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## A MEMORIAL DAY. SERMON

Preached on the occasion of the autumn communion, Sept. 12th, 1886.

—BY—

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

TEXT—"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial."—Exodus XII. 14.

The text carries us back to the olden time with its striking events and tragic scenes. God's people are getting ready to leave Egypt. They had stayed there too long for their good. They had worn out their welcome. They had stayed on and on till they were crushed under the heel of a terrible despotism. But the day of their deliverance is at hand, and the Lord is preparing them for their glorious exodus. The event is to be forever memorable—memorable to them of mercies, memorable to their tyrants of judgments.

He directs them to select a lamb. This was to be done on the tenth of the month. The lamb was to be a male of the first year, and without blemish. This lamb was to be kept till the evening of the fourteenth, when it was to be killed. Every family was to have a lamb, but two small families might have a lamb between them. The blood of the lamb was to be dashed on the two side posts and lintel of the door of the house where the family, or families, were gathered. This was to be most particularly attended to. The lamb was to be roasted whole; not a bone of it was to be broken. It was then to be eaten, every member of the household taking a bit. It was to be eaten along with unleavened cakes and bitter herbs. They were to eat, prepared for their journey, their effects all packed up, their shoes on, their loins girded, their staffs in their hands. They were to be ready to start at a moment's notice.

By and by the memorable fourteenth came, and the people did as they were instructed. So far as we know the instructions were most fully carried out, and it is evident, I think, that not a few of the Egyptians even, perhaps those more especially who were connected with the Israelites by intermarriages, observed the passover, and were thus saved from the terrible judgment that fell upon their countrymen. That night the first-born in the land of Egypt were all slain, and the Lord's people were allowed to go, the Egyptians helping them all they could to get away, giving them whatever they asked, and even pressing things upon them, so eager were they to be rid of them.

Thus, what a memorable day that was. It was a day that never could be forgotten in the history of God's people. Everything was done that could be done

to make it sacred and memorable for all time to come.

Now, brethren, we are gathered here to-day, around the sacred table, for memorial purposes. If the Jews had their memorial day, a day that was to keep most sacredly, a day that was to remind them of the great salvation their God had wrought out for them; is it not most fitting for us to have our memorial day, a day that tells us what God has done for us, for He has done as much for us as for them, and more? Yes. I think I hear the Lord saying to us to-day, gathered here, what He said to the slaves of Egypt in the long long ago: "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial."

First, then, this day is memorial to us because of all its hallowed associations and personal reminiscences and experiences.

The Communion Sabbath has always been a high day with us, and I hope it will continue so. In other days it was even more so than it is now. What Easter is to the Episcopal and Romish churches, the communion used to be, and is yet, to the Scottish churches. The week preceding was observed as a sort of holy week, special religious services being held almost every day. The Thursday was the fast-day, or day for humiliation and prayer. It was kept like a Sabbath. No work was done. The shops were shut. The churches were thronged with devout worshippers. Then Friday was called the question day. The people met to discuss such questions as perplexed intending communicants. Then the Saturday was the preparation day, and Monday the Thanksgiving day. Thus the most of a week, and sometimes more, were taken up in the services connected with the communion. Ministers of note as preachers would be invited to assist, and they would preach their best sermons, put forth their greatest efforts. The people came from far and near, immense crowds that no church could accommodate, and so the services were usually out-doors, a little booth being erected for the comfort and convenience of the preacher. Then the communion tables were real tables, placed in broad aisles of the church, or perhaps out-doors, covered with white cloths, around which relays of communicants reverently gathered, singing as they came and went. The services were long, lasting from ten in the morning till five in the evening, and yet they could hardly be said to be wearisome. Oh what communions those were out on the hills or in the deep retired glens of the dear old land! We talk of sacred places, holy churches, consecrated cathedrals; but those old communion resorts were indeed sacred places, hallowed by holy memories, not a few of them made sacred by the blood that was shed in the old covenanting days in the cause of truth and right. I do not wonder that the old people, who have outlived generation, think our communions are tame, uninteresting, almost irreverent, compared to those they used to see and enjoy in other days and other lands, and they never cease to hunger for them to come back again.

Shortly after I came here I was hurriedly sent for to see an old man who was dying. He was almost too far gone to say much, but in low and broken words he told me somewhat of his history, and with a kindling up for the moment of the old fire he told me of the communions in other days he had attended. Of course he had drifted far away from them in his tossings to and fro in this new land, but in his last hours they seemed to come back to him, and he felt that Jesus was still his, and the faith of his fathers and his fatherland was still his, and so he fell asleep thus hoping and trusting; and, I felt, that after the rude buffetings of hard experiences he had come to the rest of God, the feast of everlasting love, around which are gathered the good and the great of the old past.

Now, here to-day you cannot help but go back to the past, especially the older members. There come to you here unbidden, yea in spite of you, other scenes, other days, other faces, memories that you cannot let go, and would not if you could, for there is a sweet sad solemnity about them to you. You recall your first communion, and all the doubts and misgivings you had in coming forward. But the Lord helped you then, and He has helped you ever since, and you feel now how good it was for you to have come then. You remember too, so well, some of those who came with you, and sat around you. You think of them to-day. They have finished their course perhaps, and are now where there are no more tears to weep, no more trials to endure, no more temptations to withstand, no more evils

of any kind for them. They behold the face of the Lord; they dwell in the presence of the King. You remember the Lord's servants who ministered at the altar in other days, and their sweet tender messages come back to you to-day like good news from a far off land. You remember, too, the old elders who reverently served at the tables, carrying in their hands the sacred elements from pew to pew, and they seemed then to you so worthy to be what they were, and they seem to you yet so good. Oh the memories that come rushing, the sweet and hallowed associations linked with this service! Thus this is indeed a memorial day to you. "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial."

Again, the occasion that has brought us together to-day may well be memorial to us for this other reason, that it is fitted to call to mind the struggles and battles of bygone years, to secure for us such a sweet and hallowed privilege as this. There are still in our mode of observing the communion a few things, such as the token for example, that are held on to for the purpose of reminding us of the intolerance and persecutions of past times. There was a time when we could not thus meet. There was a time when the state stepped in and interfered with church discipline, granted the privileges of membership to those the church deemed unworthy. There was a time when the church was driven to the wilderness, and when the wine of her festival was sometimes mingled with her own blood. Happily for us those bitter times have passed away. In other days the battles of religious tolerance and spiritual liberty were fought out and won, and now we eat and drink to the honor of the Lord, none daring to make us afraid. We are glad, we ought to be glad, that the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, in happier times, that we have so good a heritage. It is not good nor wise perhaps to be fighting the old battles over again, to be harping on the wrongs of bygone ages, to be opening up the old sores and causing them to bleed afresh. "Let bygones be bygones; let the past be forgotten," it is said. And I would say it too. But still, there are memories that come up to-day we ought not to forget. We would be utterly unworthy of the hallowed privileges we enjoy, if we should ever forget, or underestimate, what they cost our fathers in the olden time. If we have a feast to-day, it is to their precious blood in a very important sense we owe it, and some of that same blood flows in our veins.

And another thing, the day may come again, as in the past, for history repeats itself, when the old battles that were fought out on the sacred hills of our fatherland may have to be fought out on our own hills. This liberty that we have in Jesus to-day may be stolen from us while we sleep. We may be saying to ourselves in these careless times, "Peace! peace!" when for us is being fought and furnished a sharp sword wherewith our blood-bought rights may be wrested from us by an enemy's hand.

Thus, it is not in our interests, nor our duty, to forget, and so we are here to-day to remember. The old past is to teach the young future lessons of wisdom. It is out of its mistakes we are to learn how best to do the good to come. "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial."

But again, the great purpose that has brought us together here to-day is to remember the sufferings and death of our Lord. "This do," He says, "in remembrance of me." And the whole services is such as to set before us in a way that is fitted to strike and impress the tragedy of the cross.

There are occurrences and events, at one time of no little importance, that it is just as well to forget, and better perhaps. In this new land, with our history to write, our destiny to make, our own battles to fight, what have we to do with the strifes and struggles of other days and other lands with regard to mere speculative questions, doctrinal or ecclesiastical differences, matters of opinion? I hold the fewer we import of these old vexed questions the better. We will have vexed questions enough by and by. It is a solemn duty to forget as well as remember, to forget everything of the past that is of no manner of use to us, and that would be likely to create trouble where there need be none. But then, on the other hand, there are events, that the world cannot afford to forget, events that lie at the root of all the good there is, events that constitute the only foundation upon which a great and glorious future can be built up. Among such events, and foremost among them, is the tragedy of Calvary. We are not to forget that. To forget that would be to forget what it is all-essential

for us to remember. But we will not forget it. We are here to remember it in the way the Lord Himself wants us to remember it.

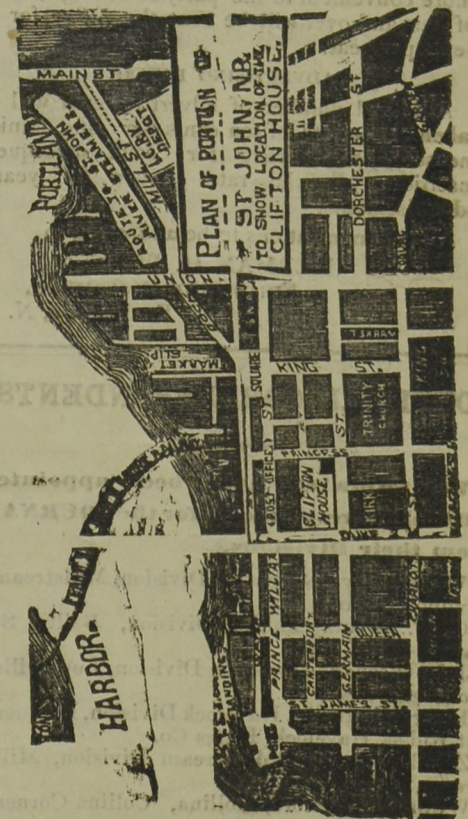
The simple elements that are soon to be on the table before us, the bread and the wine, are emblematic of the body and blood of the Lord. The broken bread, in its own simple mute way, tells us of the broken body of Him who suffered and died on the cross, and the red wine in the cup tells us of the red blood shed to wash away sin. We look, and across the wide years we see a scene that shudders the soul. But it is wise to look, and think, and feel, for it is one that means so much to us. It is a oft-told story, the crucifixion, a threadbare story, some would say, but that can never be so long as there is a soul to be saved, a human life to be helped and blessed. We need to have the story told over and over again, for it is only thus we can take in the fullness of its meaning, the sublimity and grandeur of its teachings. Come with me, then, and let us together wonder and adore, as through our tears, we gaze once more upon the tragedy of the cross.

You see yonder a young man, not yet thirty-five, driven before a howling mob through the streets of Jerusalem to the place called Calvary. He labors under a heavy cross, the oldtime instrument of death for criminals, that crushes him under its cruel weight. It is found that it is too much for him, and a black man coming into the city at the time is pressed-ganged into service as his assistant, and bears it after him and with him. It was intended for dishonor, but no greater honor could be put upon a man than to bear the cross with Jesus. When the place is reached, four Roman soldiers, men used to deeds of blood, rudely strip him, and then with mallet and spikes they nailed Him to the cross. This done, the cross, with the victim nailed to it, is lifted up and firmly planted in its place, amid the jeers and yells of an infuriated populace. And thus he dies.

You ask what it all means—what he has done that He should thus die, die in the midst of criminals, and you learn that he has done only good. The sick are there that He has healed. The lepers are there He has cleansed. The blind are there whose eyes He has opened. Perhaps the dead even are there whom His voice of power and love has raised up to life. And better than all that, men and women are there who can tell what He has done for their souls. They can tell how He found them bad, worthless, hopeless, and saved them—made them good, useful, happy, holy. You ask them, why it is they are putting one so good to death, why it is they hate him with so cruel a hatred. Ah! the truth is, men then did not understand Him, and they do not understand him yet, and so He died, and still dies over and over again.

But His death is not a mere martyr death. To look at it thus is to look at it wrongly. He is the Son of God dying for human sin, dying to take it away. He is yonder for you and me, as our sacrifice, our substitute. You see His blood flow. Ah! that blood flows to wash away my sins and yours. We say it was men's hate that nailed Him to the tree, and we denounce Judas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate and the brutal Roman soldiery, and the unfeeling mob. But there is another viewpoint, from which to look at the cross, a very much higher and grander viewpoint, the viewpoint of the Divine love. It does not, of course, lessen the crime of His murderers, but it sets the matter before us in a love-light that is transcendently sweet to behold. This is the way He Himself accounts for His death: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

You see, it was not so much men's hate as it was God's love, that set up the cross, and there is something there we had better look at. Here is a lost world, men perishing. Perishing—what a word! You can hear the hiss of the great serpent in it, the sweep and surge of the waves of the lake of fire, the awful plunge of a lost soul as with a shriek it shoots straight to its own place, the splash of hopeless tears, the gnashing of the teeth of the damned. God cannot bear to hear that word, and to save men from it, He sets up the cross, and gives His own Son to hang on. Jesus dies on the cross because God loves us. The cross is yonder with its tears and blood because God pities us, and wants to keep us, save us, and there is no other way but that one way in which it can be done. The cross is not a terrible blunder, one of the many things that need not have been at all, if men had only known better.



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