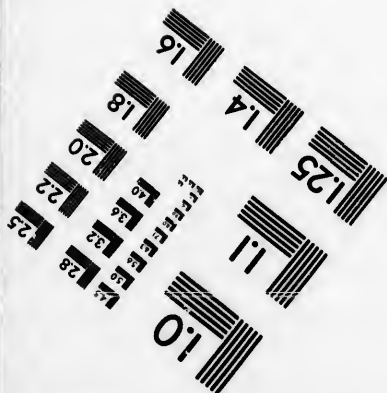
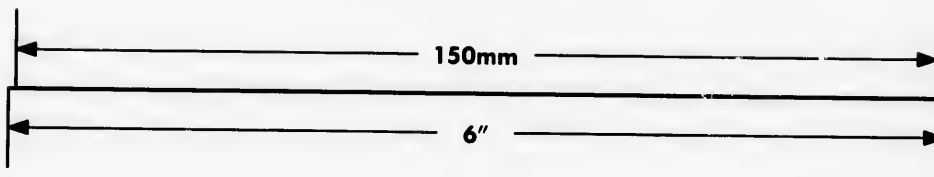
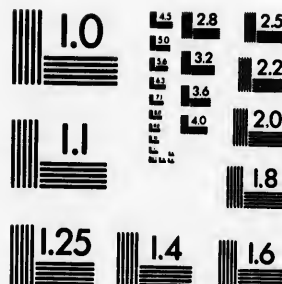
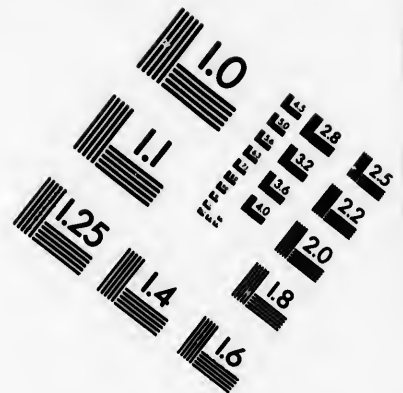
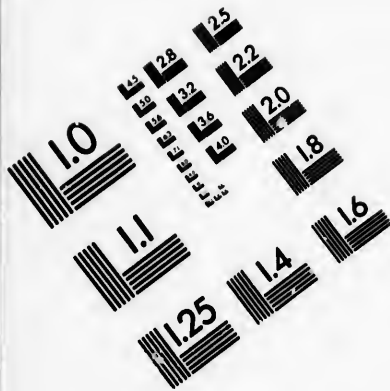
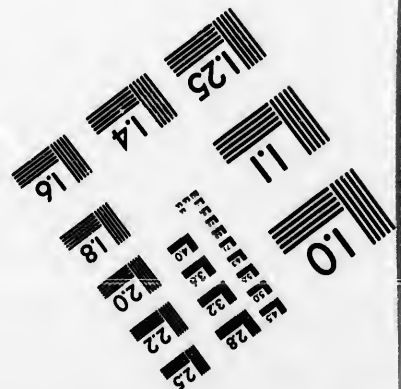


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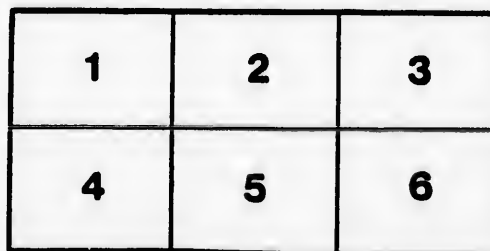
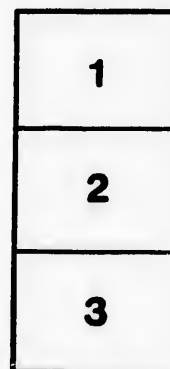
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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE OPENING
OF
ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
TOWNSHIP OF MARCH,
UPPER-CANADA,

BY
The Reverend AMOS ANSLEY, A. M.,
Rector of Hull, Lower-Canada,
And of March, Upper-Canada,
And officiating Chaplain to the Forces, &c.

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

MONTREAL:

H. H. CUNNINGHAM.

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1828.

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A SERMON, &c.

GENESIS, XXVIII. 16, 17.

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of Heaven.

IN contemplating the motives and principles which influence the actions of men and the lower animals, we observe this distinguishing characteristic trait between them. While they have no religious or moral feelings, no sense of a Deity, and no idea of any being of superior power or attributes to man, he is by his constitution a religious being. Religion is implanted in his mind by the author of our nature, and its exercise and gratification are as natural to him as is the indulgence of any one principle or affection that he possesses. That it is an innate principle of the mind, as much so as any feeling or propensity of our nature, and will be called into exercise whenever objects fitted to awaken its energies are presented to us, we conclude not only from our own feelings, but because all men as well in the rudest as in the most polished ages of the world have never been without religion in some form or other.—Hence religion considered simply as a feeling, and abstracted from all connection with particular articles of belief or modes of worship, may be viewed as an instinctive property of our nature.

This cannot be more finely illustrated than in the fondness and intense interest that children manifest for that Book in which is recorded the history of the Saviour of the World. This book is usually the first that

is put into the hands of children when they begin to read, and considered simply as a story,—and their tender minds are as yet incapable of viewing it in any other light ;—no book to them possesses more interest or is read with greater avidity. They love to read the simple events that chequered the life of the man of sorrows, and to listen to the lessons of his wisdom.—They follow him through his melancholy history, in society and in solitude, and mark him every where distinguished by acts of beneficence and love, and they thus acquire a more intimate knowledge of his peculiar character and of that of his religion than can be furnished by the most laboured expositions of the learned. Besides the simplicity of the narration and its progressive interest, the plainness of the language and the guileless simplicity of character that distinguishes our blessed Lord and his disciples—all these children can perfectly comprehend, and they read it with that undoubting faith and lively interest that proves far more forcibly than words can do, its perfect accordance with the genuine feelings of humanity.—The simplicity of the character of our blessed Lord is so congenial to the ideas of their own minds that they comprehend it infinitely better than they do the characters of those that the world calls great. There is so little pretension in his wisdom, so little effort in his actions, that the infant eye can behold the sun of righteousness with love and affection, and they read his story as they would that of one of themselves.—There is something above the world in his character : and his history presents to their minds a perfect model of all that is good in action and sublime in sentiment ; and in it they recognize that model of perfection, it is then their highest ambition as well as noblest privilege to imitate.

This manifests the natural dictates of the human mind, and to the sincerely pious is stronger evidence

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for the divine character and mission of our Saviour than can well be expressed. And hence we see that man made after the image of God, feels that this earth is not the native region of that spirit that is within him. He naturally tends to that Being whose lineaments he still bears. He finds not here objects congenial to his nature nor a sphere adequate to satisfy all the instinctive desires and expectations of his soul. Sensual gratifications and temporal delights he may indeed enjoy, but they do not satisfy his nature:—like the fabled apples that grew on the shores of the Dead Sea, fair and beautiful without, but all ashes within. When the momentary gratification is over, if they do not plant in the bosom a sting, they leave the mind vacant and joyless.

Guided by this secret instinct of human nature, mankind have in all ages erected temples to the Deity and under various names and different forms have invoked the power that presides over the world. And except during the frenzy of the Revolution in France, never was Atheism professed by any nation under Heaven. There, when the voices of the eloquent defenders of the religion and institutions of their fathers was dead and they left none to succeed them; when despotism, grown feeble by the weight of years, became the almost unresisting victim of popular vengeance; when every old association was trampled with contumely under foot; when every lofty principle was eradicated, when every old institution was destroyed and every new one covered in its cradle with blood, Atheism, which had long been working in secret, the author of all these horrors, burst forth to behold the ruin she had already made, and to finish what she had so impiously begun. Her reign was short, but it was terrible; and future times shall read the history of that bloody period with horror and with dread. What degradation in a moral point of view might France have shunned, if the spirit that

animated the celebrated pulpit orators of the reign of Louis XIV. had still been alive in the world to still the babbling of the scoffer and to support the sinking faith of the feeble believer. But the champions of religion themselves were faint and cold hearted, and the adversaries of our faith proceeded unchecked in their unhal- lowed career. They could not bear the ridicule that was heaped upon them, and they surrendered the strongest of their holds and laid aside the most celestial weapons of their armoury in the vain hope of conciliating the forbearance of a treacherous and exulting enemy. With this single exception, all times have been distinguished for their attachment to religion. But it has left a lesson that cannot easily be forgotten, and when considered, its consequences may be read, in characters of horror, in the corrupted heartlessness of domestic manners and in the most blood stained of political revolutions.

The natural and unbiassed feelings of human nature being thus decidedly in favor of religion, and its exercise being natural to the mind, it is not wonderful that the legislative authority should interpose its sanction, and that kings and law-givers should encourage the propensity of the people towards it. It required no very profound political wisdom to discover the manifold advantages that would result from the public worship of the Deity. Accordingly temples were built, and an order of men were set apart to minister in holy things, and certain days were consecrated for the people to join in the celebration of public worship. But this policy so salutary, nay, so necessary to the morals of the people, among some nations, was enjoined by a higher authority than that of man.

To the Jews, God himself delivered his law, he hal- lowed the seventh day and made it holy, and appointed other festivals in which the people should join in the public service of the sanctuary. As far as regards the

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hallowing of the sabbath, Christianity confirms what the Mosaic law enjoined. But the burdensome load of rites and ceremonies is annulled and a pure spiritual worship is instituted in its place. God who is a spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and our blessed Lord whose attendance upon the public worship of the sanctuary was always regular, has left us an example that none of his followers can depart from with impunity.

The world, my brethren, has seen many religions, and many have come in the name and with the pretensions of prophets of God. These religious impositions had their use to barbarous ages, and were permitted for the wisest purposes. And bad as they were, the greatest philosophers and legislators gave them the sanction of their authority, because they were better than no religion at all. Yet whatever may have been the sublimity of some of their ceremonial rites, and the excellence of some of their moral precepts, they are universally marked with this decisive feature that of being combined with ambitious views, with some personal interest. We trace in them alike the ambition that instigated their authors to propagate them, and the weakness and imperfection of human nature. They uniformly lead to one of the fundamental errors in religion, either to enthusiasm or superstition; and, by a necessary consequence, to the fatal separation of piety from moral virtue.

The authors of these impositions have uniformly propagated them as subservient to that love of glory that aims at the subjugation of the minds of mankind, or to the love of power, that aims at supremacy and dominion. They have either put the sword into the hands of their followers to propagate their feverish or frenzied imaginations, or withdrawn them from the most sacred sphere of social duty and have vainly thought that the favor of the Deity may be propitiated by an unproduc-

tive and unmeaning devotion, or by the dreams of visionary illumination. Very different is that religion which Jesus Christ came down from Heaven to publish and to propagate. The religion of the gospel of Christ fearfully as it withdraws the veil that conceals the counsels of the Almighty, reveals to us a "new heaven and a new earth;" it is pure, spiritual and divine; and by its progressive influence upon the heart it is capable of exalting our nature from the grossness of a lower world to the "glorious liberty of the sons of God:" we see all that is great or good in our nature purified from the corruption it had acquired through the merits of a suffering Redeemer; we see a system that is capable of exalting the humblest of its followers through progressive stages of "wisdom, knowledge and joy" to be the companion of angels and archangels and of "the spirits of just men made perfect;" and what is peculiar to this religion, and distinguishes it from all others that have ever appeared in the world, the discipline which it prescribes to man in his state of probation is that by which he is to attain to the glories of eternity and rendered meet for the inheritance of the Saints in light. While it leads its humble disciple in the road to "honor, glory and immortality," it scatters unnumbered blessings in its way, and proves the strongest and sweetest cement of society, the guardian of the purest social virtues and most sacred domestic ties.

Such being the character of that religion, that the Almighty, in mercy to mankind, has been pleased to reveal to the guilty and corrupted sons of Adam, it becomes the duty of the Legislature of the Country to secure its propagation and diffusion among the members of the community. Had Christianity never been published to the world, then every one might with impunity have followed the imaginations of his own darkened understanding. But since the joyful sound of the gospel has come to our ears; since the Almighty has

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been pleased to make known his divine will to man, it is as much the business of the Legislative authority to secure to the people the blessings of the divine law, as it is to provide for the administration of justice or any thing else calculated to secure the public tranquillity and happiness and to promote the public good. Hence it is an object of the first importance for the Legislature of a Country to provide for the religious instruction of the people by such an ecclesiastical establishment as shall best promote this grand object, and secure to them the blessings of it in its purest form. This subject was duly appreciated by the heathen legislators of old. Religion was never overlooked by them, and they either framed a system of religious worship themselves for their people or gave the stamp of their authority to the popular creed.

Indeed the necessity of a religious establishment cannot be denied, even by infidels; and, when the authority of the State has not thought fit to establish one particular form of church government, or give its patronage to one sect of Christians, exclusively, it has yet found it necessary to make such laws and regulations as shall secure to the people religious worship of some form or other. But when an establishment like that of the church of England is professed in its genuine purity of doctrine and discipline,—a doctrine which no candid adversary, if any such there be, can deny to be in perfect accordance with those Scriptures which she professes to take for her guide, and whose discipline, pure and reformed as it is now professed, if not modelled after the express commands of our blessed Lord himself who left no special written directions for the government of his church, is yet in perfect accordance with the practice of the Holy Apostles of our Lord, who, in all things pertaining to the church, wrote and acted under the immediate influence of the holy spirit, one cannot but pity the obtuseness of that man's feeling or

disperse the obliquity of his mind who would wish to undermine it and overthrow that form of sound doctrine which has been the cause and the chief instrument under God in promoting the temporal as well as spiritual good of our fellow creatures.

In this age of affected liberality and abhorrence of all restraint, our church has many obstacles to meet with and many difficulties to encounter in her progress to establish herself in a new country, which those sectarians, who have no fixed form of church government, pretending that no forms were established in the primitive times, can never experience. The dispositions of the British people are habitually pious and devout; and their love and veneration for the throne and the altar has never been shaken by any convulsions of democracy, but are still regarded by them with unbroken attachment, and their hallowed associations that belong to country and to kindred still retain all their force.—The spirit of our religion is mingled with the first ideas of innocent enjoyment; and our first indelible impressions of maternal tenderness and fatherly concern are entwined with ideas of christian meekness, charity and love. But when the emigrant sets his foot upon the shores of this country, he is indeed introduced into a new world; he finds many unlooked for difficulties to surmount, many toils and hardships to undergo, many customs that his native land does not recognize; and many wolves in sheep's clothing who are not wanting in their zealous efforts to wean his mind from the sacred institutions of his fathers and who would fain have him forget every old association by which the religion of his home and his fathers is connected in his mind.—Hence arises one difficulty which the Christian Missionary has to encounter in keeping one part of his flock steadfast in the faith of their fathers. He has not unoften the mortification to find that when he "comes to his own, his own receive him not." The badness of

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the roads, the unfavorable state of the weather, the distance of his residence from the place of worship are offered as ready excuses by the cold hearted christian for absenting himself from the public worship of God.

But another and a far more serious obstacle to the diffusion of the pure doctrines and worship he professes, he has to meet with from another quarter. A part of the people among whom his labours are to be bestowed, he finds most decisively hostile to him; a description of persons who, though descended from the same race with himself, have had every old association torn from their bosoms by the ruthless hand of rebellion; every opinion in church and state that had been hal- lowed by time, and which had stood the test of ages, eradicated from their bosoms:—and as the quarrels of brothers, and of children against their parents are the most cruel and bloody, so after the convulsion was over which had shaken every old opinion of their nature to its very center, they found a settled hatred to the mother country, and a determined malignity to her institutions and manners, the predominant feeling of their minds. These ideas are with difficulty forgotten, even in this country, where the tolerant principles of the church and the enlightened ideas of liberty and independence which distinguish the mother country are, if possible, carried farther than they are at home. And in contending against them, the Missionary of the Gospel has difficulties of no ordinary nature to encounter; he has prejudice, the most deep-rooted to overcome; for until the minds of his hearers are conciliated towards him, and until they can look upon him with that charity which is due from one christian to another, all his efforts are in vain; and afterwards, when he has obtained the friendly attention of his hearers, he has then the deepest ignorance to enlighten, for it is a fact, a deplorable fact that has been proved by the experience of ages, that the most deep-rooted of prejudices have their

foundation in ignorance that pride forbids them to remove.

To such people, the true majesty of the church is unknown; and the primitive attire in which she is clothed is looked upon as the heathenish invention of interested men. Her pure government and still purer form of prayer is disregarded by them; but let them examine her narrowly, let them study her liturgy, let them become familiar with her mode of worship, and let them join in the prayers which with unaffected piety she offers to the throne of grace, they find no discordance, in doctrine, precept or discipline, that she is not bewildered with a variety of opinions, the inventions of interested men, but that all is simple, clear and unaffected. It is here she has difficulties to meet with, but with the sound doctrine, good order and discipline that distinguish her, she must be successful; and, in proportion to the magnitude and number of her difficulties, will be the permanence of her establishment and the certainty of her extension.

But the excellence of a church establishment with a zealous clergy can do but little towards promoting a sound faith and purity of morals among a people, without their co-operation to second the wishes of those who are appointed to watch over their spiritual interests. Were it not for our assembling together on the Lord's day, christianity would take too feeble a hold on the minds of most men, to produce its beneficial effects. The heathen religion consisted entirely of pompous and magnificent festivals, expensive sacrifices and all that could please and engage the mind, all of which, however, had no relation to the great duties of morality and virtue. But the religion of the Gospel is designed to be to us the mother of good works, to promote among mankind purity of morals and integrity of life; to be our solace in affliction, and our guide through the valley of the shadow of death to the honors and

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glories of eternity. It is a pure spiritual religion and contains nothing but the simplicity of truth, and the majesty of reason to persuade the mind. Were it not therefore for regular and stated times set apart for our joining together to hear our duties explained and the principles of our religion inculcated upon us, Christianity in its purest form could never be a popular religion; it might employ the leisure of men of contemplation and of philosophical research, but it could never be useful to the generality of mankind. With the exception of the few who are given to enquiry, the whole world would be in darkness, ignorance, and moral debasement. True piety is not confined to the sanctuary; but when the observation of the sabbath is disregarded, when men distinguish that day, if they do make any distinction of it from the other days of the week, only by a greater indulgence in immorality and licentiousness, then may we safely say that there prevails throughout the land a moral darkness, that the interests of piety and virtue have been sacrificed at the shrine of selfish passion and that men will work all uncleanness with greediness, whenever they are withdrawn from the public eye. With all men religion is the strongest motive to virtue; and with the majority of mankind, it is the only motive. There are indeed many spirits among mankind, who prefer the interests of piety and virtue to every other consideration: who feel that the possession of virtuous dispositions are their best reward; and who would do their duty though the thunders of the Almighty, were for ever hushed, and the rewards and punishments of everlasting life should for ever cease to be proclaimed. Such is the character of the venerable Saint whose only book is his Bible, his only study its contemplation;—the simple and unquestioning piety of childhood, and the tender sanctity of woman. Such characters redeem the sinfulness of our nature; they form the steps of that mysterious ladder that reaches

from Earth to Heaven, and testify that notwithstanding his degradation by the fall, there is still something within the mind of man that is capable of being exalted to its original purity, if not above it. But we know that the world is not composed of such characters, and that the generality of mankind have no knowledge of the Scriptures, no rule of life but what they learn in the house of God.

Besides it is to the meetings of the faithful that the promise of the divine presence is made; and wherever two or three disciples are met together, Jesus has promised to be in the midst of them. The purest, perhaps the most exquisite delights that piety affords, springs from contemplation, from meditation upon subjects of divine providence in the closet. But those who have tasted the pleasures of devotion in secret will be thereby the more disposed to approach to God, in the ordinances of public worship. The hallowed sanctity of the place, the very spectacle of a multitude assembled together to worship the great Creator, is sufficient to still every unworthy passion, every debasing feeling, and the mind is insensibly carried away from the business, the pleasures and amusements of time, and fixed upon the great concerns of man—death, judgment, and eternity. We see around us the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the noble and the ignoble, all gathered together for the same great purpose, and confessing before the throne of God that they are all equal in his sight, all children of Adam, all sinful dust and ashes. When we enter the church we have the same sense of our degraded condition by sin and our immortal destiny, with which we enter the tomb of our fathers;—if we are thoughtful we must be serious, if we have the feelings of men we must be devout. We feel as if translated from earth to heaven and experience the emotion of mind the Patriarch was in when he awoke from his dream and exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place

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and I knew it not. This is none other than the gate of heaven and this is the house of God."

Let me therefore in conclusion exhort you to let your regard for the public institutions of religion be sincere and steadfast, your piety holy, fervent and devout. If the public institutions of religion were laid aside, private virtue would not be long behind: and the laws of men are of little avail when not enforced by the authority of God. Without the public institutions of religion, the bond that keeps society together would soon be broken; there would be no security for the public peace, and the moral world would totter to its fall. And I pray God that the observance of the Lord's day may never be slighted by you, but that the fear of God and the belief in his Providence may ever be kept alive in your hearts; that whenever you enter these walls you may enter them with that feeling of awe and that sense of your degraded situation by sin, that with pure hearts and faith unfeigned, you may invoke the pity of a pure and compassionate Creator, in the merits of a divine and suffering Redeemer: that soby the discipline which the Gospel prescribes, in time you may be led to glory, honor and immortality, and when you shall leave the house of your earthly tabernacle, you may be received into that which is eternal in the Heavens.

FINIS.

Ludger Duvernay, Printer.

