



Life for Ever and Ever

SERMON BY THE

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON

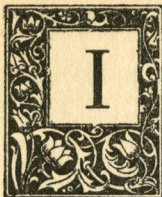
AT THE

Canadian Memorial Service

St. Paul's Cathedral

MAY 10TH, 1915

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IN THE LATTER DAYS OF APRIL LAST, Canada and the Empire, yea, the whole world, were thrilled by the story of the magnificent stand made by the Canadians against the tremendous onslaught of the German hordes at St. Julien, when for five days and five nights a few thousand of our First Contingent—a mere handful by comparison with the hosts opposing them—

withstood successfully the new and unknown horror of the poisonous gases, gaining and holding the German trenches until reinforcements arrived, and thus, as the highest military authorities of the Empire have declared, "saved the day" for the Empire and for the Allies, and for the freedom of the world."

On the evening of Monday, May 10th, a memorial service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral in Old London, for the fallen Sons of the Dominion who had given their all for the Empire. It was a service which for simple grandeur and impressiveness, deep significance and historic interest, will rank among the most memorable events held within the Empire's greatest cathedral church. The humblest and the most eminent in the Empire gathered within the sacred fane, and bowed in sympathetic mourning for the sorrow of the daughter nation. King George was represented by Lord Dundonald, Queen Alexandra by Lord Raneshorough, and H. R. H. the Governor General of Canada, by General Sir Ronald Lane. The Lord Mayor and sheriffs of the city of London attended in their full robes of office, and among the hosts of other notables were Imperial Ministers of the Crown, the acting Canadian High Commissioner, and representatives of the Allied and neutral Powers. Prominent in that vast assemblage were a number of Canadian wounded, with mutilated and bandaged limbs, who had been brought from neighboring hospitals.

The service opened with the hymn "Brief Life is Here Our Portion," followed by portions of the beautiful and impressive Burial Service of the Church of England, an anthem, "Blest are the Departed," and special prayers.

The sermon was preached by Right Hon. and Right Rev. Arthur F. Winnington-Ingram, D.D., Lord Bishop of London, from Psalm xxi 4, "He asked life of Thee and Thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and ever." The preacher said:

In honoring Canada to-night, let no one think that we are leaving out of sight the magnificent conduct of our Australian and New Zealand comrades, whose heroic conduct at the Dardanelles has thrilled the whole world, or the Indian troops who have been fighting so bravely and devotedly through the dark, long, and to them uncongenial winter, or the loyal African troops gallantly upholding the Empire far away. The mother-heart of the Empire which beats in this Cathedral feels pride and sorrow with all her children; on another night we may well commemorate here the gallant deeds of others.

But without any idea of disregard for others, to-night is the Canada night, and we commemorate a feat of arms performed by Canadians which will live in history for ever.

It was a terrible moment when our gallant French allies, naturally not expecting a species of human devilry in warfare, the like of which has not been seen for thousands of years, were overpowered by the fumes of noxious gases, which Germany among other nations had pronounced illegitimate in warfare.

We have learnt by bitter experience, and the whole civilized world learns it at last, from a further diabolical act in the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which will stain the name of Germany while time shall last, that no laws, human or divine, at present bind her, and no promise, however sacred, is considered at present to be anything but empty words.

The two children clasped in one another's arms found dead in one of the boats of the *Lusitania*, and the hundreds of gallant soldiers gasping for breath as they die in agony from poisonous gases—alike cry to Heaven for punishment on the nation which, with all its boasted culture, should now be looked upon by the whole civilized world as, for the time, "the enemy of the human race!"

It was then, at this awful moment in what has all through been a very tremendous "Day of God," when the French had been overpowered by the poisonous gas, that the manhood of Canada was tested and came out as pure and unadulterated gold.

Their line, as was so clearly shown in an eloquent description by the Canadian Record Officer, was left hanging in the air. Guy Drummond—a name known from end to end of Canada—tried to rally, with his excellent knowledge of French, the retreating Zouaves, and then, as he and his major debated what was to be done, was mortally wounded, and was the first of that band of heroes to fall.

It became necessary for Brigadier-General Turner, commanding the 3rd Brigade to throw back his left flank southward to protect his rear. In the course of the confusion which followed upon the readjustments of position, the enemy, who had advanced rapidly after his initial successes, took four British 4.7 guns in a small wood to the west of the village of St. Julien, two miles in the rear of the original French trenches.

The story of the second battle of Ypres is the story of how the Canadian Division, enormously outnumbered—for they had in front of them at least four divisions, supported by immensely heavy artillery—with a gap still existing, though reduced, in their lines, and with dispositions made hurriedly under the stimulus of critical danger, fought through the day and through the night, and then through another day and night: fought under their officers until many of those perished gloriously, and then fought from the impulsion of sheer valour because they came from fighting stock.

The enemy, of course, was aware—whether fully or not may perhaps be doubted—of the advantage this breach in the line

had given him, and immediately began to push a formidable series of attacks upon the whole of the newly-formed Canadian salient. If it is possible to distinguish when the attack was everywhere so fierce, it developed with particular intensity at this moment upon the apex of the newly-formed line, running in the direction of St. Julien.

It has already been stated that four British guns were taken in a wood comparatively early in the evening of April 22nd. In the course of that night, and under the heaviest machine-gun fire, this wood was assaulted by the Canadian Scottish, 16th Battalion of the 3rd Brigade, and the 10th Battalion of the 2nd Brigade, which was intercepted for this purpose on its way to a reserve trench. The battalions were respectively commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Leckie and Lieutenant-Colonel Boyle, and after a most fierce struggle in the light of a misty moon, they took the position at the point of the bayonet. At midnight the 2nd Battalion, under Colonel Watson, and the Toronto Regiment Queen's Own, 3rd Battalion, under Lieutenant-Colonel Rennie, both of the 1st Brigade, brought up much-needed reinforcement, and though not actually engaged in the assault were in reserve.

All through the following days and nights these battalions shared the fortunes and misfortunes of the 3rd Brigade. An officer who took part in the attack describes how the men about him fell under the fire of the machine guns, which, in his phrase, played upon them "like a watering-pot." He added quite simply, "I wrote my own life off." But the line never wavered. When one man fell another took his place, and with a final shout the survivors of the two battalions flung themselves into the wood. The German garrison was completely demoralized, and the impetuous advance of the Canadians did not cease until they reached the far side of the wood and entrenched themselves there in the position so dearly gained. They had, however, the disappointment of finding that the guns had been blown up by the enemy, and later on in the same night a most formidable concentration of artillery fire, sweeping the wood as a tropical storm sweeps the leaves from a forest, made it impossible for them to hold the position for which they had sacrificed so much.

The fighting continued without intermission all through the night, and, to those who observed the indications that the attack was being pushed with ever-growing strength, it hardly seemed possible that the Canadians fighting in positions so difficult to defend, and so little the subject of deliberate choice, could maintain their resistance for any long period. At 6 a.m. on Friday it became apparent that the left was becoming more and more involved, and a powerful German attempt to outflank it developed rapidly. The consequences, if it had been broken or outflanked, need not be insisted upon. They were not merely local.

It was therefore decided, formidable as the attempt undoubtedly was, to try and give relief by a counter-attack upon the first line of German trenches, now far, far advanced from those originally occupied by the French. This was carried out by the

Ontario 1st and 4th Battalions of the 1st Brigade, under Brigadier-General Mercer, acting in combination with a British brigade.

It is safe to say that the youngest private in the rank, as he set his teeth for the advance, knew the task in front of him, and the youngest subaltern knew all that rested upon its success. It did not seem that any human being could live in the shower of shot and shell which began to play upon the advancing troops. They suffered terrible casualties. For a short time every other man seemed to fall, but the attack was pressed ever closer and closer.

The 4th Canadian Battalion at one moment came under a particularly withering fire. For a moment—not more—it wavered. Its most gallant commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Birchall, carrying, after an old fashion, a light cane, coolly and cheerfully rallied his men, and, at the very moment when his example had infected them, fell dead at the head of his battalion. With a hoarse cry of anger they sprang forward (for, indeed, they loved him) as if to avenge his death. The astonishing attack which followed, pushed home in the face of direct frontal fire made in broad daylight, by battalions whose names should live for ever in the memories of soldiers, was carried to the first line of German trenches. After a hand-to-hand struggle the last German who resisted was bayoneted, and the trench was won.

And so the great contest went on for five days and five nights, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and by Wednesday morning, Canada, with exactly half her troops killed or wounded, still stood undaunted, facing the foe.

Well may the Record Officer close his description with these words:

"The graveyard of Canada in Flanders is large. It is very large. Those who lie there have left their mortal remains on alien soil. To Canada they have bequeathed their memories and their glory."

"On Fame's eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And Glory guards with solemn round
The bivouac of the dead."

And well may this great congregation assemble to-night to pay its last tribute to the honoured dead.

"Mother, with unbowed head,
Hear Thou across the sea
The Farewell of the dead,
The Dead who died for thee.
Greet them again with tender words and grave,
For, saving thee, themselves they could not save."

And what are we to say about these glorious young lives flung down so readily for King and country, for the freedom of the freest thing in the world, the Dominion of Canada—nay, for the freedom of the world, for international honour, and for Christian principles as governing the future conduct of the world, instead of the pagan gospel that Might is Right? As I said to the Diocesan Conference last week, you had only to look at these 10,000 free fresh faces whom I addressed in a certain country town in France—with all their officers around me, a third of whom are now dead—to see the madness and folly of talking about ours being a Robber Empire.

Who could tame these children of the prairie? They had drunk in freedom with their mother's milk, they were children of the free and would have been fathers of the free, and gladly they flung down their lives rather than that the Juggernaut car of German despotism should crush under foot the freedom which they loved better than life.

"Here fell 6,000 very gallant gentlemen" must be written one day in letters of gold over certain woods and salients in Flanders: here Goliath met David; here the would-be overweening blustering bully of the world met Canada.

II.

But did God fail these young men?

That is the really crucial question: it is the unexpressed fear of this which takes away the joy of sacrifice, and bows still deeper the mourner's head.

"Toll the bell for Percy Birchall. If I ring it at all, it will be a peal," wrote his nearest relative. But to be able to say this you must be certain in your mind of three things:

- (1) That honour is more precious than life.
- (2) That "one crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name."
- (3) That, so far from God disappointing the young soldier when he dies, He more than satisfies him. In other words, we must be able to look up to God and say:

"He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever."

The first two points are certainly more easily grasped by the young than by the old.

It was said the other day that the young grasp by a kind of instinct the idea that life is not merely a question of living over so many years; they understand that it is possible in a short time to fulfil a long time.

As Rupert Brooke, who has himself given his life for his country, said so truly:

"These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene
That men call age; and those who would have been
Their sons, they gave—their immortality."

And in his sonnet on "The Dead" he says:

"These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
"These had seen movement, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friendied;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs, and cheeks. All this is ended.

"There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night."

Or, as Shakespeare says, in words which still fire the blood of every young man to-day—

"This story shall the good man teach his son
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen of England now abed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon St. Crispin's Day."

But it is on the third point that faith grows so weak.

We have made to ourselves such unreal pictures of the life after death that no man desires it. It is a pale, ghostlike, unreal existence with no life in it, no fire, and no interest, and the heart grows cold to think that when, as Stevenson says, "the happy starred, flood-blooded spirit of the young shoots into the spiritual world," it encounters this shadowy, dead-alive, depressing existence, which is the popular idea of the life after death.

But have we fully grasped what the poet means when he says,

"It is not well that men should learn too soon
The lovely secrets kept for them that die"?

Have we not faith enough to argue from the beauty and the interest and the variety of the life God has provided for us here, to the still greater beauty and interest and variety of life which He must have provided for us there?

Do we really suppose that God had come to the end of His creative skill when He made this world, and had no imagination left for the next?

Do we really think that a God, I will not say of boundless love but even of moral rectitude, could create a mother's or a wife's love and then disappoint it?

"In my Father's House there are many mansions— if it were not so, I would have told you," said our Lord using this very argument that God's moral character demands a spacious and beautiful life after death.

And do we really suppose that Love can die?

"They sin who tell us Love can die,
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.
In Heaven ambition cannot dwell
Or avarice in the vaults of hell;
Of earth these passions of the earth,
They perish where they have their birth,
But Love is indestructible.
Its holy flame for ever burneth,
From Heaven it came; to Heaven returneth.
Full oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppressed,
In Heaven it finds its perfect rest.
It soweth here in toil and care.
But the harvest-time of Love is there."

I come round then to my question—Has God failed the trust of these young men?

They did not want to die; they loved life; they looked forward to a happy life here; they were planning out a useful and interesting future; they were not all soldiers in the ordinary sense, though they died a soldier's death; they asked life, "and they will have it." He has given them a long life, even forever and ever.

In that long life, you who are the mourners to-day will have a share; they are yours to-day, and you are theirs; the bond is unbroken; the family circle is still complete. Were you seven before? You are seven still. Unseen hands uphold you; unseen spirits speak to yours; close by, though hidden by a veil, the real, lasting activities of the other world proceed apace. Death has been for them a great promotion, and they long for

you to share their honours. "A little while and ye shall not^e see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me!" they repeat as their Master did before them. "Behold and see; it is I myself" will be their greeting to you when you do see them; they will not be perfect in their life until that time comes, for you are part of their life still, and they are incomplete without you; but when it does come, just as one of your own Canadian rivers passes over some great fall, and then dashes on into renewed and glorious strength, so will the glorious life which shone forth in the sunlight in Flanders, and seemed for the moment to fall, rush forward with more than its old grace and force, and each of your dear ones will be the first to acknowledge, in those old familiar words, the faithfulness of God: "*I asked life of Him, and He has given me a long life, even for ever and ever.*" And so we do well to have our memorial service to-night—and we mean by it at least three things:

(1) We remember these heroic sons and brothers of ours before God. They are still alive, and because they are still alive, we pray for them, as we prayed for them when we saw their dear faces.

We pray with reticence, with humility, as for those who have passed into a fuller, larger life than ours; but we know that we may, without presumption, send them forth with the most ancient and loving Christian prayer: "Grant them eternal rest and may everlasting light shine upon them."

(2) We remember them at home.

Never while the British Empire shall last shall we forget these glorious sons and brothers who have given their lives so bravely for the Flag which binds us all together, and no care is too loving or too great to be taken of the wounded, many of whom are with us in this church to-night.

(3) And lastly, we remember the land from which they have come.

Canada will be bound to us henceforth by a more sacred tie than ever; it was dear to all of us before; it will be ten times dearer now, for "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"To keep the house unharmed
Their fathers built so fair,
Deeming endurance armed
Better than brute despair,

They found the secret of the word that saith,
'Service is sweet, for all true life is death.'

So greet thou well thy dead
Across the homeless sea,
And be thou comforted
Because they died for thee.

Far off they served, but now their deed is done,
For evermore their life and thine are one."

At the conclusion of the address the Dead March in "Saul" was played by the band of the Coldstream Guards, and the Grenadiers sounded "The Last Post." The service concluded with Canada's national anthem, "O Canada."