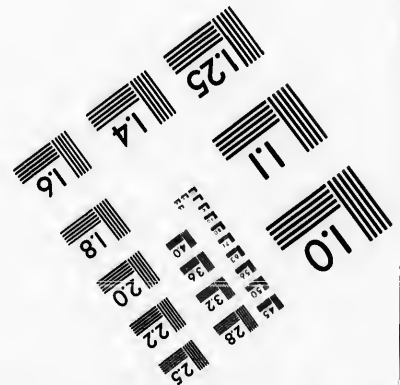
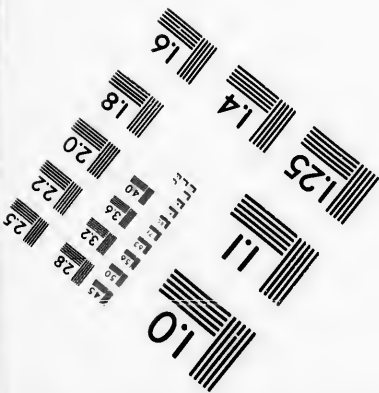
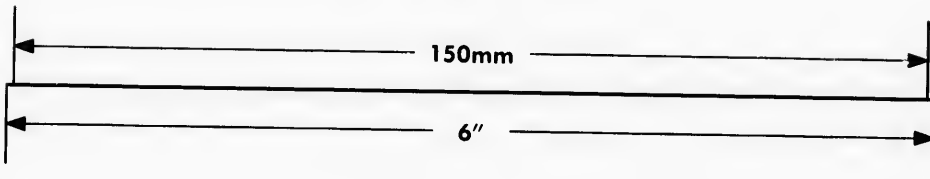
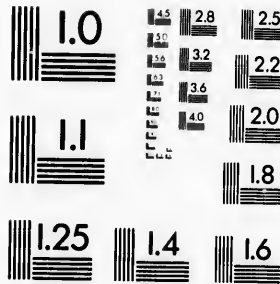
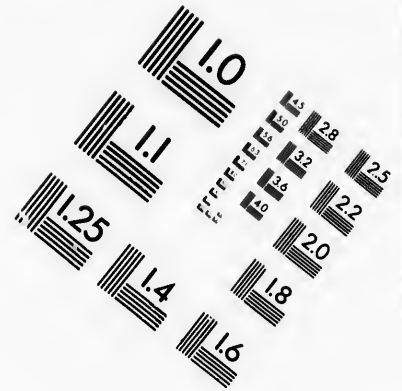
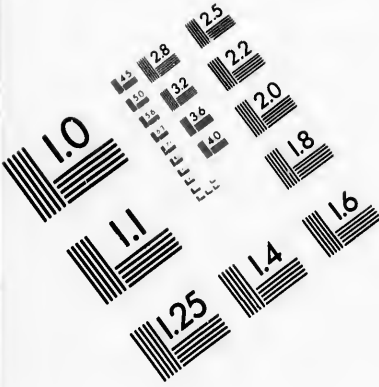


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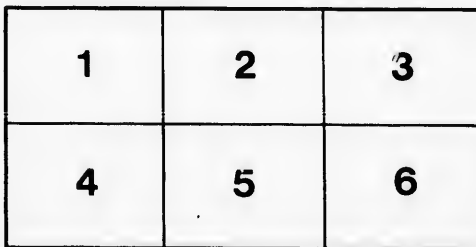
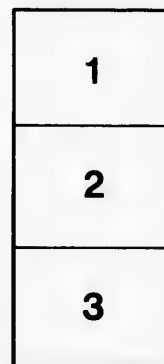
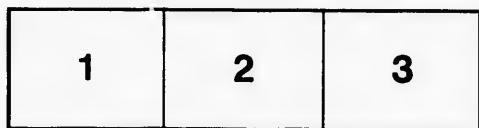
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A SERMON

PREACHED IN

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, COBOURG,

ON THE EVENING OF SUNDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 1879,

AFTER THE FUNERAL OF THE

RIGHT REV. A. N. BETHUNE, D.D., D.C.L.,

LATE LORD BISHOP OF TORONTO.

BY

THE VENERABLE JOHN WILSON, M.A.,

ARCHDEACON OF PETERBOROUGH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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SERMON.

"I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."—Rev. xiv. 13.

However dark and mysterious many portions of divine revelation may be, yet whatever concerns the present and future happiness of man is so clear that it may be understood by the meanest capacity. The plan of salvation has been so fully revealed, that "he that runneth may read, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein." The visions of St. John, as recorded in the book of Revelation, are many of them in the highest degree mysterious, and difficult of comprehension; and some of them probably beyond the capacity of any created being to understand: nor will this appear surprising, if we consider that they contain prophecies uttered by the Holy Spirit of God

respecting the condition of the Church in various ages, some of which have not yet received their accomplishment, and others evidently referring to the end of the world, and the general resurrection. No such obscurity, however, hangs over that portion of the sacred record which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation. In the beatific vision to which St. John was admitted, he heard a voice commanding him to write down this sublime and important truth, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth"; and the reason of this blessedness is further declared in the words which follow, "Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Here, then, we have the glorious declaration, uttered by the Holy Spirit of God, that those who die in the Lord are happy, that they rest from their labours, and that their works follow them into the invisible world.

When God first created man He made him after His own divine image, pure and holy, and therefore *happy*; and conferred an immortality upon him so long as he continued in a state of obedience. And man, we know, *was happy* while he remained obedient to the commands of his Creator; but he fell, and thereby lost his happiness, and forfeited his immortality. "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," was the punishment threatened to his disobedience; and by his one transgression he involved not only himself but all his posterity in the

sad consequences of his fall. "In Adam all die," the Bible informs us, and the experience of nearly six thousand years confirms the melancholy truth. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," was part of the curse entailed upon man for his disobedience to the divine command; and in consequence of this decree the whole human race have become the victims of corruption, the prey of "the king of terrors." But although death has thus passed upon all men, because all have sinned—all involved in the ruin of Adam's fall; yet, blessed be God, there is another truth no less deserving of our consideration, and one which animates the Christian in his journey through life, and sustains and comforts him in his passage through the dark valley of the shadow of death,—it is this, "*in Christ shall all be made alive.*"

In the volume of inspiration it is written that "Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." This He did by revealing His Heavenly Father's will, and making an atonement by offering Himself as a sacrifice upon the cross for the sins of the whole world. He overcame death, by destroying him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; He burst asunder the prison bars of the tomb; He led captivity captive, and by His glorious resurrection from the dead He gave gifts unto men; and the greatest of those gifts was *immortality*. An immortality beyond the present life is thus secured to man, by virtue of the death of Christ, beyond the

possibility of its being lost or taken away by all the powers of death and the grave: to those who repent and believe in Christ, an immortality of happiness in His glorious kingdom; but to the careless and ungodly an immortality of misery and woe in the kingdom of Satan, in the regions of darkness and despair.

We can now understand the meaning of the Apostle, when he says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Death, as the wages or punishment of sin, is visited upon all mankind; and eternal life, as the free gift of God, has been purchased by the blood of Christ. The fear of death is natural to man; the love of life is a principle inherent in all created beings, being implanted in us by our Creator, to teach us the necessity of self-preservation, and, at the same time to shew us our dependence upon Him, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." That the soul of man is immaterial, and immortal, is a fact of which the word of God assures us; and consequently, that it is capable of surviving the dissolution of the body, and of living in a separate state of existence, is a truth which no person who believes the Bible can for a moment doubt. That it does thus exist after death, we are expressly informed by our Lord himself; and since there are but two states in which the soul can exist after its separation from the body—a state of happiness, and a state of misery, it becomes a most momentous question, and one of the last importance to every individual of the

human race, *where* his soul shall exist after the death of the body? And, here, there is an assurance given to the sincere Christian, which removes all doubt from his mind, and reconciles him to meet his last enemy with calmness and composure, nay, oftentimes with joy and rejoicing. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," is a balm for every wound, a recompense for all our trials and labours, our toils and sufferings. It is this blessed assurance which sustained the first Christians under the severest persecutions,—which supported the martyr at the stake, and wafted his dying aspirations above the flames: it is a belief in this declaration which has animated the breast of the sincere believer in every period of the Church's history, which has enabled the Christian in every age to bow with meek submission to the will of his Heavenly Father; to bear patiently his trials and afflictions, and even to kiss the rod that smites him. He knows by happy experience that his trials, are all necessary for his correction, that they are the well merited chastisements of a merciful Father, who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, and who does not willingly afflict His children, but in order to do them good. Instead, therefore, of murmuring or repining under the dispensations of the Almighty, he submits himself, with meekness and resignation, to His fatherly correction, knowing that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." He has respect unto the recompense of the reward, and believes that his "light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh

for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" and therefore, while in this world, he makes it his constant care "to look, not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal."

But, take away this blessed hope, this assurance of future happiness; blot out from the creed of the Christian the heart-cheering declaration, that "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," and where is his consolation amid the various trials of life? What shall soothe him in those afflictions which are the common lot of all? What shall support him in the hour of separation from those he loves, and what shall sustain his sinking spirit amid the agonies of dissolution? Nothing short of a hope full of immortality. Nothing but a firm belief in the blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord, can reconcile us to our afflictions, and enable us to meet the chill embrace of the king of terrors without dismay and apprehension. *To die*, and go, we know not whither, is an awful thought: to enter upon the realities of the unseen world, without having made any preparation for our journey thither, or reflecting upon what may be the final place of our destination, is of all prospects the most gloomy, and of all hazards the most dreadful. To know that we have immortal souls, which must be saved or lost to all eternity, and yet live on from day to day as if that soul were to perish with the body, and as if there were no state of reward or punishment

hereafter, is a delusion which can only be prompted by Satan, the great enemy of man. To call ourselves Christians, and yet confine our views and prospects to this present world, without any reference to what may become of us hereafter, is to contradict the whole spirit and meaning of that Christianity which we profess; it is to deny the Lord that bought us, to tempt the spirit of God, and to provoke Him to swear in His wrath, that we shall never enter into His rest.

Nothing can render peaceful and happy, the death-bed of the Christian, but the consciousness of a life well spent in the service of his Master, and an unshaken reliance upon the mercy of God, through the merits of his Saviour. All other hopes and expectations are vain and delusive; the prospect of happiness placed upon any other foundation, shall perish at the moment of dissolution, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind."

Again, to part with those we love, to commit to the cold, dark grave the dearest object of our affection, a friend, a parent, a child, or the wife of our bosom, without knowing what shall become of the immortal soul, or without any well founded hope of being reunited hereafter, this is sorrow, indeed,—sorrow, deep, bitter, and intense, and sorrow which admits of no alleviation. But the sorrow and sadness of the sick chamber are removed, the gloom of the dark valley is dispersed by the light beams of immortality, and the

bitterness of parting is past, the moment we can lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel.

The beloved friend, whose remains we have just committed to the tomb, still lives, though we see him not ; he is gone to the world of spirits ; he has died in the Lord, in His faith and fear, and he is now happy and at rest. He lives in the hope and expectation of the general resurrection, when soul and body shall be again united, never more to part, but to be continually before the throne of God, and, with angelic choirs, to sing His praise to all eternity.

Already, my brethren, have your thoughts been directed to that sad event, which has filled all our hearts with grief and sorrow, the removal from us, of our beloved Bishop, whose estimable character has been so correctly and affectionately delineated by the preacher of this morning, in words more eloquent than I am able to express. But I cannot deny, myself the satisfaction of adding my own humble tribute of respect and affection to the memory of one, whom I have long esteemed and loved for his many excellent virtues : to know him was to love him ; and for six and thirty years, I enjoyed his friendship, together with a large share of his confidence, which was never once ruffled by a passing cloud, nor by anything that could disturb the happy relations which existed between us. In this Parish I first commenced my public ministry, under his guidance and direction ; and often have I profited

by his fatherly counsel and advice, the benefit of which I have felt through the whole course of my ministry. And as the crowning proof of his continued confidence and regard, he conferred upon me the highest office in the Church, which he had it in his power to bestow.

You will, therefore, I trust, forgive me for mentioning my own name—however unworthy—with that of our chief Pastor, whose loss we all so deeply deplore ; and bear with me a little, while I advert, very briefly, to his unwearied labours, in the cause of the Church, and the extension of her ministrations. Of our good Bishop, it might be truly said, that he was an *indefatigable worker*, in season and out of season, he was constantly employed in his Heavenly Master's service. And throughout a long life, he discharged his heavy and laborious duties with exemplary zeal and diligence. Some of the elder members of the congregation, whom I am now addressing, will remember that, for many years, while rector of this Parish, he conducted a Church Paper—the best we have ever had—while at the same time, as Theological Professor, he was preparing a number of young men for the ministry, many of whom, now widely scattered, have approved themselves faithful and efficient workers in the Lord's vineyard, and will compare favourably with those of their brethren who have had a University education. With these absorbing duties, he never neglected the members of his flock, in this large and important Parish ; but was most regular and unremitting in his

Pastoral visits from house to house. And then, outside of his own Parish, he took his full share of Missionary work ; and to his self-denying labours, many a locality, once spiritually destitute, is now indebted for the regular ministrations of the Church, which it at present enjoys.

Nor can I forget those Missionary gatherings, when the Clergy from this and the neighbouring counties, were periodically assembled, under the hospitable roof of the Rector of the Parish, to deliberate and take counsel together for the Church's welfare, and the spread of religion, in the more remote and destitute settlements. Those were happy days, never to return. There was then peace in the Church, undisturbed by strife and disunion, when brother met brother, without regarding each other with distrust and suspicion.

The younger Clergy, who now complain of privation and suffering, little know what was patiently endured by their elder brethren, when most of this country was a wilderness, and the difficulties of travelling from place to place, almost insuperable. And yet all was patiently borne, if so be they might be instrumental in carrying the glad tidings of salvation to their poor and destitute brethren. I have accompanied our dear departed friend, while he was Rector of this Parish, in many a toilsome journey, and shared with him, in many an act of self-denial, and I never heard one impatient or complaining word escape his lips, but all was borne with the most exemplary patience and fortitude.

But why need I dwell on these things? His unceasing labours are well known to you all. For some forty years he went in and out among you, visiting the sick, comforting the mourners, and administering the consolations of religion as they were needed. In a word, he was a *model Parish Priest*; and the result of his faithful labours is still manifest, and deeply cherished by many a devout and faithful Christian heart, throughout this community,

And when, in the good Providence of God, he was removed from this Parish, and elevated to the Chief Pastorate of this Diocese, we fondly hoped that our esteemed friend would then enjoy the peace and comfort to which his well merited labours so justly entitled him. But alas! these fond expectations were doomed to be disappointed. Already the storm-clouds were gathering, clamour and disaffection became manifest. Men of extreme views and opinions fostered and fomented these unhappy troubles, and by their intemperate zeal and rashness, spread distrust and suspicion in the minds of many who were otherwise well disposed to the Church and her Institutions. At length a *rival organization* was set up, in opposition to what the great majority of Churchmen in the Diocese held and believed to be the teaching of the Church; and this, be it remembered, in opposition to the decisions of both the Synod and the Bishop. Amid these conflicting parties our good Bishop endeavoured to hold the balance, and to mete out even-handed justice to

all. But this did not satisfy. And when, at length, he was forced to take his stand, and to declare that he could not recognize any institution for the collection of Church funds, except that which was already duly established for that purpose, viz., the *Synod of the Diocese*; nor any theological institution for the education of young men for the ministry, except the *University of Trinity College*,—this opposition was intensified; and some, who ought to have been amongst his warmest friends and supporters, became his most determined opponents.

Our good Bishop was emphatically a man of peace, and endeavoured to work in harmony with both parties; but the persistent opposition with which all his efforts for conciliation were met, compelled him to adopt a course, in the administration of his Diocese, at once firm and decisive; and he resolved, by the help of God, to transmit pure and unimpaired those good and holy principles of the faith which had been entrusted to his keeping. His mild and amiable disposition, and his efforts for peace, might appear to some to border *on weakness*; and had his gentle spirit been cast in sterner mould, he might have borne down all opposition; but it would have been in contradiction to the spirit of our holy religion, whose chief characteristic is love, and which declares that “the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be patient towards those that oppose themselves.” Yet this unceasing clamour, which disturbed the minds of many of our people, and diverted

their contributions for Church objects from their proper and legitimate channels, crippled our funds for Missionary purposes, and sorely distressed and grieved the mind of our beloved Bishop, and embittered the closing years of his life. In the last letter which I received from him, a short time before his death, he said, in allusion to our unhappy "divisions," "*They are a cause of great distress to me, particularly as I see no possible way for their removal,*" and then observed, "*that by a mild and conciliatory course on the part of the Laity, we might make good advances towards peace*"; but added, in a tone of sorrow and dejection, "*I am almost in despair. May God overrule all for our real good*" !

And thus closed the life of this most faithful servant of God, amidst much grief and dejection of spirit; but with a hope full of immortality, and with an earnest prayer on behalf of the Church he loved so well, and whose best interests he unceasingly endeavoured to promote, "*that God would overrule all for our real good.*" Let us then, dear brethren, act in the spirit of this prayer of our departed Bishop. Let the Church of Christ be very dear to us all, and have our best exertions for her peace and prosperity. Let us no longer be estranged from one another, but, by word and deed, do all we can to preserve the "unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."

But I feel that I have already detained you too long; but my heart is full, and I can but very feebly and imperfectly give utterance to my feelings, on this deeply solemn occasion. Yet, I must crave your indulgence for a few moments longer, while I briefly advert to the private, or domestic life of our dear Bishop, with which I was well and intimately acquainted. Suffice it to say, that in every relation of life, as husband, parent, or friend, he was most gentle, amiable, and affectionate. In the beloved partner of his joys and sorrows, he had a true and faithful *help-mate*; one who watched over her household, with unceasing assiduity and diligence, and tended her children with all a mother's love and affection. To this estimable lady, this most excellent wife and mother, I have heard him say, that he was largely indebted for his position in life, and for most of the domestic comfort which pervaded his household. Being himself a model of neatness, order, and regularity, the children were trained up to habits of usefulness and industry; and those that now survive, are filling high and honourable positions in life, the result, we cannot doubt, of such excellent training, on the part of their parents.

Of our dear Bishop's contributions to charitable and religious objects, I will only observe, that they were large and liberal, and given without any appearance of display or ostentation. His loss, in this, as in every other respect, will be deeply felt by the Church at large; but to his bereaved family and friends his loss is irre-

parable. However, he has left to his children, that which is better than gold or silver—the *inheritance of a good name*. And while we tender them our heartfelt sympathies, in this their sad bereavement, we humbly hope and pray that, grievous as is the heavy trial, it may be sanctified and blessed to their soul's eternal good. Thus lived and died our dear departed Bishop, and, "FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH," may be inscribed on his tomb:—and of him, as of another pious and devoted prelate, we may say, in the language of the poet :

"Thou art gone to the grave ! but thy work shall not perish,
That work which the spirit of wisdom hath blest ;
His might shall support it, His mercy shall cherish,
His love make it prosper, though thou art at rest."

Faithful servant of God, *farewell* ; thy warfare is over, thy work is accomplished, the victory is won, and thou art at rest and peace, in the bosom of thy Father and thy God.

And now, brethren, in conclusion, suffer me to address to you one word of exhortation, and I have done. Should not you daily endeavour, after the example of our departed Bishop, so to live, that when your time shall arrive, you may be able to say, "I am ready to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better" : "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit" ? This is the proper use to be made of each funeral solemnity, so far as we are individually concerned.

It should act as a warning to the careless, as an alarm to the ungodly, as a spur to the advancing Christian, as a consolation to the pious believer, and as a voice of admonition to all, "*Be ye also ready.*" God grant that the words which we have this day heard, may sink deep into our hearts, that the Holy Spirit may enable us to make a diligent use of all the means of grace which we enjoy, and to live day by day as sojourners for eternity. May our faith in Christ be daily evidenced and manifested by our *good works*, which are the only sure test of our obedience and love to the Saviour. And when the final hour of our dissolution draws nigh, may we be consoled and sustained by the heart-cheering declaration in the text: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

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