TAKEN DAVID MANY WEARY HOURS OF PERSISTENCE TO HAVE ACQUIRED HIS UNPARALLELED SKILL WITH THE SLING. FORTUNATELY FOR THE HUMAN RACE THERE ARE STILL OUTSTANDING CHAMPIONS WITH US TODAY, WHOSE INITIAL ADVANTAGES WERE PROBABLY NO GREATER THAN MANY IN THIS ASSEMBLY, THOSE IN STANDARD SIX NOT EXCEPTED. MANY EXAMPLES CAN BE CITED : I OFFER YOU TWO.

CONSIDER IN THE FIRST INSTANCE THE PERSON WHOM THE WORLD HAS COME TO KNOW AND LOVE AS MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA. OF ALBANIAN BIRTH SHE BECAME A HUMBLE NUN IN INDIA. FACED WITH THE SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE LEVEL OF HUMAN MISERY IN THAT TEEMING LAND OF HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS, EVEN THE MOST ABLE AND TALENTED, BACKED BY HUGE RESOURCES, WOULD BE IN DESPAIR. YET THIS UNKNOWN MEMBER OF AN OBSCURE RELIGIOUS ORDER DID

NOT FLINCH. SHE DIRECTED HER ATTENTION TO ONE APPARENTLY QUIXOTIC SERVICE TO THE MOST DESPISED AND FORGOTTEN, THOSE THOUSANDS WHO ARE BORN, LIVE AND DIE ON THE STREETS OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST CROWDED AND DESTITUTE CITIES. SHE CONCENTRATED ON PROVIDING THE HOPELESS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DIE IN DIGNITY. WITH HER INCANDESCENT CHARITY AS HER ONLY RESOURCE SHE HAS SUCCEEDED IN IGNITING A RAY OF HOPE THAT HAS ENCIRCLED THE GLOBE.

A VERY DIFFERENT EXAMPLE IS MARGARET THATCHER. SHE WAS BORN THE DAUGHTER OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD GROCER, WHOSE FAMILY LIVED ABOVE THE STORE IN GRANTHAM, LINCOLNSHIRE. THE SCHOOL SHE ATTENDED WAS IN ALL LIKELIHOOD COMPARABLE TO CLARENDON. IT CERTAINLY INSPIRED HER TO GIVE OF HER BEST, AS MANY OF YOU MUST FEEL ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL, SO MUCH SO

THAT SHE WON A SCHOLARSHIP TO OXFORD, AND WENT ON, AS WE ALL KNOW, TO BECOME GREAT BRITAIN'S FIRST WOMAN PRIME MINISTER, PROBABLY HAVING MORE IMPACT ON ITS POLITICS THAN ANY OTHER THIS CENTURY WITH THE OBVIOUS EXCEPTION OF THE INCOMPARABLE WINSTON CHURCHILL. NOT EVERYBODY UNRESERVEDLY ADMIRES HER POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, BUT HER COURAGE AND STEELY DETERMINATION PLACE HER IN A CLASS OF HER OWN. EQUALLY UNDAUNTED BY SURLY OPPOSITION BACKBENCHERS, INTRANSIGENT MINERS, COMMONWEALTH OR EEC PEERS, SHE PURSUES HER OBJECTIVES WITH SINGLEMINDED CONVICTION. PRESIDENT REAGAN ONCE COMPLIMENTED HER, IN TERMS GUARANTEED TO RAISE THE HACKLES OF EVERY FEMINIST IN THE WORLD, AS "THE BEST MAN IN ENGLAND".

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE FARFETCHED TO IMAGINE THAT THERE IS A FUTURE MOTHER TERESA OR PRIME MINISTER THATCHER IN OUR MIDST TODAY. PERHAPS NOT. ALL OF YOU, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, ARE CAPABLE OF MAKING A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION TO YOUR SCHOOL, THEREBY GAINING SOME EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING TO PLAY YOUR PART IN OVERCOMING THE PROBLEMS OF OUR STRIFE-TORN COUNTRY. WE IN SOUTH AFRICA ARE OBSESSED WITH OUR ATTACHMENT TO GROUPS. WE SEE OURSELVES AS ENGLISH SPEAKERS, AFRIKANERS, BLACK, WHITE, COLOURED OR INDIAN. WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO VIEW OUR GROUP RIGHTS, OR LACK OF THEM, AS TRANSCENDING OUR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, OR LACK OF THEM. SOME WOULD DEIFY THE VOLK, WHILE OTHERS, IN AN OBVIOUS REACTION, WOULD DEIFY A ONE-PARTY, MAJORITARIAN STATE. WE ARE ALL, TO A GREATER OR LESS EXTENT, GUILTY OF WORSHIPPING IDEALISED, I ALMOST SAID IDOLISED, ABSTRACTIONS, INSTEAD OF WORSHIPPING GOD. THE VOLK, THE NATION OR THE

STATE SIMPLY CANNOT BEAR THE IDEOLOGICAL WEIGHT WITH WHICH WE WOULD INVEST IT. WE MUST RETURN TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON, AND THE DIGNITY WITH WHICH HE IS INVESTED, BY VIRTUE OF HIS STATUS AS AN IMAGE OF GOD. WE CAN ALL, HOWEVER YOUNG OR OLD, MAKE A SMALL, BUT YET SIGNIFICANT DAILY CONTRIBUTION IN THIS REGARD BY TREATING EVERY INDIVIDUAL, REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH THE COURTESY AND CONSIDERATION WHICH HIS OR HER EXALTED STATUS AS A HUMAN BEING DESERVES. WHO KNOWS, IN A SURPRISINGLY SHORT WHILE WE MIGHT FIND THE PROSPECT OF SHARING OUR DESTINY, OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD, EVEN OUR SCHOOL, WITH ALL THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA TO BE NOT QUITE THE DAUNTING PROSPECT WE ONCE IMAGINED.

WE ARE EXPERIENCING HARD TIMES. HARD TIMES UNDOUBTEDLY LIE AHEAD. EVERY GIRL AT CLARENDON CAN BE THANKFUL FOR THE EXCEPTIONAL

PREPARATION WHICH SHE HAS RECEIVED, BOTH FROM HER FAMILY AND FROM THE SCHOOL, TO MEET AND SURMOUNT THE DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS WHICH SHE WILL EXPERIENCE. YOUR PARENTS AND YOUR TEACHERS CAN LOOK FOR NO GREATER RECOMPENSE FOR THIS LABOUR AND CONCERN, THAN THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER CEASE TO GIVE OF YOUR BEST NOR YIELD TO DESPAIR OR INDIFFERENCE. I AM CONFIDENT THAT YOU WILL NOT FAIL THEM.

D S HENDERSON

RHODES UNIVERSITY