

## Wesleyan Church, East Maitland.

### COMMEMORATION OF THE LATE WILLIAM BURGESS.

Yesterday the services at the Wesleyan Church, East Maitland, were conducted by the Rev. George Lane, a former superintendent of the Maitland Circuit, and both morning and evening had a bearing upon the occasion for the special service of the afternoon, described below.

At the morning service there was a good congregation, and the hymns and the lessons were chosen with applicableness to the circumstances in which the people met. Mr. Lane's sermon was based on St. John, xiv., 1, 2, 3,—“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” The preacher said it was needless to say whose words these were—they were the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. No man could have said such words: only the Saviour of the world could have dared to require such faith, and to promise such comfort and such glory. They were the words of Christ: unlike the teaching of a Greek philosopher, who was said to have drawn men's minds from the vain contemplation of the starry heavens to the realities of earth, the doctrine of Jesus withdrew men's minds from grovelling in worldly affairs and fixed them upon the nobler, purer, higher contemplations of God and a future eternal glory. These words were spoken to cheer those whom the Saviour was about to leave,—they were spoken to comfort and to strengthen them amid the peculiar trials which were forthcoming for them. In His words was to be seen a renewal of the assurance He had already given that, having loved His own, He would love them to the end. The world's friendships are temporary: the love of Christ is unending to those who are His own. The words of the Son of God in the text had proved a perpetual benediction and a solace to the sorrowing. It was to be noted that, as in this case, Christ's words as His life on earth came to a close became more and more tender. These words were spoken when he had despatched Judas to his evil work, had warned Peter of his approaching default from loyalty but with no bitterness, and had instituted that precious institution called the Lord's Supper. And then, as a father to his children, he gave the disciples the blessed revelation of the text—he opened what was a stream of refreshment to the believing in all ages. The Old Testament saints had a vague foreshadowing of the heavenly state, but these words of Christ were a definite revelation of it—as an abiding home of which God was the Father, and wherein Christ was the Elder Brother, and where His children by faith constituted the family. Where heaven is was a secret which belonged to God, but God had revealed to us the existence of heaven, and we must be satisfied with that. That it did exist was a great fact, and perhaps it was nearer to us than we thought. Heaven was exhibited in this text as a home where the family of God was separated by no divisions; as the place where God peculiarly dwells, as a permanent possession—

God peculiarly dwells, as a permanent possession—an abiding-place, the word mansions in its earlier signification implying endurance. Earth was beautiful though sin-stained and the theatre of man's rebellion against God, but who could depict the beauty of heaven, where no sin was, and where God dwelled. Heaven too was the place which Christ was preparing for his people, and the reality of its existence was assured by the solemn words—“If it were not so, I would have told you.” The lesson of the text was that heaven was a prepared place for a prepared people; and the preacher concluded an earnest discourse by asking his hearers who had gone before, whether they were in fact fitting themselves for entry into those mansions in the Father's House which await the faithful. He prayed that it might be so.

The special memorial service was held in the afternoon, when the tablet to the memory of the late William Burgess was unveiled. The gentleman thus honoured was for many years a substantial pillar of the church in East Maitland. A very large number of persons assembled, and the seating accommodation proving inadequate, chairs and forms had to be placed down the aisle. Among the visitors were some from West Maitland, East Maitland, Morpeth, Hinton, Largs, and other parts of the district. The Rev. George Lane, of Sydney, an old friend of the deceased, and a former minister of the East Maitland circuit, occupied the pulpit. There was a very large choir present under the conductorship of Mr. B. Sullivan. The proceedings took the form of an ordinary morning or evening service, with the inclusion of the unveiling of the tablet and the memorial sermon, the hymns and Scripture readings being appropriate to the occasion. The tablet was a marble scroll of chaste design, set in a black background, placed on the wall on the right-hand side of the preacher, and was the work of Mr. G. Arthur, stonemason, of East Maitland, on whom it reflects great credit.

The reading was taken from the Book of Revelation, vii., 9, and the address from the 14th verse of the same chapter and Book, “And I said unto him, sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The preacher delivered a splendid address from this verse on the human inhabitants of heaven. After another hymn from the choir, the Rev. George Lane took the veil from off the tablet, which had been covered with a black robe.

The preacher said he had undertaken the work of unveiling the tablet, because being an old friend of the departed one, he had been asked—not because he was any more fitted to do it than others—to show honour and esteem to one who was worthy of such. The tablet which he thus unveiled bore the

following inscription:—“Sacred to the memory of William Burgess. Born at Hastings, England, November 12th, 1819; died at East Maitland, September 12th, 1892, and for upwards of fifty years a consistent member, faithful officer, and zealous local preacher of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in this district. Erected as a tribute of love and esteem by his friends and fellow worshippers.” They would see that the tablet was of marble, and therefore of a durable character, which

They would see that the tablet was of marble, and therefore of a durable character, which he hoped would be able to be said of their memory of the departed one. William Burgess was what he appeared to be—a frank, humble-minded, christian man. The inscription, they would agree with him, was perfectly true; not a bit too much, and he hoped not too little or that anything had been left out. It was said that tombstones do not always speak the truth, but he thought that the tablet was true regarding the one whom they were then engaged in honoring. He ~~was~~ <sup>revealed</sup> that day—on a Sabbath when most of the departed one's good had been done—it appeared to him a fitting occasion. He was essentially a Christian man, a Christian man in connection with the Wesleyan Church, and a local preacher of that great church of theirs. The first local preacher in connection with the Methodist Church bore the name of Thomas Maxwell, and he began his work just 150 years ago. John Wesley, as they knew, was a high churchman: the responsibilities cast upon him oppressed him. He had churches in different towns in England, and he could not be present with all. It became an urgent necessity for the spiritual oversight and instruction of the people who were crying out for the Word of God, to place someone over them. Then he called upon the best and most intellectual men around him to take his place in his absence. These were allowed to read the Scriptures, but were not permitted to preach: Wesley held that was the right of the ordained clergy alone. On one occasion, at Bristol, when Wesley was absent, Maxwell, carried away by his feelings, began to preach, and with such success and power that it was believed he was called upon by God to do so. Wesley heard of the matter, and hurried back to stop such disgraceful proceedings. But his mother, who had heard and been moved by Maxwell, persuaded Wesley to hear him and judge before taking action. He did hear him, and all his objections fell to the ground and disappeared. Maxwell was the first of a noble army, who exercised great influence and are of great assistance to the regular preachers. They number in the Christian world at the present time 100,000, while there were 2,500 in the Australasian colonies. The first sermon in connection with the first church of theirs in the great American continent was preached by a layman. That little seed dropped by a local preacher's hand has grown and thrived. Out of it had arisen that great Methodist Church, about which Abraham Lincoln had said: "She had sent more men into the field, had contributed more money, and had done more for the abolition of slavery than any other." The Wesleyan Church at West Maitland many years ago had but two ministers, while there were twenty different services to be conducted during the day. It would have been impossible for them to do it, but for the help received from such men as William Burgess. Just think of the times when he began his work in this colony. He came out here about the year 1840, a young man who had just attained his majority, when he had the work thrust upon him. That was a time of depression worse than that through which they had just passed—when the Bank of Australia failed and money was withdrawn from circulation, when there was not more than ten Wesleyan Ministers on the continent of Australia, and when the means of grace were not so plentiful. As one had said to him, "There was a famine in the land—not of food, but of the

so plentiful. As one had said to him, "There was a famine in the land—not of food, but of the word of God." It was in such times as those that William Burgess had given his strength of heart for the good work. Some of them knew what kind of man he was—good, frank, and earnest, and with a quaint sense of humour. When horses were not available he would walk to Newcastle and back, to Sugarloaf, Lochinvar, and other outlying places, to conduct services, and say little or nothing about his work. It was done without fee or reward, or without looking for praise. He did it as a servant of that church, but did it for the benefit of his country, and therefore proved himself a truer patriot than those who had won the emoluments and honour of office. He was an unselfish man—one who was seldom heard of in the public press or in connection with public bodies. He was a helper of all that was good, and had many attributes as a preacher. His education was imperfect, his opportunities of studies limited, but he had that knowledge of the Scriptures and desires for the benefit of his fellow men which go to make a man fitted to stand in the pulpit. He had heard him on at least two occasions, and he admired his earnestness and definition of the truth. He wanted to ask the young women and men would they stand up for Christianity and the good of their country as he had done? He to whom the tablet was erected, and was to be a perpetual memorial of, was one of noble ambitions, and his ministry and influence had been of incalculable value to this country, and those in it and he asked them to honour and remember him. If they would follow in his footsteps some such memorial might be erected to their memories, but if not, never mind: if they lived properly they would receive a crown of glory that would never fade away.

The service was brought to a conclusion by the choir singing "Onward, Christian soldiers."

At the evening service there was likewise a large congregation. The text was Isaiah vi., 5, 6, 7, 8,— "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged. Also, I heard the voice of the Lord saying Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." The preacher remarked that at the first reading of this chapter of Isaiah, it would seem to be contradictory of the alleged invisibility and spirituality of the Divine Being. But as a matter of fact the Divine Being from the very beginning of human history has been accustomed to reveal himself in the guise of an angel, in human form, and peculiarly in the Shekinah in the Temple; these manifestations of God being preparations for and preludes to that last, fullest, and most convincing of all these manifold revelations—the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The purpose of these manifestations of God was always high and holy. Instances were cited, and the instance narrated in the text was said to be one of the most remarkable. It occurred in the year when King Uziah died—a good King of Judah whose

THE MOST REMARKABLE. It occurred in the year when King Uzziah died—a good King of Judah whose death left the young prophet Isaiah unprotected and discouraged in a sinful and inimical community. Isaiah mourned the King as a relative and as a protector, and the vision came to him in these circumstances as an incentive to look up from earth to heaven for defence and aid. In like circumstances, all men should remember that God is in heaven, that God's truth will stand and that the building up of His Kingdom and His righteousness are a concern of His own which He will not neglect. Further, the vision was a vision of Christ in His pre-incarnation glory, on an occasion when He came to help his people. We were too prone, the preacher said, to think of Christ as the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and did not always sufficiently realise that He was a Being to whom all power and dominion and majesty had been given, and who, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, had been, was, and would be, the succour of His chosen. Here He had revealed Himself in the temple. There God always met His people. In the vision Christ was seated on a throne—above all conflict, royal, strong, secure, immovable and eternal. About Him stood the seraphim—mentioned only here in the whole Bible, and probably identical with the cherubim—bright intelligences whom God had created to people His heaven, for that was no place of majestic solitudes and silences. Yet mankind, by virtue of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, had been raised above the angels. The wings of the seraphim were six—those with which they veiled their faces indicated their humility and modesty in the presence of the Omniscient—a lesson for modern scientists whose arrogance of knowledge was so conspicuous. Those which veiled their feet betokened their sense of unworthiness, and those with which they flew were the mark of their earnestness, promptitude and enthusiasm in the service of Jehovah. Their service was to raise the anthem of Holy, Holy, Holy,—a praise of God's holiness. God truly filled the universe with His presence, and His power

was everywhere seen; but the good time coming was the time when His holiness would fill the earth. It was that time for which Christians pray and live and hope for. The first effect of the vision of God upon Isaiah was a consciousness of his sinfulness. Such an effect always followed the first approach of man to the God of purity. But, in a parable which prefigured the atonement to be made by Christ, the sin of the prophet was purged—a seraph touched his lips with a live coal from the altar. And then, being made thus clean, his nature was transformed, and when a call was made for a servant of the Lord, Isaiah, doubting no longer, mourning no more over the loss of his earthly guardian, was ready with his answer, and said, boldly, "Here am I; send me." It was such willingness to work for God that was wanted in the church; what she should long for was a descent of the Holy Spirit, so that those whose hearts had been renewed and whose sins had been washed away should hold themselves ready to speak for God.