

26th February

Memory verse

Thou therefore **endure hardness,**
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:3

Information on today's memory verse can be found in the lesson for 22nd February.

So many interesting things happened today that this is rather a long lesson. Perhaps you could pick out some things and leave the rest for another year. We begin with two stories from Africa. The first one is a story of courage and duty that every British child should know.

Birkenhead Drill

HMS Birkenhead was a troopship. One of the first iron hulled ships built for the navy, she was a steam powered paddle ship although she also had sails. In 1852 she was carrying soldiers, their officers and also officers' wives and families to South Africa from Britain. The soldiers were mostly new recruits but Colonel Seaton had been training them on board, making what use he could of the limited deck space and fostering comradeship and military discipline. All went well on the voyage and the ship reached the South African coast. Here they began sailing along about three miles out from the shore.

Early in the morning of the 26th February the voice of the leads-man (whose job it was to swing a lead in the water and so measure the depth) broke the silence of the night: "12 fathoms; all's well."



"Four bells!" came another reassuring voice telling the crews on their various watches that they were halfway through the night.

Suddenly in the darkness came an awful sound. The Birkenhead had struck some rocks not previously known about. The paddle wheels, still turning, drove the ship further onto the rocks, tearing a great gash in the ship's hull into which the sea immediately began to rush. Many of the men who were in their bunks sleeping could not escape and were drowned immediately. The captain, Captain Salmond, was thrown out of bed. He made his way as fast as he could onto the deck so that he could assess the damage, shouting orders as he went to get the women and children up onto the deck. Amazingly all the women and children were brought safely on to the deck: they must have been very frightened.

The Birkenhead carried distress rockets that could be fired to call for help from any other shipping that might be nearby or from the shore. But they were far away from such help now: the rockets were fired in vain.

Colonel Seaton, his sword belted on over his nightclothes, began to muster the wounded on the deck. He made his men understand the need for complete discipline and control. The ship was sinking and pumping out water was urgent so he quickly found sixty of his men to go to the captain and help with the chain pumps.

"Almost everybody kept silent, indeed nothing was heard, but the kicking of the [cavalry] horses and the orders of Salmond, all given in a clear firm voice," said a survivor afterwards.

The sailors worked to lower the lifeboats. It was then that they made a shocking discovery: of the eight lifeboats, only two could be released. The others had been painted over or rusted into place and were stuck fast where they were so most people would be going into the water, not into a lifeboat.

In the end three boats were launched, including the ship's cutter, but one capsized. Colonel Seaton made it clear who would be going in the available boats and although it is now thought he did not use the actual phrase “women and children first” – words which are now known as “Birkenhead Drill” in honour of what happened that night – all the wives and children were put into the boats.

In those days, in the confusion of a ship wreck, the cry would go up “save yourselves” and every individual would try to do just that. But Colonel Seaton was determined that discipline and chivalry would prevail: there was to be no scramble or rush for the boats. He selected a nineteen year old ensign, Alexander Russell, to go in the cutter to guide and help the women and children. Colonel Seaton knew that if the men rushed to the boats they would be swamped and all lives would be lost. He stood at the end of the gang plank, with his sword drawn, in case anyone else tried to get into the boat. But not a man moved on the deck. All stayed in line as he had ordered looking up at the southern cross in the sky as the women and children were rowed away into the darkness.

Then Seaton marshalled his men into what is called “funeral order” i.e. youngest first, for there were still spaces in the other boats. At this moment another disaster occurred. Captain Salmond tried to get the ship off the rocks by reversing her paddle-wheels. But this ripped another hole in the Birkenhead's hull, filling the boiler-room with water and putting out the fires. The ship was now in deeper water with no engine power.

Thinking that the cavalry horses might be able to swim to shore they were put into the water. Some sources say the horses did not survive in the shark infested sea, others say they made it to the shore that was two miles distant.

The ship now snapped into two parts on the reef. Still the soldiers remained where they had been ordered to stand. The funnel snapped and fell into the water. More orders were given and the men worked on the lifeboats – could they free up some more of them to use? Alas, the boats remained stubbornly where they were.

Captain Salmond meanwhile had climbed up into the rigging. He would go down with his ship but he wanted to stay out of the water as long as possible. From here he shouted to the men to jump overboard and swim to the boats that had been launched but Colonel Seaton realised what would happen if they did. He shouted, “You will swamp the cutter; you will kill the women and children. I beg of you not to do this and I beg you to stay where you are.”

The officers took up his call shouting to the men, “hold the line! hold the line! hold the line!” and not a man moved.

The men remained in good order and Colonel Seaton's voice was heard shouting, “God bless you all, God bless you all,” as the Birkenhead slipped below the water.

“The order and regularity that prevailed on board from the moment the ship struck till she totally disappeared far exceeded anything that I thought could be effected by the best discipline,” said Captain Wright of the Ninety-First Regiment, one of the officers who survived, afterwards. “It is the more to be wondered at seeing that most of the soldiers were but a short time in the service. Every man did as he was directed and there was not a cry or a murmur among them until the vessel made her final plunge. All received their orders and had them carried out as if the men were embarking

instead of going to the bottom of the sea. There was only one difference: that I never saw an embarkation conducted with so little noise or confusion.”

The ship went down very quickly. The men struggled in the shark infested waters. The women in the cutter were horrified and began demanding that the boats be taken back towards the men in the water. Despite their danger from sharks, the men would not move towards the boats or board them. Young Ensign Alexander Russell jumped into the water and heaved aboard in his place the husband of one of the wives on board. Russell was one of the 430 men who died as did Captain Salmond and Colonel Seaton but every single woman and child was saved.

Next morning, another ship discovered one of the cutters, rescued those in the second boat and returned to the area of the disaster where a few men were found still alive clinging to the rigging.

News of what had happened did not reach Britain until April but when it did it became a legend. Colonel Seaton and his men had changed naval protocol forever. The cry of “Women and children first!” was established as the best – and the British – way to do things.

Something to think about

Why is the Birkenhead Drill an outworking of Christian principles? Can you find the Bible passages from which it springs?

Hint: John 15:13 and 1 Peter 3:7 make good starting points. Also note in Matthew 24 that when he is asked about the destruction of temple, Jesus himself shows greatest concern over the fate of the women and children (v. 19).

Map Work

Get out your atlas and find the island of **Madagascar**. The picture shows Ranavalona I (born Rabodoandrianampoinimerina and also called Ramavo (1778–1861) Queen of Madagascar from 1828 until her death.

Missionaries from the London Missionary Society arrived in Madagascar in 1818 and, with somewhat reluctant permission from King Radama I, they set up schools and a printing press.¹ When Radama died his wife took the throne. To begin with she followed her husband's example but then one day...



...a chief of rank and influence presented himself at the palace, requesting to see the queen; and on her majesty's appearing, he is reported to have addressed her to the following effect,

“I am come to ask your majesty for a spear, a bright and sharp spear – grant my request.”

On its being inquired why he wanted a spear, he answered, that he had seen the dishonour done by the influence of the foreigners to the idols, the sacred guardians of the land, to the memory of her majesty's illustrious ancestors, whereby the nation would be deprived of their protection, to which alone they owed their safety; that the hearts of the people were already turned from the customs of their ancestors, and from her majesty, their successor, that by their instructions, their brotherhood, and their books, the foreigners had already secured to their interest many of rank and wealth in the army, and the offices of government, many among the farmers and peasantry, and vast numbers of the slaves. That all this was only preparatory to the arrival of forces from their country, which, as

¹ You can see some of their work here: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-first-new-testament-in-malagasy>

soon as the Missionaries should send word that all was ready, would come over, and take possession of the kingdom. This, it was added, would be easy, as the people would be already alienated from their own government, and prepossessed in favour of the foreigners.

The chief is said to have added, “Such will be the issue of the teaching by the foreigners; and I do not wish to live to see that calamity come upon our country, to see our own slaves employed against us; therefore I ask a spear, to pierce my heart, that I may die before that evil day comes.”²

The queen took this bitter message to heart. In fact she was reportedly furious, vowing to exterminate Christianity in Madagascar if it meant the death of every Christian Malagasy person. She gave a kabary or traditional Malagasy speech to her people on **February 26**, 1835 in which she formally forbade the practice of Christianity among her subjects. However, the missionaries had brought many benefits to Madagascar. Their school taught not only literacy and Christianity but also trades and handicrafts which were very valuable. In her Kabary discourse, Ranaivalona explained that the foreigners were still free to practice their religion. Only the Malagasy people were forbidden to become Christians themselves. If they did, they faced the death penalty. She was happy to allow the missionaries to stay – her country would reap the economic benefits.

A great assembly of people was called together in the capital city and informed of the Queen's decision. She told them that they had one month during which if they had been baptised, kept the Sabbath or met together for prayer they could confess their misdeed and forsake these “new” ways. If they did not confess but were found out they would face death.

Thus a terrible persecution was unleashed on Malagasy Christians. Many complied – at least outwardly – but many did not. The missionaries eventually felt they had no option but to leave as they could no longer carry on the work for which they had come. Faithful Malagasy Christians continued to suffer and in 1849 alone 1,900 people were fined, jailed, or otherwise punished for their Christian faith, of whom 18 were executed.

But when Ranaivalona I died there was a blessed change. Her son, Radama II, reversed much of his mother's policy. Freedom of religion was granted once more and missionaries returned to Madagascar.

And in Madagascar now? Although there is much nominal Christianity it is often blended with the traditional ancestor worship of the Malagasy. This can be traced back to the days of the good Christian queen, Ranaivalona II, who threw out the traditional talismans or sampys of the Malagasy Court and replaced them with the Bible. The sampys had been consulted by the royal family and their keepers had great power. The queen had the sampys burned on her public conversion to Christianity, signalling a complete break with Malagasy ancestor worship. There was a great movement to Christianity in Madagascar as people wanted to express their loyalty and political allegiance to the royal family. Sadly, however, those who converted in this way often carried on with their ancestor worship as well, blending it with elements of Christianity as convenient. The Malagasy church was perhaps healthier under the persecuting Ranaivalona I than under the Christian Ranaivalona II.



Something to do

Ranaivalona I announced her policies to her people by means of a Kabary. This was a highly stylized form of speech delivered in a loud voice in a public gathering and it had been a vital part of

² William Ellis, *History of Madagascar* (London, 1838)

Malagasy culture for centuries. In modern Madagascar the Kabary survives as a kind of art form or entertainment delivered by specialists on all important occasions especially engagements, weddings and funerals. It has to include traditional proverbs and sayings called *Ohabolana* and must also stir the emotions of the listeners.

A Kabary is never read. In fact this is the key to the whole idea for it existed long before most Malagasy could read and write. Generally a Kabary is a very long speech "...because the Malagasy people never say directly when they want to say something"³ and although to a certain extent improvised on the spot, it has a definite form.

First there is an introduction which consists of a foreword and an apology or explanation of the reason for the kabary, which offers homage to the Creator then to the authorities and so on down in rank to the local family involved. Then comes the central section and finally there is a section "showing respect for the audience."

Decide on a suitable occasion, imaginary or real at which you could deliver a (short!) Kabary. If you like you could choose to imagine a historical situation. Ideal for today would be an imaginary gathering to commemorate the Wreck of the Birkenhead. This will be a British Kabary, of course, so there is no need to be indirect in what you say! Also, as you come from a written tradition not an oral one, you can use notes or headings to help you if you wish. However, follow the Kabary format and begin with praise to God. Then acknowledge the various authorities national and local and move down to your own family. Then comes the central section where you make your main point or deliver your main information. Finally, consider your audience and thank them for listening.

A Malagasy Kabary has to include traditional proverbs. You can do this with English proverbs you might know or you could try to incorporate some Malagasy proverbs. Here are a few you might like to think about:

Words are like eggs: when they are hatched they have wings.

May your friendship not be like a stone: if it breaks you cannot put the pieces together. May it be like iron: when it breaks, you can weld the pieces back together.

Behave like the chameleon: look forward and observe behind.⁴



A story of archaeology to read⁵

When buildings are demolished in London and new developments replace them, archaeologists are allowed to explore the site before the new building begins. Do you remember reading in January⁶ about the hoard of Roman writing tablets discovered in the City of London in this way? On 26th February 2022 news began to break of another spectacular find in London, this time in Southwark on the south bank of the Thames.

The Museum of London Archaeology's team were working on a site that had been cleared for a new housing, retail and office development to be called the Liberty of Southwark. They discovered a Roman mosaic floor with the largest area of any Roman mosaic discovered in London in the past fifty years. This, together with other artefacts found, led them to conclude that the site was possibly a kind of Roman hotel called a *mansio* and it is fascinating to learn that a mosaic with many of the



3 <https://glli-us.org/2021/12/13/kabary-traditional-malagasy-speech/>

4 Selected from: <https://glli-us.org/2021/12/11/ohabolana-malagasy-proverbs/>

5 Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=607916> Information from <https://www.ianvisits.co.uk/articles/remarkable-roman-mosaic-discovered-in-southwark-52165/> and other sources.

6 See the lesson for 8th January.

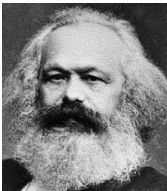


same elements was found in Trier, Germany. Both mosaics include large, colourful flowers surrounded by bands of intertwining strands – called “guilloche.” You can see an example of a guilloche at the foot of the previous page.⁷ There are also lotus flowers and several different geometric elements, including a pattern sometimes called Solomon’s Knot, made of two interlaced loops which you can see in the picture on the left. The similarities are so strong that the archaeologists conclude that the two mosaics were made by the same team of workers who perhaps travelled round Europe making such floors.

Something to do

Try drawing a Solomon's' knot or guilloche⁸ pattern yourself. If you would like to make the pattern in mosaics there are suggestions for mosaic work on 29th May and April 28th.

Something to think about⁹



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, had run away from Germany to London. They were revolutionaries but the German revolution they were involved in was a failure and now they were in danger. On 26th February 1848 the two young men published a pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*. The ideas in that little pamphlet led to prolonged wars and resulted in the people of half the developed world living in oppressed conditions in totalitarian states.



This is how their pamphlet begins:

A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism.

This sounds like a threat (that was to prove only too accurate) but actually Marx and Engels considered it a promise of something *good*. The pamphlet continued:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

By “class struggles” they meant a war between the rich and the poor, the labourers and those who employed them.

This would be solved, they said, by the abolition of private property which means no one would personally own anything, everything would be owned by all and used for the common good.

This would

...raise the proletarians [workers] to the position of the ruling class...

The pamphlet ended with words that have become famous:

The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite.

If you did the lesson about Thomas Moore on 17th April last year you will recognise these ideas as *Utopian*. Like all Utopian systems, Communism fails because it does not recognise the fallen nature

7 Image: By xiquinhosilva - 11852 - Vatican - Pius-Clementine Museum, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30178285>

8 Hint to help you get started here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=fJfp_ZsJK5k

9 Information from *W B Marsh and Bruce Carrick 366 A Leap Year of Great Stories* (Cambridge, 2007) and other sources.

of mankind. Engels thought that the state would gradually wither away because, when the workers took control, everyone would have a fair share of everything. In fact wherever communism was tried out, the state, far from withering away, ruled with an iron grip. For Russians, Eastern Europeans and others in Communist states, it was anything but fair shares for all. Communist Party members got the best of everything and working people were lucky if they did not starve to death.

Communism sounds very Christian: sharing everything you have with others sounds like a biblical idea. There is even a passage in Acts that talks of the church at Jerusalem doing just this – selling their possessions and having all things in common. However the Bible does not tell Christians that this is how they should all act at all times. It just describes how this particular church acted at that time. In fact, the Jerusalem Christians knew that the destruction of the city was going to happen and they would all have to flee (as Jesus had told his disciples in Mark 13:14). In such circumstances land, houses and valuables were a useless encumbrance. The Bible does not recommend the abolition of private property. The eighth commandment makes no sense if no one owns anything. The Bible does not instruct us to forceably impose this kind of equality on society but, as we have seen already in today's lesson, there is a higher standard. A Christian will voluntarily give up everything to follow his Master – even life itself.

Marx and Engels considered religion deeply harmful. They rightly identified that Christians were contented in this life and looking forward to everlasting happiness in the next life. This was not helpful to their ideas of class struggle. They did not want working people to be content for this would stop them advancing communist ideals. When Engels was asked to list the people he most disliked he came up with only one answer: Charles Haddon Spurgeon.¹⁰ Can you think why?

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 43: Letters 1868-70* (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010; digital edition), page 541. (Information from the *Historia ecclesiastica* blog by Michael A.G. Azad Haykin.)