

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

The Consecration of the Reverend George Augustus Selwyn to the Bishopric of New Zealand

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From the Anglican Archives of The College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland

The following account of Selwyn's consecration was deposited in the St. John's College Library in 1991.

(Reference: Kin 017).

It was purchased by the Venerable R. R. Clark from St. Augustine's College, Canterbury, when their archives were dispersed.

The handwritten document appears to be a copy of an original written by Edward Coleridge.

Coleridge was a close friend and admirer of Selwyn,

'who as he once confessed to Gladstone, was prepared to be thought 'an incorrigible Mendicant and Pickpocket' for his audacity in keeping Selwyn's financial needs before what would now be called the old boy network.'¹

As well as raising funds for St. John's College in New Zealand, 'Coleridge played a leading role in helping found St Augustine's College in Canterbury in 1848 'for the one purpose of sending out suitable clergy to the Colonial Church.'²

Edward Coleridge's Account of the Consecration of the Reverend G. A. Selwyn M.A. to the Bishopric of New Zealand

'On Sunday morning, October 17th, 1841, the day appointed by the Church for the Consecration of my dear friend George Selwyn, to the Episcopal Office, I went with my two Pupils, Allies and Balston, to Lambeth, that I might witness that deeply important and interesting ceremony. On our arrival at the door of the Chapel, we found others of his dear and valued friends, already come together with one mind to the same place. Among them I noticed all the Cotton family, W. Gladstone and wife, all the Bishop's own family, R. Copleston, E. Hawkins, C. Dalton, J. Hope, Badeley and many others.'³

We were soon led to our appointed seats in the Chapel, where we remained some twenty minutes in sad and serious meditation on that event - which in the order of God's providence,

would soon take from our eyes the object of our love and reverence.

To me it was a painful time of waiting, for I could not help feeling that we ought to have been thousands, instead of tens, gathered together as with one consent in St Paul's or Westminster Abbey, to witness the sending out by the Church of the first Bishop of her own appointment;⁴ and not as we were a few persons 'in an upper Chamber' as if we were afraid or ashamed of that good deed, which we came to sanction with our presence and our prayers.⁵ Then too there were three or four powdered officials, in court dresses and swords, strutting about, and doing all they could (though quite unconsciously) to dissipate whatever influence so poor a substitute for a Cathedral might have upon one's feelings and thoughts: and all this sacrifice of every proper

attempt to give outward effect to such a ceremony was and has been on many former occasions owing to a fear, that too many persons might be present, to suit the convenience of Mrs. Howley and her cold collation. ⁶ To such an extent has this system of private consecrations been carried, that it is an actual fact, that my own cousin, the present Bishop of Barbados ⁷ was admitted to that sacred Order of which he has since proved himself under God so worthy, in the presence of I believe only Judge Patteson, ⁸ besides the necessary attendants. I feel that such a practice cannot last much longer; the feeling of the Church will become too strong, and her cry of indignation so loud, that it will pierce even the walls of Addington and rouse the Archbishop from his slumber.⁹ His Grace will not, I trust and hope, go on paying fines to be allowed to violate the Law, and do in Lambeth Chapel what he ought to do in Canterbury Cathedral.¹⁰

To proceed however, at 11 o'clock the Archbishop, Bishops of London, Lincoln and Barbados,¹¹ Dr Nichol and our dear friend Selwyn entered; the latter dressed in a Master of Arts gown and cassock, and looking, as he always does, but more especially when occupied in any Church duty, simple and full of thought. He sat on the left side, near the altar rails, as being near the vestry, and convenient for the part he was to fill. His Mother, sister, wife, Miss E. Hobhouse and Caroline Palmer were in a seat upstairs looking down on the Altar.¹² The morning service was performed by Dr. Mill and Mr. Harrison. The sound of the responses warmed one's spirit; uttered as they were by about 80 co-operative hearts, they sounded as if they really would reach God's ears, and they in some degree realised to my mind, what I had read in Basil and Chrysostom's writings about the thunder-like tone of primitive congregations when they would fall to prayer, and cry aloud 'Let us pray. Let us pray more earnestly.'

The sermon was preached by the Bishop of Barbados from 1. Timothy: 5.10th verse in a very

feeling manner, and as if he had himself learned by long experience the perfect truth of every word he uttered. I thought that part of it, in which he spoke of the occasional 'loneliness' of a missionary, and the comforting assurance then of the presence of Living God with him, was very touching. It seemed as if he was recalling what his own heart had felt and experienced. Full also of friendship and truth was his concluding prayer for our dear friend, although perhaps somewhat too long, and from its length almost harrowing. I, in common with most of those present, was much overcome and Selwyn himself, though I could see by his face, that he was deeply affected, yet showed no outward mark of feeling visible to the eye of one who did not know him well. He was doubtless occupied in inward prayer for support; and that enabled him to keep his natural emotions under just control, just as I have seen him more than once by the bedside of a dying friend, feeling most acutely yet acting, as if he had no difficulty in keeping down the swellings and uprisings of his heart within him.

The moment now came, in which his own particular part in the service was to begin. He was led up to the Altar by the Bishops of Lincoln and Barbados and by them presented to the Archbishop, sitting in his chair. He was at this time vested in his Rochet, a sort of white lawn cassock and his appearance was such as simultaneously to remind many present of the pictures of the early Martyrs in old Fox's book. He took the prescribed oaths and answered the Archbishop's questions with great simplicity and deep feeling. I am sure all present must have been touched by the devout sanctity of his whole bearing and manner, and the profound sincerity, with which he replied to the searching interrogatories, laying as he did such a stress on the latter words of each answer, as to show where he placed his trust. I shall not easily forget the tone in which he uttered those short expressions. 'The Lord being my helper,' and 'I will so be by the help of GOD.' After the

Archbishop's acceptance of him, and prayer for him, he returned for a minute or two to the vestry; where returning in the full episcopal attire he knelt down again and 'Veni Creator' having been said over him, the Bishops all laid their hands on his head, and the Archbishop uttered the solemn words of Consecration, and afterwards delivered the Bible into his hands. He then rose from his knees, and went within the rails, taking his seat by the side of the Bishops of Lincoln and Barbados. We, about 50 of us (all males, for no females, no not even the Bishop's own family, were permitted to participate), then received the Lord's Supper, the Archbishop and Bishop of London officiating.¹³ I was much overcome during the whole service by feelings, which God will, I hope and believe, forgive; but not so much as to prevent my thoroughly attending to and sharing in every part of it.

When the Epistle was read by the Bishop of Barbados from 1 Tim. 3.1., I applied each requisite for the perfect idea of a Christian Bishop therein laid down to our dear friend's character, and with single exception of a few instances of brief impatience. I found him to come up exactly to St Paul's standard; and it is now, on calmer consideration, my deep and inward conviction, that he does. For in him almost more, than in anyone else I have ever known, are combined largeness of mind and heart, with clearness of speech and inflexibility of purpose, and all these operating under the overruling guidance of Charity in the most comprehensive and Christian sense of that

essentially Christian word. During his examination, and at the moment, when he was admitted within the altar rails, I looked attentively at the Archbishop, and I thought I could read in his countenance as clearly as if he had said it in so many words, a full sense and acknowledgement of the nobleness of the single-hearted man, that stood before him. Of one thing I am quite sure that, if he did not so think and feel, we all of us did.

Oh! may the GOD of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, go up with him, as with Moses of old, into the land, whither he is called, and may every blessing, for which the most devoted heart can conceive or utter a prayer, be showered down on him and his, by the Giver of all good gifts; may the mountains be made low, and the rough places plain before the feet of him, when preaching the Gospel of Peace to the benighted heathens; may he find 'bread from heaven' in the pathless wilderness, when his earthly needs are most pressing and may a stream of living water follow his life through many a day and sandy plain, to refresh his fainting heart and add new vigour to his life. May his ministry be eminently successful, so that even in his lifetime he may 'see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.' May he live in Peace and depart in the Lord, and in the world of Spirits may he be among those Saints, to whom white robes will be given, until after the final Judgement he shall be called to sit down for ever at the supper of the Lamb.

Amen and Amen.'

Endnotes

¹ W.E. Limbrick, ed., *Bishop Selwyn in New Zealand 1842-1869*, Palmerston North, 1983, p. 14.

² A.K. Davidson, "Colonial Christianity: The Contribution of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Anglican Church in New Zealand 1840-80", *The Journal of Religious History*, December 1990, p.179.

³ The Rev. William Cotton accompanied Selwyn to New Zealand. W.E. Gladstone was a student at Eton with Selwyn and a lifelong friend. Ernest Hawkins was Secretary of the Colonial Bishopricks Fund and also

of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts 1843-64, which gave considerable support to Selwyn.

⁴ Selwyn was the first bishop appointed under the Colonial Bishoprics Fund. The initiative for this came from C.J. Blomfield, Bishop of London, who “was concerned that ‘every band of settlers, which goes forth from Christian England, with authority to occupy a distinct territory, and to form a separate community’, should ‘take with it not only its civil rulers and functionaries, but its bishops and clergy’.” Davidson, “Colonial Christianity”, p. 175.

⁵ Tucker notes that “in 1841 it was considered to be impossible to use the Abbey or S. Paul’s, and of his [Selwyn’s] numerous friends many were unable to gain admission: as it was, the chapel was crowded to a degree never remembered on a similar occasion”. H.W. Tucker, *Memoir of the Life of and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn, D.D. Bishop of New Zealand, 1841-1869*, London, 1879, vol. p.74.

⁶ Mrs Howley’s husband, William, was Archbishop of Canterbury 1827-48.

⁷ W.H. Coleridge, Bishop of Barbados 1824-41

⁸ Sir John Patteson was a judge of the Queen’s bench and father of J.C. Patteson who worked with Selwyn in Melanesia and became first Missionary Bishop of Melanesia

⁹ Addington Park was the Archbishop of Canterbury’s country house.

¹⁰ Coleridge is criticising here the way in which the first bishops for colonial sees were consecrated almost in secret at private services in Lambeth Palace Chapel. After 1847 they “were attended by great congregations and with considerable publicity in Westminster Abbey.” K. Rayner, “The Home Base of the Missions of the Church of England 1830-40”, *The Journal of Religious History*, June, 1962, p.41.

¹¹ W. Howley, Archbishop; C.J. Blomfield, London; John Kaye, Lincoln; W.H. Coleridge, Barbados.

¹² These names point to the close ties of friendship that existed between George and Sarah Selwyn’s colleagues and their families in New Zealand and England. ‘Miss E. Hobhouse’ was probably the sister of Edmund Hobhouse, who at Selwyn’s invitation, became first Bishop of Nelson. Caroline Palmer was Sarah’s cousin and married Charles John Abraham. The Abrahams came out to New Zealand in 1850 and Charles was the first Bishop of Wellington 1858-70. Both Hobhouse and Abraham worked with Selwyn at Lichfield and were instrumental in founding Selwyn College at Cambridge in memory of their friend in 1882.

¹³ Tucker includes the unattributed quotation that “‘the ladies were not allowed to communicate, lest the service should be too long and fatiguing’”. (Tucker, *Life of Bishop Selwyn*, vol. 1, p.74.) Curteis, quotes from the description given by a friend of Sarah Selwyn’s, possibly Caroline Palmer: “The group of consecrating bishops is still before me: and it chanced that a gleam of sunshine fell on them and him as they stood there. Sara [sic] half hoped we might be suffered to remain where we were, and to follow the Communion Service. But a servant came to lead us down; and, declining the offer to be shown over the Palace, we found our way round to the antechapel.” G.H. Curteis, *Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand, and Lichfield*, London, Kegan Paul, 1889, pp.32-33.