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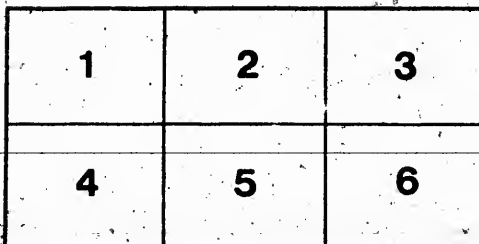
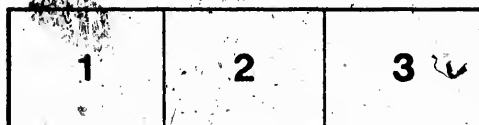
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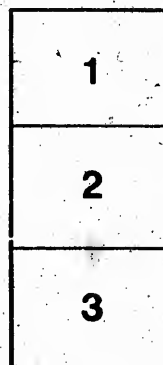
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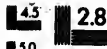
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MEMORIAL SERMON

PREACHED IN

St. James' Square Presbyterian Church,

TORONTO,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF DUNCAN
M'COLL, B.A.,

By JOHN M. KING, D.D.

(For private circulation only.)

TORONTO:

C. BLACKETT ROBINSON, PRINTER, 5 JORDAN STREET.

1882.

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A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. JAMES' SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, TORONTO,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF DUNCAN M'COLL, D.D.

“He will beautify the meek with salvation.”—Ps. cxlix. 4.

The statement of this verse in both particulars, and in the connection of the one with the other, is a striking one; at least it becomes so the moment we apprehend its proper force. “The Lord taketh pleasure in His people.” They are not simply objects of His compassion and of His care; they are also objects of His delight. He rejoices over them with joy; He rests in His love; He rejoices over them with singing. And taking pleasure in His people, the Lord adorns them. The delight which He feels in them, leads Him to array them in beauty. He not only saves the meek, He beautifies them in the act of saving them. He not only clothes them “with the garments of salvation,” He makes these to become at the same time the adornment of those who are clothed with them. “He will beautify the meek with salvation.” It is this last truth which we are to consider this evening, with the help of such light as Scripture and observation throw upon it. The Lord give us eyes to discern, and hearts to appreciate, the beauty to which it refers!

But first, who are the meek here spoken of? There is a meekness, or what, at least, frequently goes among men by that name, which is nothing more than a

pliant and facile disposition. It is a simple matter of temperament—a purely natural quality, having no connection with the person's state of heart towards God, and possessing, therefore, little or no moral value. The meekness which is so often commended in Scripture is a widely different quality. It is essentially moral; the effect, not of temperament, but of grace; a "fruit of the Spirit." It denotes the fitting attitude towards God of one who is at once dependent and sinful; who has no good but what he receives, and no claim, no right to receive any, even the smallest, save that which is accorded to him in the exercise of grace; who submits readily, therefore, to the Divine appointments, humbling himself before Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil," and making daily appeal to His mercy in the spirit, if not in the very words, of the man who "smote upon his breast" and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The grace is not only a high; it is, at least in its more marked forms, a rare attainment. It is one not easily reached. The human heart is by nature proud and rebellious, disposed to plume itself on its own fancied goodness, and to assert its own prerogatives, rather than to adore the perfect goodness and to bow before the prerogatives of the Almighty. How much must God often do to us; through what discipline of disappointment, loss, and sorrow must He put us, before the heart becomes truly humble and resigned to His will? It is surely very instructive that the primary meaning of the word translated "meek," is, "afflicted." The term employed in the passage before us means properly, suffering, depressed; as if to show that in most cases, only when God has dealt with our hard

natures in the way of judgment or chastisement, are their high thoughts and lofty imaginations brought down, and the spirit rendered entirely humble and submissive.

The meek, thus, are the humble in heart, the poor in spirit, the contrite. The statement made respecting them is, that the Lord "will beautify them with salvation." The underlying truth here is, that He will bestow on them salvation. It is one to which numerous passages bear testimony. "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "The Lord preserveth the simple;" "God saves the meek." The key of the kingdom is in the hands of the humble. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God pardons those who are penitent. He justifies those who condemn themselves. He "giveth grace to the humble." He exalts them of low degree. He visits the lowly with salvation. He works deliverance for those who, renouncing every other confidence, look only to Him. He saves those who exercise faith; but what is faith, but meekness, reclining where it has found a worthy ground of confidence!

"God saves the meek." This is the implied or underlying truth in the text. The main truth, however, which the text asserts is, that God not only saves the meek, but beautifies them in saving them; that He not only gives grace to the humble, but in giving them grace He renders them lovely and attractive; that the salvation which is of God becomes

in some way the ornament of the man on whom it is bestowed.

In seeking to estimate the constituents of the beauty of which the Psalmist speaks, one must begin with forgiveness. The process of beautifying the meek may be said to commence in pardoning their sins. All sin is deformity. It is not only a wrong against God, and an injury to the man himself who commits it; it is an evil and unsightly thing, abominable to God and to all pure beings. There is no room to speak of beauty so long as the life is chargeable therewith. In pardon, God sets the man free from it. Forgiveness is not simply release from guilt and from punishment; it is release from the sin itself, which draws after it guilt and which deserves punishment. The sinner is not only delivered from wrath, yea, restored to favour, he is also cleansed, His sin itself is cancelled, blotted out by Him who has the sole and exclusive power to do this. And thus the sinner forgiven is no longer a proper object of aversion. That in him which awoke repulsion has been removed. If, in the act of forgiveness, positive beauty is not imparted, at least actual defilement is taken away, and the proper and indispensable foundation laid for those graces in which the soul is to be arrayed. The more deep and spiritual our conception of what forgiveness is, the more closely shall we discover it to be allied with that beauty with which God clothes the meek.

But if forgiveness is the commencement, it is the commencement only, of that process of beautifying the meek to which the text refers. Other and more positive adornments follow. The forgiven are also sanc-

tified. "The washing of regeneration" is accompanied by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." The image of God is restored to the soul. "The new man is put on, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The believer becomes a new creature in Jesus Christ. His life is brought under the influence of new motives, is informed by a new spirit, and is marked by new and heavenly qualities. The grace of God, in bringing salvation to him, teaches him to "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world." He is made a participant of the Spirit of God, and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." The salvation that is of God carries with it such results as these, or rather, they form its very essence; and just because of this is the soul beautified in being saved, are the meek clothed with beauty in being clothed with the garments of salvation. The graces which are produced in them, patience, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity; the pure aim, the upright life, the heavenly mind, the gentle and tender heart, are not only of inestimable value, they are supremely beautiful. They at once accredit and adorn the discipleship on which they are stamped. He whose work they are does more than secure the safety of those in whom they are found. He invests them with charms, which are not the less real that they can be fully appreciated only by the spiritually-minded or the pure in heart. In other words, He beautifies the meek in the very act of saving them.

I have said nothing as yet of the sentiments which are awakened in the breasts of the saved; the sentiment of gratitude for the redemption which has been wrought,

and at so great a cost ; the peace, sometimes rising into joy, with which the soul is filled as it contemplates the perfection of the Saviour's sacrifice, the hope to which it is begotten by His resurrection from the dead, the love by which it is inspired not only to the Lord, but to all who are His. But no proper estimate can be formed of the beauty which God puts on the meek, while these are overlooked. These sentiments, indeed, so unmistakably divine in their origination and character, may be said to do for the Christian life in general what the sunlight does for the ordinary landscape, lending a new charm to rock and tree and river, glorifying its commonest features. The whole character is irradiated by their heavenly glow. Than the devotion of the saved to Him who redeemed them with His blood ; than the love they bear to those who share in this redemption ; than the peace, so deep and holy, of the soul which has come to rest beneath the cross ; than its joy, so bright, yet so free from boisterous excitement, when it gives itself to Christ's service and feels assured of His favour ; than the hope of a heaven of which He shall be the chief attraction ;—than these, human life has nothing more beautiful to show—nothing, indeed, half so beautiful. But they are, in one measure or another, the common attainments of the saved. It is once more true, then, that God beautifies the meek with salvation.

We see the work only in process of accomplishment here, even in the case of the most advanced. Heaven will first witness its completion. The salvation of the meek will be first perfected when they enter into the presence of their Lord, and with and through the perfecting of their salvation shall come the perfecting of

the beauty of their characters and persons. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." Then, first, when found in that likeness—when, having "borne the image of the earthly," they "bear the image of the heavenly"—when, having laid aside forever the sin-stained raiments of earth, they receive the vesture of heaven and join the company of the white-robed, will the words come to their full meaning, "He will beautify the meek with salvation."

It has not escaped your notice that in beautifying the meek God lends beauty to beauty. There is no incongruity here between object and embellishment such as we often see in human life, but, on the contrary, the most perfect harmony, as when God sows glittering stars in the deep, clear vault of heaven, or scatters in profusion flowers of many hues in the green meadow. The adornment, moreover, is of no external kind. It forms a part of the man. It is inseparable from his character. It seems brought out rather than put on; resembling the vesture of green with which spring clothes field and forest, rather than the snowy robe in which winter wraps all things. Even when it assumes its highest character—when what is grace here develops into glory there, it is "the glory which shall be revealed in us."

To no one who was acquainted with the deceased will it be matter of surprise that, called to speak respecting him, the thoughts of the preacher have turned to the theme which has been now discussed. Duncan McColl was deeply pious, and piety in him was pre-eminently beautiful. There was a captivating charm about it such as all confess in the smile of infancy, or

the calm, benevolent face of age. This was indeed its outstanding feature. The story of his brief life is soon told, and it may be told perhaps as appropriately here in this church with which he had so long a connection as anywhere else. He was born in the township of Westminster in 1853, of pious parents, one of whom laboured for many years and with great acceptance as a catechist in the neighbouring districts; the other is spared to mourn his loss. Having received such elementary instruction near his home as the public school could give him, he went at thirteen years of age to London, and for the next four years attended the High School of that city. He then taught for a period of one year and nine months, continuing at the same time his preparation for the University of Toronto, which he entered as a second year's student in October, 1873. At an early period in his University course his health threatened to give way. Attendance in classes was discontinued for a time, and the former and loved but exhausting work of teaching was resumed, this time in the city of Hamilton. Returning to Toronto, he completed his literary studies in the spring of 1878 with much honour, though without the distinctions which would have been readily his, had he possessed a frame capable of the strain of more continuous exertion. Entering Knox College, to the professors and students of which he was greatly endeared, and discharging with marked fidelity and success the duties of classical tutor in the institution for the last two sessions of his course, he completed his theological studies in the spring of 1881, and left the city in a state of health which excited the alarm of his friends, and which he himself knew to be ex-

tremely threatening. By the advice of physicians, he went in July to Wyoming and Colorado, and for a time he seemed to receive benefit from the drier and more bracing atmosphere of that country. But the benefit was only partial and temporary. He returned to Canada in the early part of January, and after nine weeks of little pain, but of daily increasing weakness, receiving throughout the attention of those to whom he was very dear, he passed peacefully away on the morning of Sabbath, the 19th of March.

Passing from the outward facts of his life, and coming to its inward character, it appears that he was one of those in whose case religious life begins in very early years. Before he was ten years of age, the books which appeal to that life and nourish it were favourites with him. Before leaving London he made public profession of his faith in Christ, under the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Scott, for whom he cherished a warm and lasting regard. In October, 1873, he joined the membership of this congregation, and, with the exception of a brief interval spent in Hamilton, he continued to be connected with it until God called him to a purer fellowship. In the earlier years he was a regular attendant on the Bible-class, and to the last of his residence in this city he was an earnest and devout worshipper. Most of the students of our Church, as you know, employ the summer months in supplying with ordinances districts which do not possess settled pastors. These months, in the case of the deceased, should probably have been kept for recreation. But the people in more than one Mission station, coming to know his worth, urged him to give them the benefit of his services. In this way he

laboured for three months with much zeal and with the very best results in London East, and on another occasion for a similar or perhaps longer period in a suburb of our city. It was his ambition, almost his passion, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ ; and as if to seize and enjoy, for however brief a period, a gratification of which death was threatening to rob him, he undertook in the month of November last to give supply to the vacant congregation of Fort Collins, in Colorado. He preached his last sermon to it on the 1st of January. A minister of our Church, the Rev. Dr. Smith, of Kingston, going there soon after he had left, bears testimony to the wonderful effect produced on a population far from impressible by that less than two months' ministry. He spoke doubtless as a dying man. His message was one the preciousness of which he felt in every fibre of his being, and he spoke it with such tenderness and winning power that the most indifferent were impressed as they had never been before. He loved life ; he had more cause than many to love it, for he had a keen appreciation of its more refined pleasures. There is no reason to think that, any more than others, he was able to accept the alternative of death without some inward conflict. This over, he bowed with entire submission to what was seen to be the will of God. Those who visited him in the last weeks of his life, if Christian, were cheered by blessed testimonies to the power of the Gospel ; if indifferent and unbelieving, were most faithfully and tenderly warned and entreated. To the relatives who had the privilege of attending on him during his illness he spoke many precious and memorable words. The promises of Scripture were

his stay and his comfort ; he dwelt on them with evident delight, repeating to the end such words as these : "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee ;" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ;" or words older still, in which the fatherly pity of God is interwoven with the fact of human frailty, and the fleetingness of man's life is made to supply the ground on which all the more strikingly are brought out the never-failing righteousness and mercy of God: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass ; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone ; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children."

The Church, it is not wrong to say, has sustained a great loss in the early removal of this promising student. To intellectual ability of a high order, cultivated as fully as his years and his tender frame would allow, he added a refined taste and most winning manners. His piety was at once intelligent and fervent. His disposition was bright, almost gay, and his face reflected easily and naturally the light which was within. His aims were noble, his conduct at once pure and transparent, and his conscience tender.

Gentle, he was not facile. Courteous and obliging to a degree in matters of mere convenience, he was firm as a rock in matters of principle. Take him altogether, he seemed one fitted by nature and by grace to fill with honour and with usefulness one of the most important spheres in the Church. In the ministry he would have won the hearts of the children and the young by his affability and sprightliness; he would have drawn to himself the weak, the suffering, the bereaved, by the tenderness and delicacy of his sympathies; he would have commanded the appreciation of the mature and of the most cultivated by the boldness and moderation and fervour of his presentations of truth; while he would have won the respect of all by the integrity and the nobleness of his life.

Still, I am very far from saying that it is all loss; that the life has been lived either to no purpose or to small purpose. If the poet could cherish and express the trust,

“That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;”

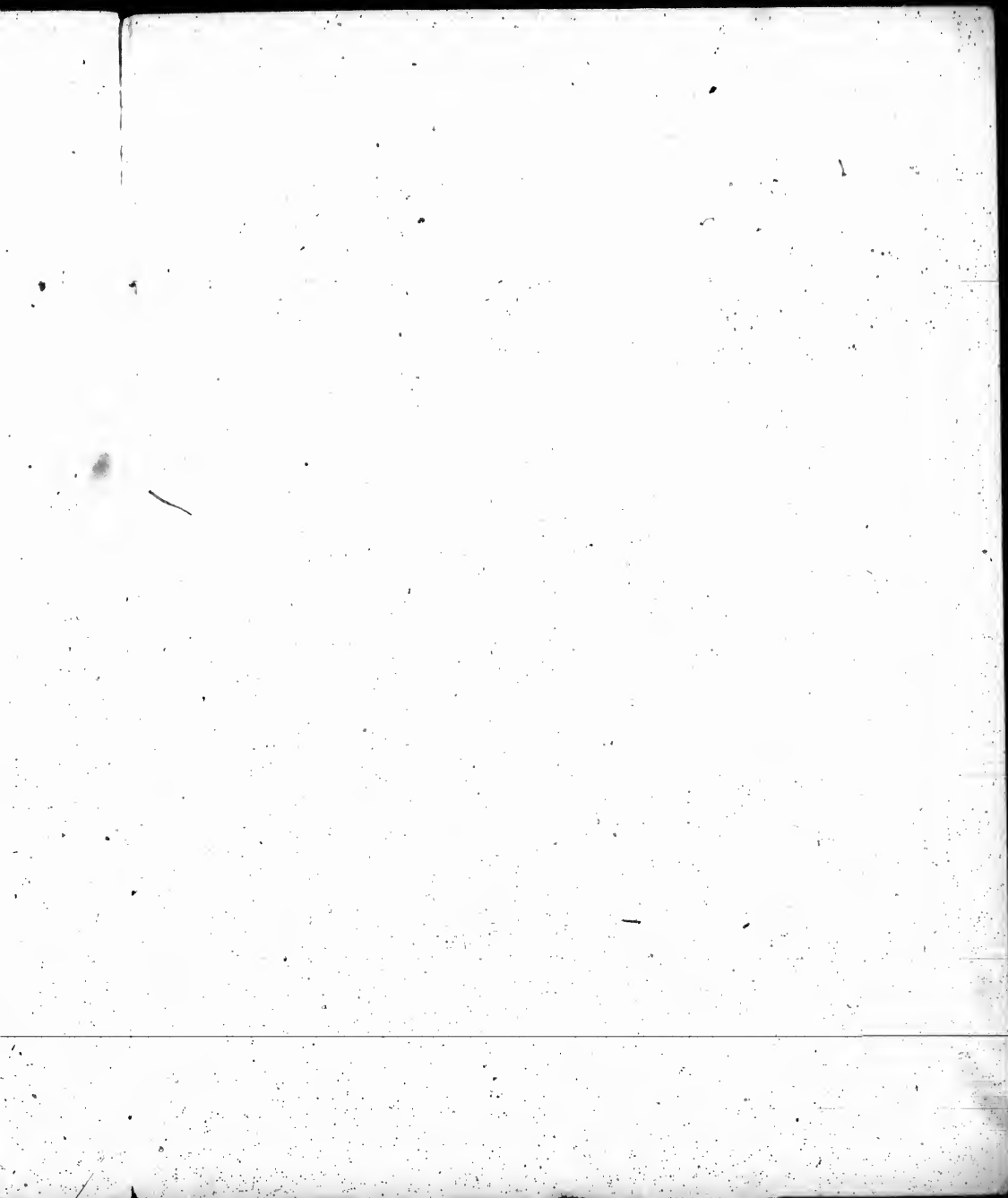
then we may confidently believe that the life which has just closed will have many both near and far-off issues of good. It is true, the departed did not preach many sermons, but then his life was a sermon to all who witnessed it. It was more; it was in a manner a poem, a picture. Such a life awakens in us the same kind of emotions which we feel when we look upon a beautiful flower, a fine painting, or some quiet but lovely scene in nature; or when we listen to a psalm or hymn, or to some grave, sweet melody; the

same kind of emotions, only far stronger and holier. We are touched and we are elevated by its blending beauty and pathos. Who can tell what a single psalm like the Twenty-third or the One Hundred and Third, or what a single hymn like "Rock of Ages," or "Sun of my Soul," or "Lead, Kindly Light," when it has been once given to the world, will do to guide, elevate and comfort mankind? As little can we estimate the gracious issues of a pure, manly, gentle Christian life, such as that which we have been contemplating. It has left not only to his relatives, but to his fellow-students, and to all of us who were privileged to witness it, a very precious memory—one which will blend easily and naturally with all our best thoughts, and which will greatly strengthen our noblest purposes—a memory which will be long cherished in the college of which he was so real if also so modest an ornament, and which in years yet distant, and in spheres remote from this, will live in the hearts of many of you who were his fellow-students, and be an inspiration to the things pure, and gentle, and lovely, and of good report.

But I must close. I probably address some who are either not at all Christian, or not decidedly so. O that I could plead with you to give yourselves now to the service of God with the same earnestness and power with which, on his death-bed, the departed pleaded with some who were careless and wayward! When a soldier falls in the front ranks, another steps forward and takes his place. Is there not one here this evening, who has hitherto counted for nothing in the battle between truth and error, between sin and goodness, prepared to enrol himself under the banner

of the Saviour? I beseech you, my hearer that art yet undecided, to be that one. Make choice here, and now, of the service which is once more seen to be so blessed. Take Him who ever liveth to be your leader, the Captain of your salvation, and then, faithful unto death, He will give thee the crown of life.

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