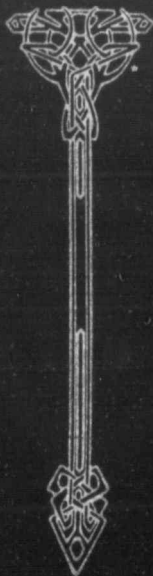


SIR JOHN THOMPSON

BY THE LATE ARCHBISHOP O'BRIEN



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FUNERAL SERMON

ON

SIR JOHN THOMPSON

BY

THE LATE MOST REV. C. O'BRIEN, D.D.,

ARCHBISHOP OF HALIFAX.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

1906

HALIFAX, CANADA:

E. P. MEAGHER, Limited.

FC 526

T6

02

AN ELEGY

BY SIR LEWIS MORRIS.

Dead at the crest, the crown,
And blossom of his fortunes, this strong son
Of our great realm sank down
Beneath the load of Honours newly won.

Windsor's Imperial Towers
Kept mournful watch above him as he lay:
His Sovereign lavished flowers
In gratitude upon his honoured clay.

Through storm and stress afar,
He crossed once more the troubled wintry wave
In that stout ship of War
By the old flag enshrouded for his grave.

Great Empire, heart and mind,
Let Britain's sons closer and closer draw,
Such lives, such deaths can bind
A firmer union than the bond of Law!

May this career sublime,
This honoured ending of an honoured life,
Bear fruit through secular time
In hearts drawn near, deep peace, averted strife!

January 3rd, 1895.



PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

THE following sermon was preached in St. Mary's Cathedral, Halifax, Nova Scotia, by the late lamented Archbishop O'Brien on the occasion of the funeral of the Rt. Hon. Sir John S. D. Thompson, Prime Minister of Canada, January 3rd, 1895. In compliance with repeated requests, it is now published for the first time in pamphlet form. The Elegy by Sir Lewis Morris, corrected from the latest edition of his works, is added with the special permission of the author. The publishers have appended the speeches on the same subject delivered in Parliament at the opening of the session of 1895, by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Foster, then as now the acknowledged orators of outstanding ability in the House of Commons of Canada.

July 1st, 1906.



S E R M O N

“ Having then conversed with you from my youth unto this day, behold here I am. Speak of me before the Lord, and before His anointed, whether I have taken any man's ox or ass : if I have wronged any man, if I have oppressed any man, if I have taken a bribe at any man's hand : and I will despise it this day, and will restore it to you. And they said : thou hast not wronged us, nor oppressed us, nor taken aught at any man's hand.” (*J. Kings, Chapter xii. : 2-3-4.*)



BEFORE the remains of the honoured dead are borne hence to their last resting place, it is meet some words should be spoken in this sacred edifice to tell of life and hope amidst the sadness and gloom that encompass us round about. It is no exaggeration to say that the great heart of Canada has been strangely moved during the past three weeks, its sympathy aroused as never before, and a sorrow deep in its sense of loss, and pathetic by reason of the noble qualities of its object, awakened. Nor have the mourning and regret been confined to our Dominion. From across the ocean, an echo of the Empire's wail has reached our shores. From far and near have come unmistakeable evidences of grief. No outward mark of respect to the memory of the departed has been omitted. From our gracious Sovereign down to the lowliest citizen, from personal friends and political opponents, an abundance of such tokens has been given. The representative of our Queen and the civil

power of our country are here to give all pomp and circumstance to his funeral. But man dies not with death, and in the midst of our mourning the solemn rites of religion, tinged though they be with a human sadness, yet have an undertone of consolation, of hope, aye of triumph! The pleading tones of the "Dies Iræ" are not the wailings of despair. They are rather the expressions of confidence in an infinite mercy. And finally, before the remains are carried forth, the exultant words which contain a promise and an assurance of victory over the grave are intoned:

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live: and everyone that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die forever." (John xi. 25-26.)

Our sorrow, then, is not as that of those who mourn without hope, for we know that our friends, though dead to the world, live before God; and, although their bodies may be left to moulder in the tomb, we ever hear the consoling words of our Saviour spoken near the little town of Bethany, "Thy brother shall rise again." Though there be hope in our sorrow, the sorrow itself is profound and universal. For an individual loss, the regret, sincere though it be, is confined within a narrow circle. When a nation mourns we may be sure that the loss is a national one. Few indeed will deny that by the death of the Right Honourable Sir John Thompson our great mother Canada has suffered an almost irremediable loss. The reason of this is found in the qualities that were based and rooted in the character of the man as he appeared in the eyes of his fellow-citizens in the discharge of the duties of his high public station. In him, as in Samuel of

old, the people recognized integrity of life and the conscientious fulfilment of onerous duties. In the words of my text he might say :

“ Having then conversed with you from my youth unto this day, behold here I am.”

He had held various trusts during his earthly career—in the City Council, in the Provincial Legislature, on the Bench, in the Department of Justice and in the Dominion Parliament. It will not be saying too much to assert that he might make the challenge to public criticism contained in those words of my text ;

“ Speak of me before the Lord and before His anointed, whether I have taken any man's ox or ass : if I have wronged any man, if I have oppressed any man, if I have taken a bribe at any man's hand.”

Canadian public life has its bitterness. Party journals do not lack a keen vision for the delinquencies of their opponents. Even now, as in the days of our Saviour, men can see the mote in their neighbour's eyes, whilst perhaps blind to the beam in their own. Public men live now more than ever in the full light that is cast around them from a hundred sources which did not exist in past ages. They cannot hide themselves behind the throne of their sovereign, or screen their character beneath the cloak of office.

Our age respects no curtains drawn before the sanctuary of the council of the King. Hence the acts of a high public official are as open to the criticism of the people as those of the village beadle. Indeed, the more exalted the station in which a man may be placed, the more fierce is the light which surrounds his actions and the more

unsparing the censure to which his conduct is subjected. What might have been hidden from the masses of the Jewish people in the days of Samuel is impossible of concealment from the public to-day. Yet were the people of this great Dominion to be called upon to answer to the challenge of the dead Premier to speak of him before the Lord and before His anointed they would be obliged to answer: "Thou hast not wronged us, nor oppressed us, nor taken aught at any man's hand." Official integrity can have no higher credentials than this, nor need it desire a more infallible vindication. It is a matter for legitimate congratulation that in the public life of this Dominion we can proudly point to a career which has summed up and embodied all the best attributes of official purity and unbending uprightness; that while vast interests were in his keeping and many subtle influences at work to render him untrue to the common weal, still no duty was neglected, no obligation to the public shirked, and the hands which had wielded almost unlimited power were found free from any wrong-doing, from oppression and from taking a bribe at the hands of any man.

A life such as that of the late Premier is not intended to be written merely in a family register, to be perused only by intimate friends: it is to adorn the annals of a nation and to be an example and an instruction to future generations. All through the history of the past, we find that the Creator spoke to His creatures not by revelation only, but also by the living example of those in whom general principles of many virtues, which might be gathered from various sources, had been harmoniously blended. The concrete action of their well-regulated lives was calculated to

exercise a greater influence over the conduct of many than abstract principles, however explicitly inculcated. Many lessons may be learned from the life of Sir John Thompson on which it is well to ponder on this day of our grief, so that we may derive therefrom the consolation of realizing that though dead he speaketh, and though removed from the scene of his earthly activity, the magic of his influence survives and is productive of good to his fellow-man.

Considered in a worldly point of view, no one will deny that his career was an unbounded success. From the modest position of an humble citizen, he rose rapidly from one height to another of public importance until finally he reached the highest office in the gift of the nation. At each successive stage of his upward course, he acquitted himself in a manner satisfactory to the public and gave a guarantee that to whatever further heights of national importance he might attain, he would be found equal to their responsibilities. But mere outward success is no criterion or measure of real greatness. This latter must be gauged rather by the manner of attainment than by the attainment itself. How, then, did the late Premier rise to the lofty eminence from which he was stricken down by the hand of death? It was not by the aid of the outward accidents of wealth and birth, much less was it by an unworthy pandering to the passions and prejudices of the people, or by the employment of cunning arts and devices by which a corrupt public man sometimes treads his way successfully to ambitious distinction. No! none of these lent him any aid in his upward course. A faithful observance of the law of labour imposed by the Creator on the human race, and from which no one

without disturbance of nature's order can exempt himself, together with intellectual gifts of a high order, strengthened and made perfect by a deep religious spirit, enabled him to hew a pathway through the difficulties of life on an ever upward plane. It is only by a combination of such forces that great results can be achieved. Some will say he was "lucky"; but to a thoughtful man what's the meaning of this trite phrase? As we are not the creatures of blind chance, but, under God, the architects of our own destiny, the word can only mean that a man is always alive to and takes advantage of his opportunities. In other words, that he puts out at good interest the talent committed to his keeping. We can therefore safely conclude that industry, sobriety, and a conscientious attention to the details of each duty were the pinions which bore him onward in a career which can only be rightly characterized as phenomenal. The manner of his success then claims our admiration and affords us a measure by which to gauge his character. It points out also to young men the one sure and honourable road to public distinction, as well as the one way of combining worldly success with personal integrity.

Eulogies of the recent dead are liable to be tinged with exaggeration, and to express the loving admiration of a friend rather than the calm judgment of an historian. But in the desire to appear cool and impartial men are at times unwittingly unjust to the departed. In the wish to be thought severely judicial, they deem it necessary to hedge their praises by restrictions and conditions, which deprive them alike of logical sequence and judicial fairness. Whilst we should guard

against exaggerated statements, we should not be afraid to draw the legitimate conclusion that flows from a consideration of the career of him whose life we may have under review. Can the word "great" be legitimately applied to Sir John Thompson in any or all of the various parts which he so honourably fulfilled? Undoubtedly some will answer "no," either through a fear of being thought wanting in judicial acumen or, perhaps, from a misconception of the constituents of greatness. What elements go to compose that special manifestation of a faculty or faculties which we call great? Many seem to imagine that greatness cannot exist in an everyday dress. Unless it is presented to them booted and spurred, they fail to recognize its face. As the vulgar confound bigness with greatness, so they make this latter synonymous with pomposity of manner and aggressive self-assertion. The ability to meet emergencies and to attain legitimately the special end in view without any apparent effort, proves the possession of resources which merits the designation of greatness. Now, it is admitted on all sides that as a lawyer Sir John Thompson was never found unable to meet the legal points, which unexpectedly arise in the conduct of a case. Some will say that he had not laid up a store of legal knowledge; he merely solved the difficulties as they successively arose. Even if that be so, it would simply prove that he lacked the time in a busy life to fill his mind with all manner of law questions, whilst it would serve to show the resourceful quality of his intellect.

As a pleader his success was so marked that his services were eagerly sought in all cases of great moment. As a judge, his summing up of cases was noted for its method

and impartiality; his decisions were ever clear and satisfactory. As a speaker on the floor of the House of Commons, he may not have had the trick of voice and gesture, which in a ruder age, and even now, among the less cultured, are supposed to constitute oratory. His speeches, nevertheless, were masterpieces of clear, logical reasoning, and attained their end, namely the conviction of all fair-minded men. They have that sincerity and that appeal to the higher nature of man, with a masterly grouping of arguments, which will ensure their immortality in the literature of our country. As an envoy of Canada, whether at Washington, at Paris, or London, he impressed all with whom he came in contact as a man of superior abilities, and one possessed of a marvellous grasp of the intricacies of every question discussed. In view of all this varied and continuous success, both at home and abroad, we are but expressing a legitimate conclusion, and not the exaggeration of funeral eulogy, by claiming for him in many things, at least, the appellation of great.

But there is another and a higher aspect of the life of the Premier, which on an occasion and in a place of this kind, is deserving of serious consideration. Splendid as were his intellectual gifts and endowments of mind, of themselves they would never have enabled him to win and to retain the esteem and admiration of so many. It was the spiritual element in his nature which developed and expanded his intellectual attainments, gave consistency to his actions, strength and vigour to his reasoning, and won the confidence of those with whom he had to deal. Material as is our

age, and set though the hearts of the multitude may be on the good things of life, still men can admire and appreciate a line of action which is moulded by a standard more noble than any to which they can dream of aspiring. The words of the book of Wisdom,—

“Love justice, you that are judges of the earth. Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in simplicity of heart,”

had sunk early and deeply into the heart of Sir John Thompson. To the justice of his dealings with all men, both as a private citizen and as a public official, we have already alluded, and the public voice fully endorses it. The way he sought the Lord in goodness and simplicity of heart is known to his friends. He recognized it to be the first duty of a Christian to follow the dictates of conscience, and to make his life an outward expression of his inward convictions. We shall not insult his memory, nor seem to think so poorly of the enlightened citizens of this Dominion, as to offer any excuse for, or vindication of the change of his religious belief, made after due deliberation, in the strength of his young manhood. He who follows conscience needs no vindication in the eyes of posterity, nor excuse before the bar of contemporary opinion. We shall merely say that his manner of life, from the date of that change until the day of his death, was that of a thoroughly practical, consistent Catholic. Both in public and in private, at all times and under all circumstances, he fulfilled with regularity and exactness, not merely the essential duties of his religion, but likewise many of those which a busy man might well be excused for thinking supererogatory. This faithful discharge of religious duties brought him into daily and close

intercourse with his Creator, detaching his mind from the love of material things, causing him to see the emptiness of worldly honour and applause, and making him realize that a good name is better than riches, and the fear of God preferable to the acquirement of unjust triumphs. How faithful he was to the practices of devotion which he deemed profitable to the soul, can be gathered in an unmistakable manner from what was found on him after death. Amongst other things were a small picture of his Saviour, a crucifix, and a set of rosary beads. Be it borne in mind that he could not have foreseen his death at Windsor Castle; consequently, even his most bitter adversary cannot accuse him of posing for the occasion. Such tokens of pious practices, of the utility of which we shall not here treat, but in which he fully believed, were ever on his person. He had gone to Windsor Castle at the command of his earthly sovereign; whilst bending his knee to her and swearing fealty to her throne with a heart filled with the spirit of true loyalty, he wore pressed to that same heart, the image of his heavenly King, both as a reminder of the homage which he owed Him, and as a consecration of the service of his soul to the Eternal King. He was to dine with his Queen, and then to remain for the night in her historic castle. He would offer to, her every sign of respectful allegiance and ready service; but when he should have retired from her presence he was prepared to salute the Queen of Heaven, and commend himself to her care by devoutly reciting the beads in her honour. Have we not here a striking example for the fulfilment of the command, "Fear God and honour the king." The thoughtless may smile at such trifles being found on a

great public man; we maintain that without them he would have been shorn of half his greatness.

This exceptionally brilliant and highly honourable career, measured by years, is a disappointment; judged by the work performed, it may be said to embrace a lengthened span, for, according to the words of Wisdom :

“Venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years; but the understanding of a man is grey hairs; and a spotless life is old age.” (Wisdom iv. 8, 9).

In this true sense, then, although taken away in his prime, Sir John Thompson filled up by his good deeds and a spotless life, more than the allotted three-score and ten. Some will say, as some have said, that had he not entered on the arena of Dominion politics he might have lived yet for many years. True; and the soldiers who lost their lives in defending their country might have lived to extreme old age had they remained in the quiet retirement of their homes, and buried their courage and their patriotism in some obscure potato-patch. But we do not live for ourselves alone; man has duties towards society, and those to whom the Creator has been lavish of his gifts have a responsibility for their right use corresponding to their measure. Sir John knew and recognized this; and though personally averse to the turmoil of public life, he sacrificed his feelings at the call of duty. Who of his friends could wish it to have been otherwise? Who of them would purchase for him a few uneventful years of life at the cost of his achievements during the past nine years? It is needless to say I am speaking in no partisan sense when I ask, Who would wish to deprive Canadian public life of the noble and

uplifting influence of his example; to have had him hide his light beneath a bushel, and thus to take from the young men of the future an example and an inspiration of honesty and patriotism, even though he might have adorned, for many years to come, the Bench of his native province? The man who could desire this is only half a Christian, and nothing of a Canadian.

I need not recount to you the tragic story of his ending. He was summoned from the presence of his earthly sovereign to that of his Eternal Lord and Master. Well was it for him that, "being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time," for only his Christian life, and not worldly honours or success, could then avail him. Men often wonder at the ways of God in taking away at an early age the just, whilst leaving the wicked. So they wondered in the days of Solomon, who explained the seeming mystery by saying, "For his soul pleased God, therefore he hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities."

If England mourned and all Canada wept at the sudden falling of his night, there are those whose agony, not only then, but now, is too sacred to be unveiled. The faithful wife, and loving children and sorrowing relatives must bear not only their full share of the public bereavement, but also a bitter personal loss, the extent of which cannot be known save by themselves alone. If words of sincere sympathy and every mark of tender and delicate respect could obliterate such sorrow from the mind, they would be even now fully comforted. From far and near such words have come. Her gracious Majesty, with true womanly feeling and solicitude, for

which all Canadians love and admire her the more, if that be possible, has testified in a most striking manner her sympathy, her admiration and her love. By her special command all the observances prescribed by his religion were carried out, and almost royal honours paid to his remains. Such marks of universal esteem, as well as words of friendly condolence, may well help to assuage, if they cannot heal, the wounds of the heart. More than this, his grieving family will find consolation in reflecting on his well spent life and simple Christian conversation. He has left to them an inheritance more precious than gold, a spotless reputation, an untarnished name and the memory of noble qualities nobly employed. Though soon to be borne from their sight, their hearts shall not be bereft of hope, for the God whom he loved and served will whisper to their souls, "Thy husband, thy father, thy brother shall arise." In this sure hope, we commit to the earth his mortal remains, and as we pray for the speedy entrance of his soul into the eternal joys of heaven, let us not forget to pray for his family, that they may be comforted and sustained; and for our country, that it may be the fruitful mother of many such sons as the late Right Honourable Sir John Thompson.

APPENDIX.

SPEECHES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON THE DEATH OF SIR JOHN THOMPSON.

THE Fifth Session of the Seventh Parliament of Canada opened on April 18th, 1895. His Excellency the Governor-General (The Earl of Aberdeen) in his speech to both houses made the following reference to the death of the Prime Minister :

"By the sudden and lamented death of the late Right Honourable Sir John Thompson, Canada has sustained a grievous loss. The deep and heartfelt sympathy expressed by Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, and the manifestations of sorrow with which the distressing intelligence was received throughout the Empire, as well as tokens of esteem and respect everywhere paid to the memory of the deceased statesman, have been gratefully appreciated by the people of Canada."

On the following day, in the course of the debate on the address in answer to His Excellency's speech, the Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister of Canada,

RIGHT HON. SIR WILFRID LAURIER,

spoke as follows :

"My friend from Simcoe (Mr. Bennett) spoke eloquently and well, and most feelingly, on the death of Sir John Thompson. I can re-echo everything he said in that respect. The death of Sir John Thompson was a most shocking one. When a man is struck by the hand of death in the fullness of his years, after a long career, after a career of great usefulness to himself and his country, there remains a feeling even above the poignancy of grief, that after all death has dealt kindly with him. Such was the death of

Sir John Macdonald. But when a man is struck down, when he has hardly reached the summit of middle life, when he has attained the full measure of his power, when his friends and his country could look to him for years of useful work, then, Sir, death carries with it a sense of inexpressible bitterness. Such was the death of Sir John Thompson. In that respect it is, perhaps, one of the saddest, perhaps altogether the saddest that our history records. In other respects I look upon it as one of the most glorious. This Canadian Minister, this colonial statesman died under the roof of the old Norman Kings, when he had just been sworn in as a member of the Privy Council of that mighty Empire, of which the old Norman kings laid the foundation, but which has reached dimensions which their wildest dreams of imagination never, I am sure, contemplated. Perhaps it is that such a death, under such circumstances, sad as it be, may be looked upon as a sacred consecration of the majestic principle of the unity of the Empire ; unity, not only of land and water, unity not only of islands and continents, but a unity of all the creeds and races embraced in that mighty Empire, giving to all while preserving their individuality, a common aim, and a common aspiration, and teaching to all the salutary lesson of tolerance and mutual forbearance. If the death of Sir John Thompson were to result in such a lesson being learned by the Canadian people, I am sure we must all agree that glorious indeed would be his death, and I am sure that for all ages, his name would be surrounded with a halo of imperishable fame."

In the course of the same debate, the Minister of Finance,

HON. GEO. E. FOSTER,

said :

Now, Sir, I have but one word more to say, and I commence that by thanking my Honourable friend for his allusions to our late lamented leader, Sir John Thompson. So hearty and so eloquent a tribute as he paid to Sir John Thompson's memory shows us, and shows us in a most pleasing manner, that whatever may be the bitterness of party and political life, whatever may be the strifes between different camps and on different sides of political questions, there is yet deep in the heart of Canadians this feeling that ever and anon there arise amongst us on one side or the other men who do not belong entirely to any party, but

who belong emphatically to their country, whom all are proud to know as Canadian citizens, and to whose worth and merits all are glad to pay tribute. And after that eloquent tribute which the Honourable gentleman has paid to the memory of Sir John Thompson, what can words of mine avail? What can any words avail in the face of that splendid exhibition of sentiment which commenced at Windsor and flashed itself out along the chords of sympathy, under sea and over land, until in the remotest part of the world, wherever British institutions are established and the British flag waves, there vibrated the plaintive lament for a great man who had lived and, alas, was now dead; a man distinguished above others in the greatest of the possessions of Great Britain, a man honoured above others in the Empire itself, a man whose life contributed great and invaluable factors to the public spirit, the development and the future greatness of both? What words can avail in the face of that tender solicitude and that unfeigned sorrow of Her Most Gracious Majesty herself, and of that significant pomp and circumstance which followed him from the scene of his tragic and sudden death, accompanied him across the sea panoplied in the symbols of Britain's might by sea and land, and never left him until, in his native city, the tender blue sky and sorrowing multitudes of friends bent over the grave in which his mortal remains were laid to rest? We may strew our flowers, we may drop our tears, we may keep the last sad vigils with the dead, and after all is done, what remains? In one sense, nothing; but in another and better sense, much remains. There remains to us his memory, instinct with loving reminiscences, pregnant with noble impulses and ideals. For, after all, when we think of it, the career of Sir John Thompson was a phenomenal career. Known and loved by his circle of intimate friends for many years before he was widely known in Canada, it may be truly said of him that he came to be known to the larger public in 1885, and the short span of ten years saw his rise and his glorious and tragic death. In 1885 he entered the Ministry. In 1886 he took first rank as a debater and statesman in this House. In the few years that passed he gained the confidence of both sides of this House, and he went from honour to honour until he became Premier of this country, in judicial matters attaining proud pre-eminence and on one of the greatest tribunals that the world ever saw, and upon a most important case—easily the peer of any who sat with him, until, at the last, under the highest honours that his Sovereign could bestow, his life went out

like the noon-day sun—shining one instant bright and glorious in mid-heavens ; in the next, hidden forever from view, with the soft effulgence of its light flooding the horizon far and near. Let us hope, that seeing now most clearly the virtues of the man who was so loved by us, and who has forever gone from us, we may emulate them, and that there may never be a decade in the history of this country when there shall not be equally strong, equally true, and equally grand and patriotic men as the late Right Honourable Sir John Thompson.

