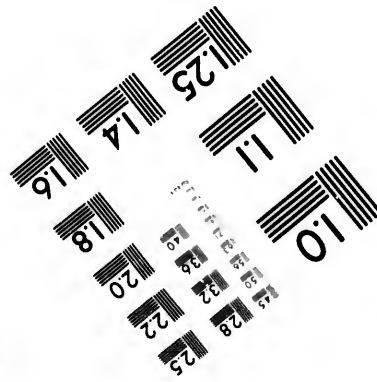
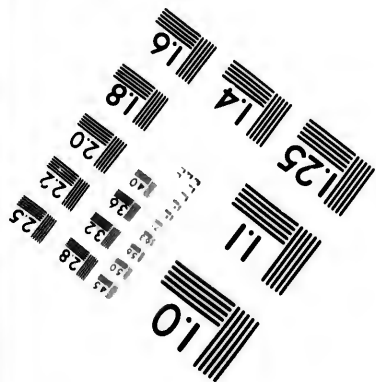
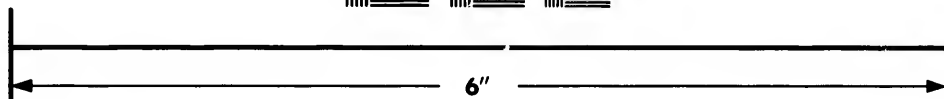
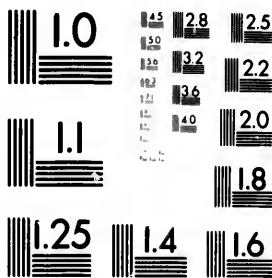


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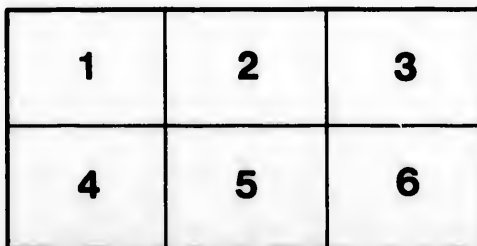
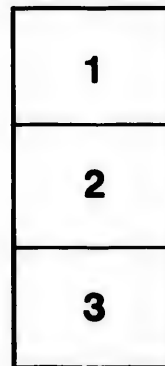
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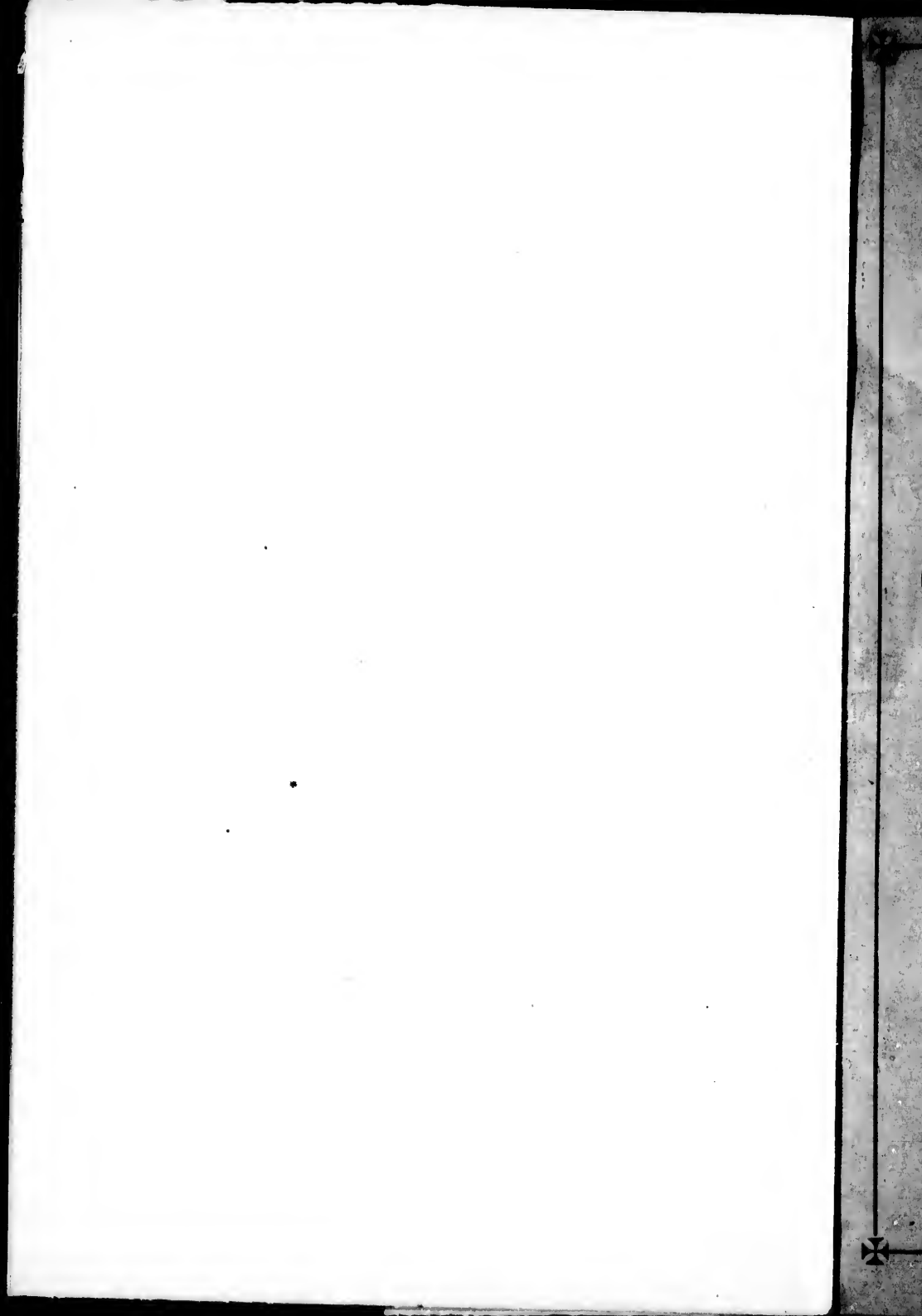
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A SERMON:

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH, FREDERICTON,

AND IN

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, ST. JOHN,

ON THE OCCASION OF

THE LATE CALAMITOUS FIRE.

BY

JOHN, BISHOP OF FREDERICTON.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Supplement

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TO

Those Kind Friends

IN FREDERICTON AND IN ST. JOHN,

WHO DESIRED THE PUBLICATION OF

This Discourse,

IT IS

DEDICATED BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND BISHOP,

JOHN FREDERICTON.

ST. JAMES' DAY, 1877.

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SERMON.

ST. LUKE XIII : 2, 3. — *“And Jesus answering said, Suppose ye that these Galilaans were sinners above all the Galilaans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”*

WHAT are the lessons, my brethren, which God intends us to learn from the great and unexpected calamity which has befallen us? The text implies that all such evils are permitted by God, but it shows a clear distinction between the Providence of God, and the agency of man. There is a disposition, at such times, to throw everything on Providence, and to forget how free is our choice of good or evil, and how largely we are dependent on the conduct of those around us. Few misfortunes are so strictly accidental, or providential, that the misconduct or the negligence of man is not, in some way, concerned with them. But while the text leads us to see how entirely we are in the hands of God, though, at the same time, our own errors are often the cause of our misfortunes, it speaks also in the interest of charity towards sufferers. It forbids us to speak of those who are the victims of great calamities as necessarily the most guilty of mankind. This would repeat the error of the friends of Job. It cautions us not to profess to know the reasons of the divine judgments, and not to connect heavy calamities with the sins of individual sufferers. For even when a special punishment was foretold by the prophets of old for some special national sin, the righteous suffered with the wicked. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel went into captivity, and lost all they possessed, together with the guilty Israelites who had neglected or mocked at their predictions. Thus, the chief caution of the passage is a warning against self-righteousness; and we are reminded that

our duty lies in doing all in our power to mitigate the evil under which others are suffering, without attempting to penetrate into the counsels of the Almighty, or to pronounce judgment, individually, on our fellow-creatures. At the same time, it is no part of Christian charity to deny the existence of crimes in a community, which may bring upon us divine chastisement; and our utter powerlessness in the presence of any great visitation, whenever God permits a particular concurrence of circumstances to arise, shows us our feeble, helpless condition in the hands of God. Men have boasted that they were entire masters of the element of fire, — so perfect their mechanical skill, so thorough their organization, that they could always stay its progress; but now, in broad daylight, they are made to feel how little their boasted skill avails them against the natural forces opposed to them, and that they lie helpless under the mighty hand of God. Our first lesson, then, is that of the deepest humility. "We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Even if we admit that we cannot carry our possessions with us, we feel confident of being able to bequeath them. But God steps in, and shows us, that not even this is always permitted. When the sense of possession is strongest; when the produce of our labour in our silver and our gold is multiplied; when our houses are enriched with costly ornaments; when banks are laden with our accumulations; when private citizens and corporations spend as if there were no end to riches, and the world lay at their feet; when men cry "Peace and safety," then "sudden destruction cometh upon them," and there is no escape. All is levelled with the ground. Then the truth of the inspired maxim is pressed home upon us, "It is certain we can carry nothing out." The solid walls, the costly furniture, the tasteful paintings, the admired plate, the jewels and gay clothing, the abundance of provision for the future, all is dust within one hour. It is as if we had never possessed it; and the very use of it seems to embitter our loss, for if it had never been ours, we should have less to regret. What a call is here to remember that our true life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions! What a terrible reflection comes home to us, that we shall have to give a strict account of all those riches which are gone, and which we are not now permitted to enjoy! A humble submission to the will of God will do much to mitigate the loss, and

soften the blow. There is much suffering, but the great hope remains. This fire is an anticipation of what will happen to us at the end of life, when everything will be gone but hope in the life of the world to come. But if we face this great sorrow manfully and resolutely, God may yet raise our city from the dust. Industry and perseverance will do much to restore our ruined walls, but humility will do more: it will promote our moral and religious improvement; it will teach us lessons of good, which nations and communities in general are too slow to learn. The Scripture teaches us, that the best and holiest men humbled themselves to the dust, in national calamities, although they had not been partakers in the sins which had brought down divine judgments on their fellow-countrymen. We see a special instance of this in the confessions of the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel. And if the present calamity lead us all to acknowledge our part in the general evil, and to say, "To us belongeth confusion of face, as at this day," this suffering would be of essential benefit to our souls, and would help us in many ways that, perhaps, we know not of. And it would increase our trust in God, for no man can have faith who is not humble. We may also learn from this calamity the utter worthlessness of mere external show, and prodigal expense in selfish objects, especially when it is incurred at the expense of others. Surely it is not uncharitable to say, that this has increased, within our memory, to an alarming extent. In former days the New Brunswick farmers were content to live frugally on the old homesteads, which their fathers had built on land reclaimed from the wilderness. Their manners were simple, and their dress was plain. And one esteemed them the more for that plain living. But this simplicity does not satisfy their sons and daughters. They must be dressed in the gayest and most expensive fashions, and this costs more in a month, than their fathers spent on themselves in a year, which the land will not pay for. They attempt to grow rich suddenly by rash speculations, or dishonesty, or by leaving their country for more favoured climes, in search of wealth. But they soon find, that among speculators everywhere, only the few succeed, and the great majority fail; and so, they who might have been the strength of the Province, pass out of it to bankruptcy, bringing misery on themselves and on their families. They, too, "brought nothing

into the world, and it is certain that they carry nothing out," not even character, faith, and hope, and love.

Alas! what a strange mixture of good and evil do we see in every large community. How imperfectly is the Christian life understood and practised! How truly may we be said to live in civilized heathendom! On the one side is sin, flaunting and triumphant; unbelief and godless infidelity; not a prayer ever offered in the family; enormous waste, prodigality, and luxury; exceeding selfishness, and forgetfulness of God; profanity, intemperance, licentiousness; dishonesty in public and private acts; constant neglect of religious duty; a secret Universalism tainting the faith of thousands, and hiding from them the judgment that is to come;—and on the other, how are our eyes gladdened by the sight of daily endeavours to do good, of holy watchfulness, purity of life, sobriety of manners, frugality in expenses, uprightness in all the transactions of business, constant attendance at public worship, holy communion with God in prayer, and all the means of grace! Here, in the selfsame field, are the tares and the wheat growing up side by side: the one preparing for the heavenly garner; the other for "everlasting shame and contempt."

How loud a call is upon us for religious and moral improvement! How earnest should we all be to "strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die"! How deeply should we lay to heart, that it is "righteousness," not wealth, which "exalteth" a city, as well as a nation; and that selfish luxury, and careless living, "lay the lofty city low, and bring it even to the dust."

Now is the time for plainer living, and higher thinking; for contracting no debts we cannot in reason hope to pay for; for remembering, that to give orders for goods which fill the merchant with dread, because he knows we cannot pay for them, is as great a robbery, only more genteelly executed, as that which was committed in the squares of St. John, when the goods rescued from the flames, and deposited there for safety, were secretly stolen by base plunderers. Till Christians come to understand that debts thus ill-contracted and undischarged, are ill-disguised robbery, and that the practice is entirely inconsistent with the Christian character, they have not learned the elements of the religion they profess. Their prayers, their alms, and their communions are of no value in the sight of God.

Nor is it dishonesty only which is to be eschewed. Carelessness is commonly regarded as a venial fault; but it is far otherwise, when it involves the destruction of the property, perhaps of the lives, of our neighbours. It is a want of love, as well as of prudence and consideration. It is commonly met by the confident statement, that if our houses are burned, we are, at all events, well insured; which is a piece of daring villany, if we wilfully set them on fire; and of gross unfairness, if we take from a society, formed for the common protection, what, with a little careful management, we need not have required. Robbery of an insurance company is as bad as any other robbery; and I fear it is a proof of the deterioration of public morals, that in suits between individuals and corporations, the verdict is almost always given against the company, as if there were a foregone conclusion in men's minds, that, right or wrong, the richer party must pay; against which unrighteous feeling we may set the inspired sentence, "Thou shalt not countenance a poor man in his cause"; that is, I presume, to do an unjust act. It is his justice, not his poverty, that entitles him to a verdict in his favour.

Nor ought we to forget the lesson, that sentiment without reason, and mere excitement, are of little value, either in our temporal misfortunes or in our spiritual progress. We have all been terribly excited by this raging fire. Terror and confusion have strained our nerves to the utmost. Yet of what avail was the sensation? Now it is all over, and the results are to be seen, and are yet to come, — we want the calmest and the soundest judgment, the manliest resolution, the most untiring perseverance; and the power to discriminate, even in our charity, between what may satisfy greedy and importunate claimants, or may permanently benefit suffering thousands, and subserve the welfare of the whole community. If this be plain wholesome truth in a crisis of our temporal fortunes, why should it be otherwise in concerns of higher moment? Why should we place the loftiest interests of man at the mercy of a fierce and uncontrollable sensation, which is certain to recede, as the waters of a tide which ebbs and flows, and which, when receding, may carry us along with it, far from the shore on which we hope to land.

But for our comfort under this calamity, we may remember that punishment is always intended by God as a remedy. The sinful

heart of man requires to be taught by pain. Unchecked prosperity corrupts and enfeebles the mind, as surely as a constantly hot climate enervates the body. Sin needs to be burned out, and grace to be burned into the soul; and we are braced and invigorated by chastisement. "I will show him how great things he must suffer," contains a principle not applicable to St. Paul only. If you will read the hand of God aright, you will see in it as much tenderness and mercy, as severity. You all feel, that if this evil had occurred on a stormy night of winter, many hundreds must have been frozen to death, and the awful account of the inspired historian would have been fulfilled in our streets: "When men arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses." Think of the readiness with which you have been assisted from all quarters; the spirit of Christian charity which has been called forth; the union of many hearts and hands, in untiring and unselfish labour; the eager desire to benefit, without any expectation of a return; the happy forgetfulness of old rivalries, and differences of race, government, and religion, folded together in the embrace of a universal charity; and you will see that, probably, more real and substantial good may result, than if the evil had never been permitted. It only requires that the good feeling should be permanent, and that brotherly love should continue, when the need for aid shall have ceased to exist. And the aid we can give, should be offered in a Christian temper and manner, as an offering to the people of God. For all frivolous methods of getting money, even for charitable purposes, in the face of so serious a calamity, are inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, unworthy the dignity of Christians, and the respect we owe to Christian companions in misfortune.

And what heavenly consolation does Christianity suggest, even to the greatest sufferers. As one sadly gazes on the wide waste of ruins, at first sight, one may be led to exclaim, What irretrievable destruction is here; what laborious industry rewarded with ruinous loss; how many desolate hearts are sorrowing over the labour of past years; over remembrances that can never be restored, the bridal presents, and the gifts of long-lost friends; the comforts of a small but happy home,—all gone to dust within one luckless hour! Yet, surely, here are jewels which no fire can burn, stones of inestimable value, and meet for the Redeemer's Crown. The precious things of

earth can be consumed, the thief can steal them, and the moth corrupt and destroy. But Christian love and truth and hope, are all the more precious for passing through the fire. Their lustre is ever fresh, and their joy unutterable.

How can those be called possessions which the fire can rid us of, which perish in the using? How can those be called possessions, which are accompanied with so many alloys, thorns, and inconveniences? If our speculations fail, we are pressed down by debt; if we suddenly grow rich, we are besieged with a multitude of greedy, importunate applicants; if we have many children, they all expect to be maintained in idleness, and to begin life where their fathers ended it; if we have no family, we seem to be toiling for some distant heir, who loves us not; if our riches are unjustly gotten, our pillow is strewn with thorns, and our conscience laden with reproaches; and if we have no solid and refined education, unmeaning luxury, and vulgar waste, are neither a benefit to the mind, nor a comfort to the body.

O! the heavenly blessing of contentment in every station in which God has placed us; the blessing of imparting to the honest poor, what is in our power to give; of not hasting to be rich, by any means, good or evil; of being able to lie down in peace and say, Thanks to my Heavenly Father, I owe no man anything but to love him. I need never meet my creditor in the street, and run to the opposite side, because I cannot discharge my just debts. If I had all some men have, or are supposed to have, I might be no happier than I may be now, and should have more to answer for. Soon shall I have nothing left but a shroud, my coverlet will be a narrow bed of earth; therefore, O my God, make me satisfied with the portion thou' allotted me; give me a calm and thankful heart; religious and reasonable desires; honesty, prudence, and simplicity; a guileless soul; a quiet, trusting spirit, that I may find all I need, desire, and hope for, in Thee.

If these heavenly riches go with us out of the world, then shall we be rich "beyond the dreams of avarice." No earthly pomp may follow us to the grave, no laboured inscription may record our virtues; but those precious words, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," will reveal our everlasting wealth. All that is pure and lovely, kind and generous and noble, will be there: all the dear lost

ones, by whose bedsides we have watched and wept ; mourners, whose tears we have dried ; children, in whose hearts we sowed good seed, and strengthened the rising plant of righteousness ; our companions in travail, and in the patient endurance of sorrow, — all these possessions will be there, and will be ours. Will they not be true, lasting riches ? Will they ever “ make to themselves wings, and fly away ” ? All will be rich in themselves, and in each other, and in Christ, who became poor that we might inherit his eternal riches.

If, then, God has allowed many of our perishable goods to be consumed, he calls to us out of the midst of the flames, from the very ashes where our homes lie low : “ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where the moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” for there is your “ better, there is your enduring substance.”

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