

Dedication of Memorial Tablets

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AT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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On Sunday, March 27th, a crowded congregation witnessed the dedication of two tablets in the Presbyterian Church erected in memory of two young adherents who lost their lives in the last war—John McGregor and Charles Cruickshank.

Rev. P. A. Smith from Penhurst, an old friend of both family circles, joined Rev. R. MacArthur in the special morning service and delivered the sermon.

Taking as a text for the address "What mean ye by these stones?" (Joshua 3-6) Rev. P. A. Smith began by referring to the well known incident in the story of the Israelites, where they had crossed the Jordan near Jericho; and feeling they had been wonderfully helped by God representatives of the tribes gathered large stones and set them up as a memorial. In so doing they established a saluting base past which future generations could in imagination march and recall they had learned three things in wilderness days. These lessons were: First, something about God, His character and His purpose for the world; second, something about themselves, especially their call to serve God's purpose and the discipline which had fitted them for it; and third, something about other people who should be regarded as neighbours. "Where they had been slack, flabby and inclined to lean, now they were taunt, disciplined and able to stand on their own feet. They had left Egypt as a rabble; they crossed Jordan as a nation." The God who had first been a Provider, doing things for them had now become their Commander, calling on them to do things for Him. On their banners were inscribed "Love God" and "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

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The speaker went on to say there was something common between this association of religion with neighborhood and the points of the Atlantic Charter, freedom of religion and speech, and from want and fear, which were the planks of 20th Century democracy, and round which had raged resistance to aggression in two World wars. "The four freedoms mean civilisation moving forward in steady march; any infringement of them strikes at their sense of fairplay, and resistance in such case has all the appeal of a crusade, a holy war, the only war which can be justified." Into such a war Australians had been called twice in a generation because they felt that bullies and bandits on the natural scale had to be resisted.

In such struggles the democratic nation could easily be caught unprepared by unscrupulous nations who were prepared to use any despicable means to a diabolic end. This meant that at the beginning the Allies had to fight with their backs to the wall, and that involved such setbacks as the Australians suffered at Gallipoli and Malaya. But it had to be remembered that the delay to Japanese plans caused by the resistance in Malaya, ending as it did in surrender, saved Australia from the horrors of armed invasion; and "it was Australian men who beating the Japanese at their own game of jungle fighting scaled the heights of the Owen Stanley Range and started the movement which swept the Pacific clear of the piratical hordes of Japan."

The speaker went on to speak of the conditions endured by prisoners of war. "But what of the prisoners themselves? Weakened by unremitting toil, enfeebled by starvation, worn by disease, and hungering for news from home, they refused to part with their integrity; they shared their scanty rations with sick mates, in camps they organised games, listened to lectures; they maintained their dignity in face of insults; though dragging weary feet their spirits never faltered: in a word they were heroes in

in a word they were heroes in rags. Perhaps no page in the story of Australia at war is so worthy of being written as that of our suffering prisoners and the victory they wrested from bitter defeat.

What of the folks at home? For three and a half years they were almost cut off from news of the lads from home. An occasional voice from time to time came over the air, and many nights folk sat with strained ears over their wireless and picked up tiny fragments of information. Many parcels of food were sent, but nothing reliable came through as to whether they were received. To all intents the silence remained unbroken, save by an occasional postcard. Then came VP Day and all families became agog with eagerness. Relief ships were rushed through and receiving camps established. Next the

published lists of those who came through; and many hearts rejoiced. But some names remained missing as the weeks wore on, and hopes died down in some hearts. At last the final word which shut the door on hope; and folk learned that if we had rejoiced with those who had rejoiced, we must now weep with those who weep.

Such bitter loss came to some ten families of our own district; and among them two within the circle of fellowship of our own church here and at Gunyerwardi, John McGregor and Charlie Cruickshank.

John McGregor was one of a family whom fifty years of association with the community and church life have become part of the fabric and fibre of this district. To this church he belonged as a boy at Sunday School, and grew up in fellowship with this church. Somewhat delicate as a boy his later vigor and robustness allowed him to take part in its sporting activities. With a sound body was united a thoughtful mind enriched by wide reading about men and affairs. He showed sturdiness of character

ing about men and affairs. He showed sturdiness of character and ability to stand on his own feet; and it was in the years of the depression that he made a successful business venture at Croppa Creek and where he won respect from all sorts and conditions of men, winning friends alike among navvies and the men on the land. There was an intimate side that he showed to his friends and family which was altogether one of charm. His abounding good spirits were a tonic to his mates in the army and we see him as he marches out of sight with his unconquerable smile.

In Charlie Cruickshank we also have one of a family identified closely with Warialda district for over 70 years, and who in their present-day representatives have put their stamp upon it; and between the Cruickshank and McGregor families there has been a warm friendship. In Charlie a certain reserve stood, as the word means for capacity, steadiness and equanimity to his work in the life of the land. The land is a great character builder, and does much to mould the stuff out of which soldiers are made. It is largely owing to men like him who know their own paddocks that the daily bread is put on the tables - of those who live in cities. Among his friends he moved easily and those who knew him enjoyed him most. His nearest loyalty was for his aunt who had brought him up and who for him was a mother and the cousins to whom he was a brother.

One of his characteristics was a scrupulous fairness. From one of his mates it came through that when in the prisoners' compound at Changi, when sometimes hungry men helped themselves to seeds which should be planted for future supplies of food, he put up with the hunger; and even when toiling for his captors he would not be classed as a malingerer. He showed himself a good comrade, and in the closing scenes we see him at the last supported by the comrades whom he had stood by in their turn.

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The speaker concluded by quoting words used by John Buchan of his brother Alastair who died in 1st World War.

"In August 14 he found himself and entered upon the task to which he was dedicated. He had a remarkable gift for managing men especially bad characters and he endeared himself to all who served with him. He was never out of temper or depressed, and wherever he was he diffused an air of confidence and hope. When I ran across him during the last stages of the battle of the Somme he seemed the only cheerful thing in a grey world I wonder if the future historian will realise how much the strength of the British army was due to the boys of 20 who brought the kindly ardour of youth into the business of war and died before they lost their freshness."