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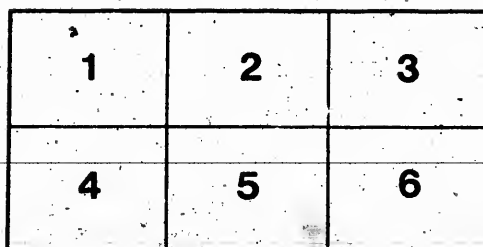
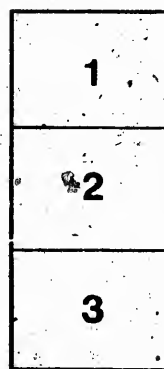
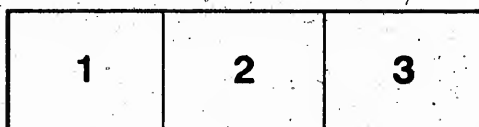
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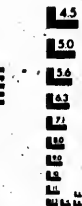
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# In Memoriam.

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SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON

PREACHED NOVEMBER 28<sup>th</sup> 1896, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE DEATH OF

**REV. GEORGE SMELLIE, D.D.,**  
RETIRED PASTOR.

BY

**REV. JOHN H. MACVICAR, B.A.,**  
PASTOR OF MELVILLE CHURCH, FERGUS.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

TORONTO:  
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# In Memoriam.

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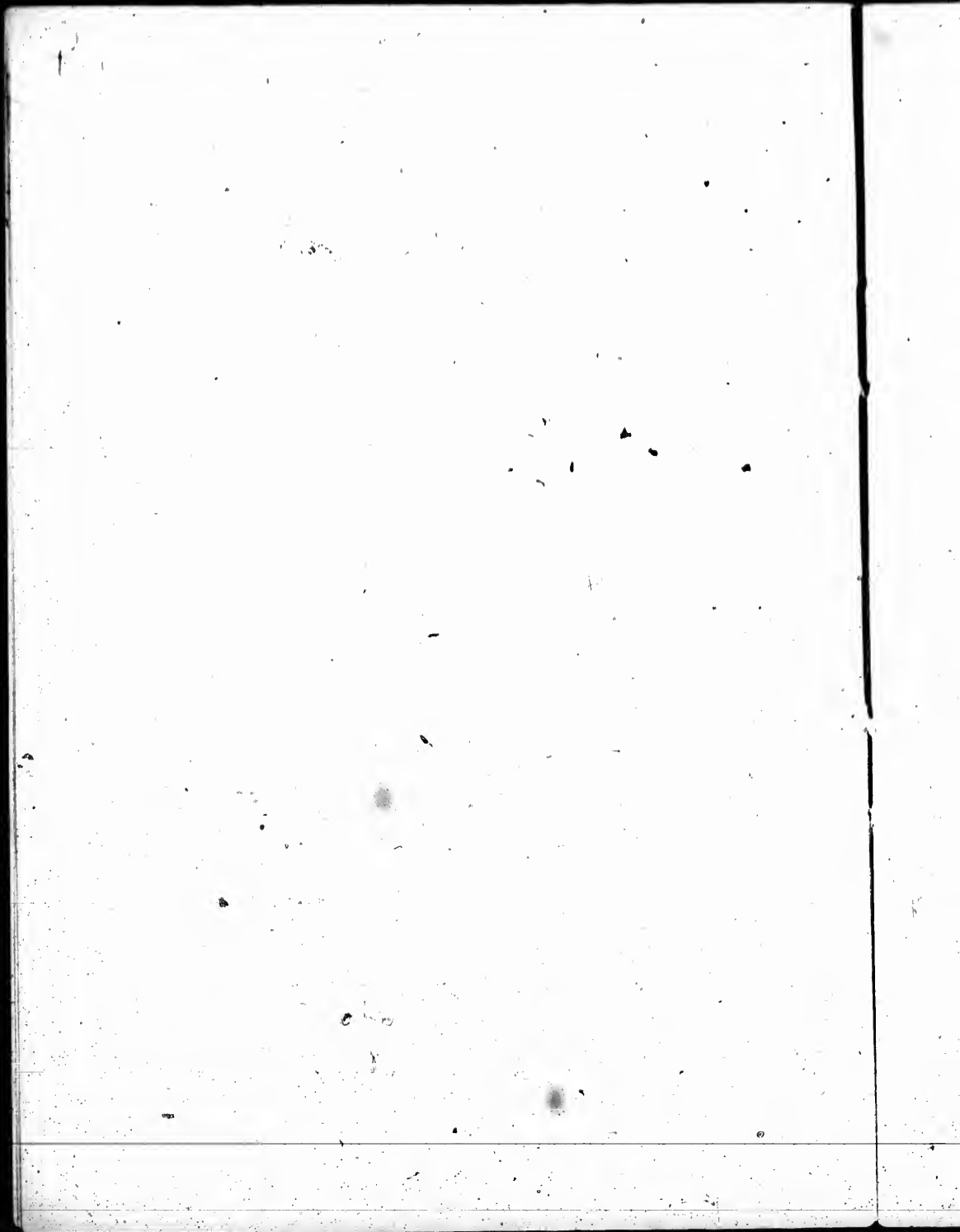
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# In Memoriam

REV. GEORGE SMELLIE, D.D.

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"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" *Psalms*  
*116: 15*

THE LORD has clearer sight than we; for, to human eyes, death is more often a thing of horror than something to be looked upon as precious. In Westminster Abbey there is a ghastly monument erected to the memory of Lady Nightingale, who is seen shrinking from a hideous skeleton that creeps from an open tomb and poises the death-dart which an anguished husband is powerless to avert. This is the light in which the King of Terrors is most commonly regarded. We instinctively cling to life and shrink from death; and the woman of Tekoa has touched the deepest soundings of our being when she said, "We must *needs* die." We die, that is to say, not from choice but from necessity; and any marked advance beyond the allotted span of life accentuates this fact. The growing infirmities of age are physical reminders that we leave the world, ~~not~~ like Christ, as a matter of expediency, but as a matter over which we have no control. And yet, as heirs according to the hope of everlasting life, we are able to recognize in death a preciousness commensurate with the infinite resources of the grace by which we are redeemed. To the sordid sense of sight, death makes our being seem as water spilt upon

the ground which cannot be gathered up again. But faith has brighter figures. "I walk through the valley of the *shadow* of death," says faith. To a believer in Jesus it is but a shadow and nothing more; a shadow that retreats forever in the brightness of the glory of God's immediate presence. "He is not dead, but sleeping," says faith; and it seems to me no words describe more perfectly the manner in which our beloved father, the retired pastor of Melville Church, fell asleep than those quoted at the funeral service in Kirkhall:

" Life! we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;—  
Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time:  
Say not 'Good night,' but in some brighter clime,  
Bid me 'Good morning.' "

Even so, he fell asleep in Jesus; and, as we contemplate his peaceful end, we cannot but recall the words upon which he addressed us at a recent sacrament: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." "I know no word," says Matthew Henry—a commentator whom our departed father consulted much throughout his protracted ministry—"I know no word more proper to close our eyes with at night when we go to sleep, nor to close them with at death, that long sleep, than this, 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' "

But what is it that constitutes the preciousness of such an event? Let us answer ever so simply:

1. The death of saints is precious because Jesus died.

The voluntariness of Christ's death gives an untold value to the involuntariness of our own death; for "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must

put on immortality." Is it asked what the death of Christ has to do with this? The reply is that, Jesus Christ hath tasted death for every man, and brought life and immortality to light. The saints, whose death is precious, are such, not through nature but through grace. They triumph not in their own strength but in the strength of Him of whom each one says, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." They are saints because they are able to say, "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." The death of every saint is precious in the sight of the Lord because affording a signal demonstration of the efficacy of the atonement made by Christ, no less than the power of His resurrection. More than one faithful servant of God, the time of whose departure is at hand, has been able to say with the confidence of Paul: "Jesus Christ . . . hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, whereunto I am appointed a preacher, . . . for I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

2. The death of every saint is precious because it marks the completion of an earthly career consecrated to the service of Christ.

A saint is one who is "set apart," and none of us should shrink from being known as saints—those "set apart" by Him "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people." The life of a saint is that of one who is "peculiar" enough to be zealous of good works; and, when such a life reaches its end, there is both human appreciation of divine merits and divine appreciation of human merits.

On the human side, the saint is able to exclaim: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." And on the divine side, are uttered the words of astounding commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The work of Christ, coming before our works, gives a value to what we do that never can be estimated. The relation in which it stands to our efforts is very much the relation in which a digit stands to a line of ciphers. Our choicest efforts are but ciphers; and a line of such indefinitely extended—for miles if you will—must always be worth nothing; but place a digit before them and they mount up in value beyond computation. So when the vicarious work of Christ has been implicitly accepted by the individual believer, not the most trivial service that can be rendered in Christ's name, even to the giving of a cup of cold water, but will be recognized and rewarded in the divine estimate of the preciousness of the death of the saints. Every time an honored servant of God is removed from the sphere of earthly activity, not most subdued of the voices that are heard filling the vacuum that ensues may be heard the voice of the Great Head of the Church saying: "I know thy works and thy labor."

The Rev. Dr. George Smellie, our retired pastor, may be regarded as having lived in a more than ordinary sense the life of a saint. He was peculiarly "set apart" to the work of the ministry. His forebears for six generations, with one exception, were clergymen. Of the early days of his own ministry very few remain among us who have definite recollections; and fewer still who can recall the wild, uncultivated state of the country when he and Mrs. Smellie first came on foot to Fergus. Born in 1811, and

trained in Edinburgh University under men like Dr. Chalmers and Prof. Wilson, he had already been laboring seven or eight years amongst an attached people in Ladykirk, Orkney, when through the urgent representations of Dr. Bayne, of Galt—whose memoirs he afterwards wrote,—he was induced to cross the seas, under appointment of the Colonial Committee of the Church of Scotland. In December, 1843, he was inducted as successor to Rev. Alexander Gardiner, in the pastorate of St. Andrew's Church, Fergus, and in this community spent forty-four fruitful years in active service, before his retirement in 1888. Even in the early days before the building in which we now worship was erected, and when the country was far from fully settled, the old rough-cast building, known as St. Andrew's Church, was found to be inadequate for the accommodation of all who wished to avail themselves of divine ordinances. It was estimated, one year after Mr. Smellie's settlement, that nearly a thousand persons were connected with the congregation, and I find an entry in the minute book, in his own writing, which records a resolution to devise measures for increasing the seating accommodation. In 1844 Mr. Smellie joined what is sometimes spoken of as the Disruption Movement in Canada, and nearly all his congregation followed him. For some time they continued to worship in St. Andrew's Church, but it proved necessary to change the name of the congregation to that of Melville Church and to proceed with the erection of a separate building. This was completed and formally opened for public worship on Thursday, March 4th, 1847. Rev. Dr. Burns, of Knox College, officiated, and made a touching reference to the little hand that had laid the corner stone; this ceremony having been performed by a child of the Manse, who died before the completion of the structure and was buried beneath the floor.

Mr. Smellie, in his ministerial labors, was ever unsparing of himself, and, more especially in the early days, used to make long tours, in all sorts of weather, in order to carry ordinances to distant parts of his parish, which then practically extended to the Georgian Bay. As the country became cleared and settlers grew in number, considerable portions of the congregation branched off and became separate organizations in Elora, Alma, Cumnoch and Belwood, points at which he had been in the habit of preaching periodically in barns and similar buildings.

Calm, deliberate, thorough, with an exceptional regard for lofty principle, his impressive personality, both in the pulpit and out of it, characterized by all the marks of a true Christian chivalry, will long linger in the memories of those who had the privilege of knowing him; and his extraordinary staying powers—physical, mental and spiritual,—whereby, throughout such a long career, he was enabled to keep his own freshness and maintain his hold upon the love and esteem of his people, are exceedingly noteworthy. He was ever mindful of the dignity of his office, and preached, as I have been assured by more than one of you, with unwavering fidelity to the truth as it is in Jesus. In the mellow years of advancing life, he dwelt much upon the efficacy of that blood whereby the accumulated sins of individual responsibility and actual transgression are blotted out, and remembered no more against us. I am sure we all felt during the summer months when he was last with us that his presence in the church was itself a benediction, and the sweetness of our communing at the Table of our Lord was not diminished by seeing our retired pastor in his accustomed place and hearing his voice exhort us to go from strength to strength till, every one of us, we should appear before God in Zion.

3. But the death of saints is precious, not only because



Jesus died and because those whom He redeems have been "set apart." for His service, but precious most of all because Jesus lives.

His resurrection power assures us that this life of service is eternal, and that in our flesh we shall see God. We may not follow our departed father immediately into that higher sphere of service, but through Christ's resurrection power we know the work he has now laid down abides. He still lives in what he has accomplished. He labored and others have entered into his labors. His voice, though it was silent as he lay before this pulpit in his open casket, is still heard amongst us. He being dead, yet speaketh; let us give due heed to the message of his precious death.

He speaks by the private life of faith and endeavor lived in the cheerful, hospitable home of which he was the head, and where he was through all these years so lovingly, so faithfully, so ably sustained by her who has been in the truest sense a help-meet to him and a mother to us; surrounded by a family endowed with exceptional gifts. Kirkhall has been described to me, by those who knew it in former times, as one of the brightest, happiest homes, pervaded by a peculiarly hallowed atmosphere. Many a one who went to the Manse heavy-hearted, received comfort and strength for the struggle of life; and the profound impression made by Dr. Smellie's voice as he led in family worship, inspired visitors to say as they turned away, "It was good for us to be here." Through all the sacred influences that proceeded from his home, he being dead, yet speaketh to us.

But he speaks most of all by the exceptional fidelity and endurance of his public work. He was never known to trifle with his appointments, or shrink from difficult service, and, more especially in the early days, difficulties

abounded in Christ's service; but what he said at the twenty-fifth anniversary of his settlement in Fergus, he might have repeated at his Jubilee: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." His preaching was characterized by earnestness and thoroughness. He was never able to consider the mere mechanical iteration and re-iteration of a text a satisfactory mode of expounding it, but would take the full meaning and lay it before you, with conscientious regard to the analogy of faith. How faithful he was in his private dealings with the members of the flock is known to many. He would travel on foot great distances to see them, and, when occasion arose, was fearless in uttering truths that were not always palatable; yet sympathetic withal, and ever ready to point the fallen to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

We shall not easily forget the last public words he addressed to us as we were about to rise from the Lord's Table. Somehow we felt they might be the last, though at that time we had hoped to have had him with us at a general assembly of the friends of Melville Church to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the building so long associated with his ministry. He has responded to a higher call and joined the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven. In the light of his removal what deep significance attaches to his last public words. "They go from strength to strength." We almost hear him saying it still; in a voice so clear, so unwavering, so charged with the accents of conviction: "They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

And now he himself has gone; gone through the valley which was so literally to him the *shadow* of death and nothing more. When he fell asleep that Saturday morning it was to fall asleep in Jesus, with the hope of waking on

the resurrection morn. He has left us here in another valley—the valley of Baca, of which he spoke and still speaks—“the valley of weeping,” or still more exactly rendered, “the valley of tear-shrubs.” The berries on those shrubs when bruised may shed their tears, and the valley itself have every suggestion of depression, but the light of the promises, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, shines through the dimness of our tears. This valley in which he has left us may be a dry place spiritually, where tear-floods are the only waters, but in themselves those very waters become founts of blessing. Precious, surely, in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints, when, passing through the valley of weeping, the survivors make it a place of springs, and go from strength to strength until every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

Let his voice, then, from the other world appeal to the aged amongst us who are nearing the end of their pilgrimage, that they, too, may be prepared to say, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” And let it appeal to the young, who are but starting on life's pilgrimage, that with simple faith in Jesus Christ they may walk all the way along that path which is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. And to the Lord's name shall be all the glory, in Whose sight the death of the saints is precious. Amen.

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