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# A SAINTLY LIFE.

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Memorials of the

Character and Life-Work

OF

CATHARINE TAIT,

WIFE OF THE LATE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

(Obiit 3rd December, 1878).

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## A Sermon

*Preached at St. Stephen's Church, Toronto, April 1st, 1883, by the*

REV. A. J. BROUGHALL, M.A.,  
INCUMBENT.

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*Published by request.*

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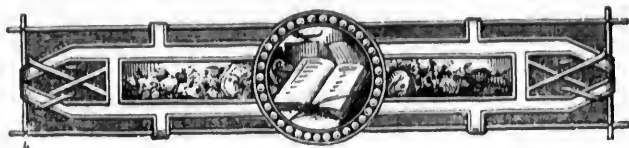
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## A SAINTLY LIFE.

*“That ye be followers (imitators) of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”—Heb. vi., 12*

**T**HE enthronement of the new Archbishop on Thursday last reminds us that while one goeth and another cometh in the Church of God, it is still our duty to bear in affectionate remembrance those who are gone before. To remember the dead, to realize the fact that they who are asleep still live to God, is a principle of our holy religion, and is both comforting and salutary to Christian people. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are exhorted to be “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”; and the reference is not the less to those of our own day and generation than

it is to the saints of olden time ; and not to men only, but to those Christian women who have given signal evidence of God's grace working in their hearts and lives.

I intimated on Sunday last that I would probably refer this morning to the wife of the late Archbishop Tait, that we may see what lessons her example suggests for our serious consideration. It is the more fitting to do so because it was a fixed principle with that estimable woman to remember the loved ones God had taken to Himself ; and it seems right that the measure she meted to others should be measured to her again.

In the course of her bright happy life God's hand was now and again laid upon her in the removal of the greater number of the children He had given her ; and we are told in her Life (which every one might read with profit) that constantly with the daily prayers of the family, there was said a carefully prepared form of thanksgiving and commemoration for



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the five little ones who, in the space of five weeks, were carried off by scarlet fever—services which were “greatly soothing to her spirit” when bowed down with sorrow.

My purpose in bringing the subject before you is not only to show what a saintly character can be developed in a Church whose two great text-books are the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, but also the grand possibilities of good which are within the reach of multitudes of women in the Church. Every one cannot be a Catharine Tait, but all can be far more like her than at present they dream of, if they will only make the effort, and set the heart to get good from the source of all good, by a diligent use of the means of grace, and by asking in an earnest spirit, “Lord; what wilt thou have me to do?”

Let me, then, as far as I can, in the short time allowed me, give a sketch of her life.

The daughter of a country clergyman, she was baptized by her father when three days

old : as a little girl, it is said, she was of remarkable beauty. In childhood she was most endearing in all her ways ; and as time passed, like the Holy Child Jesus, she grew in favour with God and man. She was looked upon as “ a ray of light ” in the home, and the joy of the whole household. Fair and fresh in features, playful and gentle in her ways was she as a child—not pert, not affected, not self-opinionated. She was what one likes to see a girl—bright, enthusiastic, large-hearted, studious, religious, devout. Although always thoughtful and earnest, her life, from the period of her confirmation, was wholly given up to God’s service. In her youthful mind there were distinct awakenings of the spiritual life, and she acted upon the call to live to God. She often said that there was a time when no life would have appeared to her more happy than that of becoming village schoolmistress in the district carved for himself by her brother-in-law out

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of a neglected parish. And at sixteen she often wished to join a mission to convert the Roman Catholics in the west of Ireland. In every respect she became a typical church-woman. In the midst of joyfulness and healthful spirits she was more and more occupied by thoughts and aspirations connected with the eternal world. Throughout the whole of her life she had a marked love for the ceremonial of the English Church as the outward form in which her deep inward piety embodied itself. As daughter, wife, mother, it may be said of her, that duty was an instinct. She was one of those "glad hearts, without reproach or blot, who do God's work and know it not." In process of time the country maiden became the wife of the headmaster of Rugby, who in a few years was appointed Dean of Carlisle, then Bishop of London, and finally Archbishop of Canterbury, second only in the realm to the princes of the blood royal.

And now I would have you note how that,

although she was *in* the world, she was not *of* the world. Her piety remained with her to the end, deepening and increasing as years rolled by. It is said of her that "scarcely any one ever so thoroughly enjoyed life"; her heart was open to every innocent pleasure that came in her way. A little amusement now and then, to use her own words, was "simply delicious." God gave her wonderfully good health, and a buoyant, cheerful nature. In the various positions which her husband was called to fill, she always moved as befitted her. She never plunged into society. She could not avoid it altogether, but when it came quietly in her way, she enjoyed it as far as was consistent with the claims of duty, which were ever present to her mind. She cared for pleasure, but she did not *live* for it. Hospitable at all times, she was most charming as a hostess; and in turn she was called to enjoy extraneous pleasures, either at court, or in the company of

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cabinet ministers, or men of letters, or bishops, or professional men of every rank and degree. And moving thus in the world, how did she bear herself as a Christian woman? The things of God, the kingdom of God, first; earthly things last. Nothing, nothing was ever allowed to interfere with her religious duties; and as to church work, she never dreamt of excusing herself from it on the ground of family duties, or of society having so many claims on her. In a very busy life it was a delight to find time for both. Her character, from infancy holy, happy, and joyous, was being deepened year by year in its earnestness and spirituality. At one period of her life, it would appear, she was keenly enjoying the earthly pleasures and blessings which surrounded her, perhaps, as she fancied, a little too keenly; and her higher life was quickened by a message which seemed to come to her from above. She seemed at the time to hear the words, "But make for

the higher!" The call met with a ready and full response of heart; and ever after, whatever her hand found to do for Christ and His Church, she did it with all her might.

Let us now look at her in the family and in the parish, or rather in the Diocese.

1. As regards her family, we cannot conceive a better model of a Christian home. We know that, according to the law of God, a father has clearly defined duties towards his children. He is to teach them the words of the divine law, and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But after all, mothers have most to do with their children. Good men and women in all ages of the Church have pointed with gratitude to the teaching and prayers of their mother as most effectual in forming and developing their character. It was so with Mrs. Tait. In an eminent degree, she was careful to instruct her family in the principles of our holy faith;

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and in the case of her only son she guided his reading and studies all through boyhood. Every morning, as a rule, she would read the Bible with her children ; and it was her habit to pray not only *for* them, but *with* them, teaching them both by precept and example to lead the Christian life to which they had been pledged in Holy Baptism. She felt the force of Keble's words referring to the baptism of infants,

“ But happiest ye, who sealed and blest,  
Back to your arms your treasure take,  
With Jesus' mark impressed,  
To nurse for Jesus' sake.”

It is the mother that must teach and Christianize her children. She must see that they be taught, so soon as they are able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise and profession was made for them in baptism. An hour in Sunday-school (perhaps not that), a few sermons poorly attended to, will not instruct a child in the Christian faith, or train it for

heaven. Let parents be careful to guard their little ones from evil influences, encourage and help them in preparing for Confirmation ; let them come with them to Holy Communion and the other services of the Lord's house, and we shall have some hope of the rising generation.

Mrs. Tait had so trained her children from infancy that when six of them had been taken from her, she had no doubt that every one, from the youngest to the oldest, went to the Saviour. What a blessed and comforting conviction! It was at Carlisle that she experienced her first great sorrow, an event that was the pivotal point of her life, and a life-long sorrow. Through five weeks of agony, one darling little child after another being cut off with fever, the iron entered into her soul. She hoped, she prayed, with all the intensity of her earnest spirit, that the uplifted hand of a Heavenly Father's Providence might be stayed. But God in His wisdom willed it



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otherwise, and she acquiesced. Soon after they left her, she wrote an account of that time of trial, in order that, as she said, when she was gone, it might speak a word of help and comfort to those upon whom a similar burden is laid, and who are feeling that it is too heavy for them to bear. To them she would say, "O, tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and He shall comfort your hearts, and put you your trust in the Lord."

By both parents the loss of their little ones was looked on as a bright chain to draw their spirits up to heaven; and thenceforward parents and the children that were left "specially prayed together daily, that the links which bound them to the world unseen might never be broken, that Christ at His coming would bring with Him those who were gone before, so that all again might be united with the Lord." The same solicitude Mrs. Tait manifested for her servants; she had a constant care for them. There was

little of the "fine lady" about her. Even as a girl in her father's house, it was her wont to teach the younger servants, and to prepare them more especially for Confirmation. This practice she continued when she had a home of her own, being careful to instruct both her children and her household, and to guide them in the paths of virtue.

2. Equally careful was she to do her duty in any parish in which her lot was from time to time cast. She was from girlhood even till old age most active in Church-work. Wherever she lived, she was known as the friend of the poor and the afflicted. People in trouble would come to her for sympathy and advice, and she would send them away strengthened by prayer as well as by ghostly counsel. If the boys at Rugby were sick, she would read and pray with them, in order that absence from home might not at such times be keenly felt. At Carlisle, as well as at Rugby, her poor neighbours found in her a

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warm-hearted friend. In London, the work-houses, homes, hospitals, sisterhoods, with their many works of charity, back alleys, cholera districts,—all alike claimed her time and attention. It is said that she visited the workhouse near her home every Sunday of her residence in London. On being settled in Lambeth palace the record is that “*at once* Mrs. Tait set to work among the poor.” So thoroughly was charitable work a part of her existence that, as a friend remarked, “she took you one minute to call on a duchess, and the next into a ward of a hospital.” On one occasion, as she entered her carriage after a lengthened round of calls, and said to the footman, “Home,” he promptly inquired, “Which?” St. Peter’s Orphanage, in the Isle of Thanet, and a Convalescent Home, are but two of the monuments she has left behind her. Naturally, she was interested in the many ordinary diocesan works of charity, and by her aid contributed largely to their

successful operation. In this respect she was indeed a help-meet for her husband, who says of her that "for thirty-five years she helped forward every good work he was called upon to promote, and, by the associations of her early Oxford bias, tempered whatever might otherwise have been harsh in his judgment of the good men from whom on principle he differed." And now looking back on the wonderful events of the Archbishop's career, and his remarkable influence on the Church in our day, it may be that there has been left on the Church of England the impress of Catharine, as well as of Archibald Campbell, Tait.

And what was the secret of this holy and useful life? How was all this wonderful activity and usefulness maintained? We may say that it was owing to the deeply religious character of this saintly woman, and to her daily, one might say hourly, communion with her God and Saviour. Hers, in a

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marked degree, was a life of prayer. Her spirit was ever real, earnest, and devotional. Prayer, private, family, and social, was ever the characteristic of her life. Herein was her strength. She lived in faith and in prayer. If one trait in her character shone out above another, it was her constant prayerfulness and her devotional frame of mind. It was her rule, her pleasure, to attend the Church's daily service. Having risen early and observed her private devotions, she would go, for instance, to the parish church at Rugby, or to morning service wherever she might happen to be, and return in time for family prayers. Intercessory prayer, too, was never neglected; as a girl she would pray for her brothers and sisters, and afterwards for her family, her friends, and for the candidates who were to be admitted to Holy Orders by her husband at the four Ember Seasons. Any change in life was made and accepted in the restful, acquiescing spirit of

prayer. She took everything as coming directly from God, and trusted Him implicitly.

The Bible, I need hardly say to you, was a loved book. "From a child she knew the Holy Scriptures;" and her customary portion was read early in the morning, even on her wedding-day. Partly from her daily attendance at Church she knew almost every Psalm by heart; and in order that she might understand what she read, she studied standard works on theology, among them some of the old English divines, and such books as Denton "on the Gospels," and Pusey on the prophet "Daniel." In passing, it may be well to remark, that history, ancient and modern, poetry, biography, modern languages, as well as divinity, yielded regular food for her mind, even in the busiest periods of her life. What a contrast this range of reading is to the feeble, worthless, so-called works of fiction, which so many women, yes, and men, are

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now-a-days content shall form their sole mental stimulus, even to the exclusion, it is to be feared, of God's Holy Word.

Sunday was to her a joyous day. It was her "day of days." Here the under-current of her life obtained freer course by hindrances being put aside for a time. There was the full measure of outward observances, of services and sacraments, and "Church-blest things." She honestly tried to give up the day, whole and entire, to God and His spiritual service, or to the service, in some form or other, of His poor and suffering creatures. It was not with her half-church, half-world. The bright stirring Sunday services she could always meet with in England, wherever her lot was cast, she greatly enjoyed; and her face, ever expressive of joy and peace, was at these seasons a picture, it is said, never to be forgotten. If she joined in that beautiful hymn, "Pleasant are Thy courts above," it was with the heart she drew nigh to God,

and not with the lips only. She felt the words, and she meant what they expressed. Her soul longed for the house of God, and was satisfied. On one occasion, during the six months which elapsed between the death of her son and her own decease, her biographer writes, "At the Holy Communion we sang Dr. Bright's lovely hymn, 'And now, O Father, mindful of the love.' I could not help watching her as she sang it. She seemed absolutely unconscious of any presence but that of the Divine. And, as she came to the last two lines,

' In Thine own service make us glad and free,  
And grant us never more to part from Thee,'

her face was peace itself." Yes, let me add, Holy Communion was to her to "spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood; to live in Christ and Christ in her; to be one with Christ and Christ with her." She thankfully received the doctrine of sacramental grace, and found it to be a blessed reality. Among



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all the changes and chances of life, in all her doings for the Church, this was the central point of union for herself, her friends, and fellow-workers. In the dark, sad days of mourning for her little girls ; on several occasions when her husband was thought to be dying ; or at times of rejoicing, such as on the morning of a daughter's marriage ; before her only son's death, the day after he died, and again on the following Sunday—there were special celebrations of the blessed sacrament for the strengthening and refreshing of their souls. In view of her own death, it was still the same. As the end drew near, the Archbishop writes, "we were now in great alarm of some sudden termination . . . and it would have left a sad memory if she had departed without that solemn rite through which her soul had always rejoiced to hold communion with her Saviour. . . . I administered the Holy Communion to her, to her daughters, and to the physician." And soon after

she joined those blissful spirits which had gone before, and which, doubtless, with outstretched arms, were ready to welcome her.

Time would fail to tell of her unselfishness, of her sympathy, of her uniform spirit of thankfulness. Her large-heartedness as opposed to narrowness and bigotry, were well known. She used to say that "though thoroughly orthodox herself, she had no faculty for detecting heresy; and could read with the deepest interest the books, and enjoy the conversation, of men from whom she differed, and admire their great qualities and help them in good works, without in any way pledging herself to follow their guidance." In fact, she had enjoyed to a great extent those helps which promote large-heartedness — "light, experience, and observation." The sick in mind or body, those in distressed circumstances, the lonely, the suffering, all came within the range of her sympathy. Blessings she always enjoyed with the keen sense of

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thankfulness. "A heart full to overflowing with gratitude to God," expresses her character and is the key to her life. Afflictions were meekly borne in submission to the will of God. Amid all her joyousness, her cup was full of sorrow. "None but my God and I know what I have suffered," she said, towards the end of a life which had been sanctified by prayer and disciplined by abundant suffering. And what was her stay through it all? She acted on the advice of the prophet Isaiah—"Who is among you that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." This was her never-failing support. She never repined, nor charged God foolishly. She could leave all in His hands, knowing that He would give what was best. One was guiding her who could guide, and guide well, in sorrow and in joy; and she felt that the years of life would soon be over, and then she should know how well it was, and how well it

had ever been, with her. Christian mothers may well desire to imitate her faith and patience, to live as she lived, and work as she worked for Christ and His Church. Many of you will confess you have not that faith you would like. Jesus Christ has been a long time with you, and yet you have not known Him. Ask God to increase your faith. Use what you have, and obey the promptings of God's spirit already felt in your heart. God will lead you on, and gradually reveal to you the higher life, that "other life the world doth not account." It is only when we feel the nothingness of earth that we begin to know the joy we have as Christians. And knowing this, the love of Christ will constrain us to work for him, whether in a lowly or an exalted position, by serving His Church below. And work, any work for Christ, if heartily rendered, will be for good to one's own soul, and help to wean us more and more from the things which are seen, and set our affection on things

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above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. God grant us all this heavenly frame of mind, and fill us more and more with His love, so that we may indeed rejoice in hope of that glory which is to be revealed at His coming.

