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Fidelity in our Lot.

BY

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FIDELITY IN OUR LOT.

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THE
SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE

PREACHED BY THE APPOINTMENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, AT
THEIR ANNUAL MEETING IN THE CITY OF NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, IN MAY, 1855.

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FIDELITY IN OUR LOT.

ESTHER iv. 14.

WHO KNOWETH WHETHER THOU ART COME TO THE KINGDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?

I. FATHERS and Brethren of the General Assembly, it is by the appointment of your predecessors in the high trust now discharged by you, that I stand here to discuss a subject and to advocate a cause, which it is the constant habit of this venerable court to distinguish from all others, by causing it to be formally plead in some one of its great aspects, every year at its bar. It would ill become me, therefore, whether I consider what the occasion demands, or what my own past life requires, that I should fail to speak with all freedom and earnestness concerning the duty of such a Church as ours, in such a day as this, upon such a subject as that which lies before us.

The words which indicate, of themselves, the tenor of my thoughts, remarkable as they would be in every case in which one human being could properly apply them to another, become doubly so, when we consider the persons and the circumstances of that first utterance of them which, through divine inspiration, has been preserved for the instruction of all succeeding generations.

There was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin; who had been swept away along with that great captivity which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried off from Jerusalem with Jeconiah, king of Judah. An obscure dweller at Shushan, the royal residence, this heroic and

uncomplaining sufferer for the sins of his people, loved the Lord none the less because his hand was very heavy upon him, and loved his down-trodden brethren only the more for their peril and their woe. Little did he know that his part in the captivity of Israel, was that Israel might not perish. Little did he wot of the means whereby the fearful danger and the wondrous deliverance should, both alike, find their immediate origin in his own sublime courage and unshaken fidelity to God.

A captive maiden of his own lineage, doubly an orphan, had been brought up by him as his own child, though he was childless himself. By one of those strange turns of fortune which so often startle us in the history of oriental nations, this Jewish maiden suddenly became the Queen of the East, the bride of Ahasuerus, one of the greatest of the successors of Nebuchadnezzar, and the ruler over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. And what is more, she rose, in the most extraordinary manner, to this summit of human power at the very moment when her influence over Ahasuerus, and the influence of Mordecai over her, seemed absolutely indispensable to preserve the captive people of God from utter extermination.

It is the object of the Book of Esther to record for everlasting instruction, that great danger and deliverance of Israel; to illustrate at once the nature and the action of divine providence and of sublime faith, under circumstances the most remarkable. The words from which I speak form a part of the final and successful appeal of Mordecai to Esther, upon which she risked her crown and life to save her people—and won the fearful hazard. And surely it was a wondrous thing, for a captive girl to save a great people, by her heroic piety and her devoted love!

II. The use I am about to make of these pregnant words,

is to apply them to the kingdom of God in this world, and to our duty with regard to it—our duty to it, considered both as we are individual persons and as we are united into a Christian commonwealth constituting one most important part of that kingdom of God—our duty to it, as that is modified by the peculiar times in which we have come to it, and been called of God to act our part concerning it.

Thus considered, the case of this Jewish maiden involves and illustrates many of the fundamental principles of God's providence and our duty; which, though they are presented to us in a concrete form and under a special aspect, are nevertheless in their own nature universal and invariable. The chief of these I will briefly state and enforce.

1. All the duties of which I have to speak at present, are such as have their origin in our immediate relation to the Lord Jesus, and to his kingdom. Except that Esther was a queen, and except that she was a Jewess, no obligation rested on her to attempt any thing that is related of her. As she was both, the obligation was complete. Precisely in the same manner, the things which you have made it my duty to press upon you, are things binding upon your souls because you are Christ's children, placed by Christ precisely as you are. I have no plea founded on philosophy, or on any wisdom of man, or on any worldly consideration, to offer to you at all. I address myself exclusively to your faith in the Redeemer. You have come to his kingdom, for such a time as this. This is the foundation of all I have to utter. On this ground you are to execute the will of God, if it were to cost you a crown and your life. And he who the most frankly risks all, is the most certain to win all.

2. The circumstances of our lot—the times in which we come to the kingdom—determine with controlling force, the peculiar duty of the whole Church, and that of every individual member of it. Every child of God will have a crown; but

every one a crown peculiar to himself; a crown which will illustrate all that grace has done specifically for us, and which God forbids us to allow any man to take from us. The whole truth of God, the divine rules of his providence, and the unchangeable principles of our duty, are all invariable and eternal. Nevertheless, the circumstances upon which and amidst which they all expatiate, are infinitely various—all urging us with forces at once unspeakably energetic and diversified. Such a case as Esther's occurred but that single time on earth. Yet innumerable cases, not one of which is identical with it, but all of which are settled by its principles, occur every day, and will occur for ever. God never repealed any thing. If we could behold the entire universe at a glance, we should behold a picture of all things which had never been seen before—a concatenation which would never be seen again throughout eternity. Yet the universe is the same universe—and all its parts and principles remain the same. So that the closest and highest generalization we can reach, is eternal change founded on eternal unity: laws which cannot change, regulating with infinite exactitude duties which are susceptible of boundless modification.

3. There may be always, and ordinarily there is, more or less obscurity cast over the peculiar duty, whether of the Church or of individual Christians, under the ever varying aspects of events as they pass over us, and our attempts to apply to them the eternal principles and truths which underlie them all. "Who knoweth," was the solemn peradventure of Mordecai, which adjourned over into the counsel of God, the whole cause and end of the strange glory and peril which had fallen upon Esther. Out of this state of case arises the incessant hazard of our Christian warfare; the ceaseless danger that environs the Church of God; the perpetual necessity for divine illumination to direct us, and divine strength to support us. The more difficult the times may be, and the greater the

peril, the greater also may the obscurity be expected to be, and by consequence the greater the need of divine guidance and support. It is only by faith that the Church of God can walk, even in light; only by faith that she can even live in darkness.

4. Perfect fidelity in our lot, is the only ground upon which we have any right to expect either security or success, or to rely on the divine protection: and perfect consecration of herself to her great mission, is the universal condition on which God teaches his Church to rely on him for every deliverance, and for all ability to advance his glory in the earth. And this spirit is to be maintained when it exists, and recovered when it is lost, only by living near to God, in the way of his own appointment. "Gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me:"—"I also and my maidens will fast likewise:"—"If I perish, I perish." In such words did that soul unburden itself, upon whose struggles the fate of Israel seemed to hang. How is it possible for the Church to do any thing which exceeds her faith? The sense of her own condition and necessities, is the very measure of her efforts to bless others and to glorify God. Nor is there a more illustrious proof of the exact connection of these two things with each other, than that furnished by the origin and present condition of all those great organizations through which our own Church is striving to execute large portions of her work. Her Board for the spreading of the Gospel through this vast land, and her Board that takes cognizance of the mighty interest involved in raising up an adequate supply of faithful ministers; were both resuscitated from a state of torpor, at the very period when her first efforts to purge herself from inward corruption began to manifest that her own vitality was being restored: while her Board of Foreign Missions arose immediately out of the first free efforts of the delivered Church: and the Board of Publication was the direct result of the yearning of her

awakened heart for true Christian union upon that very truth which had saved her, and which the second centennial jubilee of the creation of her noble standards, brought immediately before her at the moment of her final triumph. While I do not believe that any of these organizations are capable of doing the whole duty of the Church, in the glorious departments of effort assigned to them; yet who does not see that their success has corresponded with the restored vitality of the Church, and that it must advance in proportion as her own fidelity to God increases?

5. Nothing is more remarkable than the manner in which God raises up and qualifies individual persons for the special work on which he sets them. The general tendency of our fallen race, when left to itself, is rather to decay than to advancement; and every institution committed to human hands, not excepting even the Church of Christ, is prone to exhibit this abiding work of our degradation. It is only as God arrests this downward tendency, that anything good or great endures on earth; only as he gives special grace, or exercises special providence, that man, or anything entrusted to him, advances in a career of glory or blessedness. To this end, what is specially noteworthy here is, that it is the way of the Lord to select his own instruments after his own fashion, and that they to whom he sends them, prosper exactly in proportion as they accept and cherish them. Moses in the palace of the king of Egypt, and David following his father's flock, and Saul, breathing out threatening and slaughter, were, all alike, nothing, and could do nothing, except as God made them what they became. And Luther had remained in his besotted superstition, a mere monk—and Bunyan had continued in his brutality, a vagabond—and Calvin, and Owen, and Wesley, and Whitefield, and all the rest whom God has set for any great thing on earth, could no more have done it of themselves, than two captive Jews in the capital of the world

could have saved God's scattered people from destruction. The great lesson is, that they who reject such interpositions of God, reject his eternal counsel, against their own souls.

6. The solemn conclusion of this grand climax of divine truth is distinctly stated, and is full of warning to us all. "Think not within thyself," said Mordecai, "that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." The peril from which we shrink may indeed be avoided; but in the place of it shall come irretrievable destruction. The glory and the blessedness set before us and despised by us, are indeed lost to us for ever; but in our stead will God raise up from some other quarter more faithful men, and a more devoted church, whereby the intended glory and blessedness shall have free scope, to the praise of the unsearchable riches of his grace. And it behoves us deeply to comprehend that when the day of our visitation is once effectually hidden from our eyes, it returns to us no more. It was for *such a time* that we came to the kingdom; but we altogether held our peace; and so we and our fathers' house were destroyed. The eternal wheel of Providence has crushed us. The eternal necessities could not wait on our loitering. The eternal light has passed far beyond us, in its infinite career. When we awake from our stupor, it will only be to see our crown shining upon some worthier brow. Where are the graves of Israel for nearly two thousand years? Where are all the churches planted by the immediate labours of the apostles? Where are the churches which have arisen in all succeeding ages, but which have forgotten God, and betrayed the time for which they were called to the kingdom? And where shall our own beloved Church find refuge, except in victory? where, deliverance, except around the cross of Christ?

III. Let us turn our thoughts, now, in another direction, in order that we may see as clearly as we can, what is the posture of God's providence and our duty, as both are manifested in the aspect of the time in which we have come to the kingdom; striving to apply the divine principles I have stated, to the stupendous facts amidst which our career is to be run.

The posture of this earth and all its interests—this earth, which is the theatre on which the kingdom of God commences its development—may be expressed in a single sentence. Everything lies under the curse of God; but everything, except hell and its final inmates, underlies that curse, with a promise of deliverance. These two truths explain the whole career of the universe known to us. The entire development of the kingdom of God thus far, and the entire progress of the human race until now, make manifest the struggle, and the success yet attained, as the universe emerges from its condition under God's curse, upward towards the full fruition of the promised deliverance.

And now, after so many centuries, and so many efforts, and so many vicissitudes, and so many dispensations—what is the sum of the whole progress? What is the actual posture of the struggle? Is the conflict near to any definite result? Does the Church seem to be any nearer to the conquest of the whole earth, than she seemed to be at many former epochs, nay, than she seemed to be when the Apostles of the Lord had completed their personal work? On the other hand, does she seem to be any more inclined to give up the contest as hopeless, than she seemed to be at the most exalted point in her career? Alas! it is true that only the edges of the gross darkness that covers the earth, have as yet been illuminated by the truth. But still the torch is lifted up upon the mountains, and its beams glance from land to land. Alas! it is true that the kingdom of God is wasted, and scattered, and

rent, up and down in the earth; or rather, it floats like a great wreck tossed on the boundless sea of time, as it surges to and fro over the nations. But still there floats above it the banner stained with blood. And not one faithful soldier in a^{ll} her broken host, has any other thought than that this rebellious world is to be subdued once more.

The present population of the earth may be about one thousand millions of souls. Of these, it is probable that more than one-half are still heathen idolaters—the greater part of them devoted to superstitions more gross and absurd than those which covered the earth at the advent of the Saviour. Of the remainder, one hundred millions, perhaps, are Mohammedans; a like number, it may be, are Jews, Infidels, and various sectaries in various lands, who cannot be classed either as mere pagan idolaters, as Mohammedans, or as even nominally Christians. Three hundred millions—less considerably than one-third part of the family of man, are the utmost that can be considered as even speculative believers in the Son of God. Of these, less than one-third, less, that is, than one-tenth part of the human race are Protestants, even in the widest acceptation of that appellation. Upon this mournful classification it is to be observed, that not a solitary circumstance is known to exist which renders the hearts of the enemies of God more open to the impressions of divine truth, or less set upon the refuges of lies on which they rely for salvation, than they were when the Saviour of sinners appeared in the flesh. And although it is true that the nominally Christian population of the world, taken as a whole, are very far in advance of the rest of mankind; yet that was, probably, equally true fifteen centuries ago, when the Christian religion became the religion of the Roman empire, and so almost of the civilized world, under Constantine the Great. Nor is it easy to perceive, that with all the immense progress of mankind during the last eighteen centuries, they who would propagate true Christianity to-day,

have any facilities above those who would oppose it; which, relatively to the state of the world during the first ages of the Christian Church, were not possessed in an equal degree by the early followers of the Lord, as compared with his early opponents. Jerusalem, and Rome, and Mecca, and whatever else is an emblem of hostility to Christ, or a power of itself hostile to Christ, stand where they have stood always; and the sum of the combined force distinctly exhibited throughout the world, against the Lord and against his anointed, is comparatively scarcely less vast or relentless, than at any one of the grand epochs of the past. We gain nothing by deceiving ourselves, or misleading the people of God. Let the true soldiers of the cross know, that victories are yet to come greater than all they have hitherto won.

The idea which we obtain of the existing condition of the populations and the religions of the world, must, for the special purpose of the present discourse, have a particular application to our own country, and then a further one to the question of evangelization in it, by our own branch of the Church of Christ, in its immediate efforts to extend itself, according to the measure of the grace given to it, throughout this continent. Considering the whole subject in this light, it must be admitted that the general posture of the cause of Christ is better in the United States than in most parts of the Christian world; better, in some important respects, than in any other portion of the earth. And it would be full of interest, and not difficult in itself, to point out the particular causes which have produced these important results, and to designate with clearness the results themselves. At present it is enough to say, that as for us and our Presbyterian Church in this great country, we have come to the kingdom of God, and are set to the work of evangelization all around us, under circumstances marked neither by extraordinary danger, nor hardship, nor self-denial; but rather demanding of us extraordinary efforts and peculiar sim-

plicity of faith. What we need is not so much heroic courage as fervent zeal.

But even here it is impossible to deny that the condition of the kingdom of God is sufficiently deplorable to fill every pious heart with anguish, as often as we allow ourselves to be fully impressed with what is passing around us. Amongst those who profess to be the disciples of Christ, what multitudes are only the more thoroughly separated from God thereby! Pelagians, Arians, Unitarians, Universalists, Papists, Mormons; what true child of God can doubt, that the faith of all such sectaries is utterly destructive of the souls of men? What multitudes, again, of those who, in the judgment of that charity which hopeth all things, might be allowed, for the substance of their professed faith, to be in the way of life, are yet given up to the eager pursuit of the merest sectarian trifles, or to the wildest devotion to the absurd traditions of men! Sects, too, numerous and powerful, obscuring the truth which their own creeds teach, or betraying it in the pursuit of some barren rite or empty ceremony—or sacrificing it to the demands of some heartless philosophy! How large a part of the Episcopal Church has fallen away from its own evangelical Articles! how strong and persistent is the tendency in the Congregational churches to forsake the precious faith of their ancestors! how deplorable are the errors which disfigure the German churches in this country! how sad is the decay in a pure faith which for a whole generation has marked the progress of so large a portion of the Baptist churches! and, to mention no more, how fearful was the heresy and schism which we ourselves endured within the recent memory of us all! It is with profound sorrow that I utter all these mournful facts; but how could I avoid it, and speak the truth? Nay, am I not obliged, as I will answer to God, to go farther still, and confess that even in the bosom of every evangelical denomination, those are to be found who have no part in Christ? Hypocrites, heretics,

formalists, alas! too, self-seeking and unconverted ministers! That small part of the human race, even in this most favoured land, which names itself after Him who was dead and is alive, presents itself, even to the imperfect view of man, in such a light as this. How must it appear before the face of God!

If such be the aspect which the land presents, viewed only as it calls itself Christian, and estimated only with a strong desire to do it good, what shall be thought of that enormous and perishing mass of souls which lie beyond the pale of all true communion with Christ, and whose evangelization, whether they have a name to live, or whether they truly confess themselves to be without hope in the world, is the immediate object of all our missionary efforts on this continent. A vast population, mixed, heterogeneous, gathered from all lands; restless, eager, ardent, reckless, irresistible; free, and rejoicing in its freedom, yet side by side with millions of slaves, and with the remnants of the primeval people of the land; full of the instinct of a glorious destiny already attained, and one still more glorious to come; ignorant of nothing but God; capable of all things, except its own salvation; millions of men, multiplying with a rapidity never before known on earth; occupying an empire, the widest and noblest ever embraced under the dominion of regulated liberty and equal laws; advancing in a career of civilization, wealth, power, and grandeur, hitherto without a parallel; the earth never witnessed before, and can never witness again, such a people, upon such a theatre, passing through such a development. Alas! what power but that of God is competent to struggle with a force like this?

All the immense problems on whose solution the destiny of man depends—and chief amongst these the nature, the position, and the efficacy of all religious institutions—are presented amongst us in a light altogether singular. Here, for the first time, religion is absolutely free; and having been corrupted everywhere else by its union with the civil power, or

oppressed everywhere else under the iron hand of persecution, its sublime mission amongst us is to make manifest its capacity to be at once free and efficacious, in the bosom of a people at once great and free. Moreover, the people amongst whom this vast experiment is to have free scope, differ most remarkably from all others precisely in those respects in which religion might be supposed most capable of being affected for good or ill, by other absorbing interests of man. Here there is cast loose upon society, wholly disconnected with religion, and therefore available against it, as well as for it, a larger proportion of educated intellect than ever before existed in any community; a greater mass which must needs be influenced, and when influenced either way, correspondingly powerful; a mass stimulated throughout every portion of it, to a degree never witnessed before in any age of the world. Can the religion of Christ establish its dominion, by its own power, over such hearts? can it maintain supreme sway over such minds, by its own simple and divine force? It is a singular proof of its wonderful hold upon the human soul, that so far from being shaken loose, it has constantly augmented its influence throughout the terrific agitations of the human race during the whole career of our country. It has survived the midnight of the world—and its last office is to preside over the noon of human grandeur. Let us do our part towards the accomplishment of this sublime destiny.

The great truths of every system must struggle to the light, as soon as it is put into intense activity, no matter how much darkness may have been cast over them. In the widest range of religious ideas, how immeasurably do ages and sects differ, who agree nevertheless in the fundamental truth of all religion, namely, the unity of the Godhead, and his exclusive worship; and they also who reject this chief truth, though they agree in nothing else but this rejection, how constantly have they been one in the abjectness of their superstition! And in a far nar-

rower, but hardly less important field, they who hold what are called the *doctrines of grace*, though they differ in many things, and may be often sundered by sharp contentions, yet how thoroughly are they agreed in that evangelical system, which gives vitality to all Christian effort, and lies at the foundation of all human hope! To restore to their very highest activity the simplest and deepest truths of the religion of God, is to restore in like degree the highest unity to the rent Church of Christ, and to extend in like manner the triumphs of that evangelical Christianity, which from the day of the Reformers to our own, has stimulated the whole progress which mankind has made, and sustained whatever freedom the world possesses. This too, is the most direct method by which we may sunder the unnatural connection between the promoters of all false religion and the true friends of human advancement, an alliance pregnant alike with injustice to godliness, and wrong to every interest of man. All that is most excellent in knowledge, most virtuous in practical life, most heroic in great deeds and under great trials, most faithful to man, and most fruitful in all that can do man good, is written in the history of evangelical Christianity. Our country is at this moment passing through a trial most signal, and before unknown—the wide union of religious fanaticism and civil licentiousness; and it behoves those to whom God has committed the great remedy for so great a pest, to bestir themselves in a degree commensurate with an evil which aims at nothing short of the utter degradation of religion and the total subversion of society.

Amongst all the branches of the great Christian family, not one has a history more remarkable, a position more distinct, or a call more explicit to fight this great battle for the Lord of hosts, than that great but divided family of churches, in all lands, which sets forth its faith in the standards of the Westminster Assembly. The English Commonwealth was the real birth-place of modern liberty. It was also the true represen-

tative of the Protestant freedom and power of the earth, in an age of fearful trial and danger. What is Protestant Christianity?—was the demand of the heroic defenders of Protestant freedom. They put that question, not to one or two sects, but they put it to the Protestant world after a century and a half of Protestant effort and Protestant suffering throughout Europe. The answer is found in the standards of the Westminster Assembly; standards which deserve to be, and will continue to be, as they have been for two centuries, not the narrow creed of a sect, but the bulwark of evangelical Christianity. They constitute the solemn and well-considered response of the combined learning, talent, and piety of the Protestant world, to the demand for a true exposition of Protestant belief, by the embodied heart of Protestant civilization and liberty. Protestant Christianity—is the explicit answer—is a spiritual commonwealth of which Jesus Christ is the only head, whose laws are only such as God has given to it, whose faith is evangelical, whose morality is exact, and whose order is free. As for Antichrist, against whom every child of God had striven for more than a thousand years, and against whom every one strives still as against the peculiar enemy of God, and the great corrupter of the Church, these standards were in one aspect especially directed against him, as in their nature they could not fail to be. Many of the chief errors of Popery are, no doubt, peculiar to itself; but many others are common to it and other forms of superstition, heresy, and idolatry. Some it holds in common with every form of heathenism; as the plurality of objects of divine worship. Some in common with the Mohammedan imposture, as the propagation of its faith by fire and sword. Some in common with the lowest apostates from Christianity, as the denial of the sufficiency of the divine word, and the rejection of the doctrine and the work of the Holy Spirit. But the grand and all-pervading spiritual error of Popery in the plan she puts forth for the salvation of

men, lies precisely at the foundation of every false system that ever existed, and is exactly the great error against which our standards direct their utmost strength. The doctrine of God is that man is indebted for salvation merely to divine grace, and that faith in the crucified Saviour is the sole method of access to God. The universal doctrine of error is that man can do and must do something, more or less, which as merit, condition, or occasion, shall secure his salvation. Here the systems of God and man part, and they meet no more. The great controversies of all ages have turned directly on this distinction, or looked remotely but decisively to it. In settling it we implicitly settle all. And he who will carefully examine the subject with sufficient light to guide his steps, and enough of intellect to fathom its realities, must end his search with the deep conviction that evangelical religion affords the only refuge from atheism on the one side, or superstition on the other. Wandering from the simplicity of the gospel, there is no resting place for man but in universal credulity, or total unbelief. In the face of such things, and in a time like this, how immense is the obligation resting on us, who constitute the largest single portion of the Presbyterian Church on earth, not merely to exert ourselves that men may not perish, but to exalt the great salvation wherewith God hath so remarkably entrusted us! The temporary controversies of the sectaries with each other, the fierce, incoherent warfare, which has no higher excuse than the folly or the passions of the combatants—these things, let them rage as they may, are nothing to us. There are abroad through the land rampant heresies which sap the foundations of the Christian's hope, which take from the gospel its distinctive character, which threaten the total ruin of the Church of Christ. There is a great defection from the bosom of Protestantism, in which its erring children have let slip the fundamental point of God's method of saving sinners, and while they profess to abhor the Man of Sin, are in reality

unwitting instruments of his will. These are the things that do most vitally concern us; here lies the real conflict of ages. Shall God's way prevail, and sinners live—or shall man's way prevail, and sinners perish?

Now, it is in the midst of such a scene of things, at such a time, in such a country, with such a population, that our branch of the great Christian host, such as she is at this day, is called of God to act her part in those vast events, under those tremendous sanctions, and upon those eternal principles, which I have endeavoured to sketch, to distinguish, and to group together. Who knoweth whether she is come to the kingdom for such a time as this? And what may one of her sons, called to speak thus to her concerning her transcendent duties, venture to say to the common mother of us all, by way of filial yet faithful exhortation? This much, at least, even the lowliest of her children might attempt. He might presume by the love he bore her, and in the name of God, to beseech her as she surveys a conflict so difficult and so glorious, to recall her own past career and past deliverances; to look around her earnestly and trustfully on the wide field of combat; to look within, judging herself with an unflinching eye; to look before her and nerve herself for the greatness of the battle; and then looking above, to throw wide over her host her unconquered banner, and strike for the Lord of glory! My brethren and my fathers, is there one of us here who is willing that she should content herself with feeble efforts and poor sacrifices for her exalted Lord? Is there one of us who holds his very life too dear to peril it for her, if she will but keep herself worthy of the sacrifice? Is there one of us who would not weep over her sloth and ignominy—who would not rejoice with exceeding joy at every proof that God counted her worthy even to suffer for Christ's sake—and oh! with what rapture to see her perfectly arrayed as his bride? Bid her then go forward, nothing doubting. It is for that very purpose you occupy these seats;

it is to that very end that God and his people have placed you where you are. For what are you taken from the thousands of your brethren and constituted into the great Assembly of the Church, if it be not to advance the great glory of God? Hold not your peace in a time like this, lest, though enlargement and deliverance arise from some other place, you and your father's house should be destroyed.

IV. What remains is that I should endeavour to apply the great posture of providence beside which our lot is cast, and the eternal truths which were first deduced from his word, to the course of our own duty in the circumstances which surround us. For it is upon eternal truth that all duty rests, and it is by the course of Providence that all duty is regulated; and blessed is that church and blessed is that man, and none besides, to whom the revealed and the secret will of God thus made known become the invariable rule of life. It is not, however, the particular things which we ought to do, that it is proper or even possible for one situated as I am to point out for the consideration of this venerable court. It is the great and controlling course of duty, the broad and deep lines of conduct, and both of these as having peculiar relevancy to all that I have hitherto advanced, which I cannot omit stating. Upon what principles, so considered, ought the action of such a church and such persons, so called of God, in such a crisis, manifestly to proceed, in order to be any ways answerable to the whole current and spirit of these meditations?

1. In the first place then, and above all, let it never be forgotten that the immediate object and end of the existence of the Church of Christ on earth as a visible society, is to perfect and extend herself in the salvation of lost sinners of the human race, to the glory of her divine Lord. This is her special mission in the world. There are, no doubt, innumerable blessings bestowed upon the universe through her, besides those which

result directly from her own immediate work. But all of these, even the very highest—which I take to be the revelation to the universe of the true nature of God—are but incidental to her own peculiar end. It follows, therefore, that the very object and substance of all her efforts and all her teachings must be of that sort which is addressed to the faith of men—since salvation itself is by grace through faith. It follows still further that the Church of Christ has no direct concern with anything at all, in regard to which she may not address herself with a divine authority to the human conscience and understanding. From the complex nature of human affairs difficulties may sometimes arise in the practical application of these pregnant rules of duty: but in the whole round of the active life of the Church no important principles are more obvious in themselves or more important to be observed; and yet none, perhaps, have been more frequently or more grossly violated by many portions of the visible Church in all ages of the world.

2. In the second place, and as a direct result of what goes before, let the Church cleave closer and closer to the word of God, and more and more eagerly spread the knowledge of it amongst men. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; and it is the very end of the existence of the Church that men may believe, and that believing, they may have eternal life. Besides all this, let her bear in mind these further truths:—1. That we as a great department of the kingdom of God, have no other plea to offer to mankind but the simple necessity and power of godliness. We have neither rites nor ceremonies by means of which to proclaim an exclusive salvation. We have no special forms by virtue of which we are able to assure men of the safety of their souls. All we have to offer is Christ, and he crucified. Therefore let us offer him with an earnestness at least equal to that with which substitutes for his blood are

pressed upon the acceptance of men. 2. This word of God to which we ought thus to cleave, besides being able to save men's souls, is able moreover, and it alone is able, to restore and to sustain that moral and intellectual unity of the human race, the loss of which is the source of such innumerable miseries and such boundless degradation, and the recovery of which will be fraught with such incalculable results. 3. It is upon this very Bible that the main pillar of all that is good and great rests, in the very scene in which our whole destiny is cast. An open Bible and free institutions are the elemental principles of our whole American dispensation. To lift on high that open Bible—to bear it aloft throughout this vast continent and amidst all its diversified populations—this is the grand portion of our mission which those free institutions enable us to perform.

3. In the third place, and also as an immediate consequence of all that has been said, let the Church more and more eliminate from her bosom everything for which she cannot produce a clear warrant from God. The Lord did not call her to be his counsellor; he sent her forth to observe and to teach his truth—to obey and to execute his commandments. The very conception of a divine revelation is as positive in what it excludes as in what it embraces; and if God's sacred word be a perfect rule of faith and duty—which is the ultimate truth upon which Protestantism rests—then we must not only go wherever that rule goes, but we must stop wherever that rule stops. If our faith and our duty as Christians rest exclusively upon an inspired Christian record, then, manifestly, to extend either the faith or the duty beyond the record, is not only to impeach the sufficiency of the record and the character of the God who gave it; but is also recklessly to incur the extreme peril, if not to insure the absolute certainty, of perverting by our carnal additions, the very substance of that which lies at the foundation of all our divine knowledge and all our eternal

hopes. Nor can we form any idea of the perfect headship of Christ over his Church, which does not exclude every authority but that of Christ from the faith and the obedience of his people; nor can we have any conception of the perfect freedom of the Church, except one which involves on the one side a perfect consecration to Christ and a perfect conformity to his will, and on the other a complete deliverance from every authority but his in all divine things. I speak not now of the sacred rights of private judgment and individual conscience; I speak of the Church of Jesus Christ, and of the transcendent obligation resting on her, that she add nothing to the revealed will of God, and that she take nothing from it.

4. In the fourth place, and as a necessary corollary from the three preceding propositions, as well as a most express duty clearly commanded by God, let the Church discriminate more and more carefully amongst those who profess to be the disciples of the Lord. Having done so, her opposition to all the corrupters of the gospel ought to be most steady and emphatic; while she ought to cherish and trust as brethren and fellow heirs of the common salvation, all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. Union amongst all true Christians—unity amongst all true Presbyterians—are amongst the clearest necessities of the times in which we live—a union and a unity prompted by every feeling of the renewed soul, and urgently demanded of us all, for the very purpose of enabling every follower of Christ to execute with greater certainty and power his part of the work required of us all. The capacity of any particular generation to perfect this union amongst all true Christians, and this unity amongst the scattered members of any particular branch of the family of Christ, depends altogether upon the depth and purity of the faith of the generation itself. When men are thoroughly like Christ, they also thoroughly resemble each other; when they love him supremely, they cannot avoid loving each other tenderly, and longing

for mutual fellowship. But any alliance of light with darkness, is in its own nature impossible; and all carnal attempts to unite the children of God with the corrupters of his truth, upon the pretext that they all call themselves Christians, or even all call themselves Presbyterians, are obliged to begin in the betrayal of faith, and end in the sacrifice of godliness. It is not by striving to be conformed to each other that either men or sects can be united in Christ; but it is by exalting Christ and exalting the truth whereby we are conformed unto Christ, that all who are fit for Christian union or Christian unity develope at the same moment their mutual assimilation and their mutual love. So that both the capacity and the desire of the Church to perform this duty, on the one side and the other, are constant tests of her own progress, infallible proofs of her true condition.

5. In the fifth place, and as the conclusion of the whole, let the Church, thoroughly comprehending and joyfully admitting that she is not the whole body of Christ, realize completely her own mission, in her own lot, in the peculiar times of her present call to the kingdom. There is a mission and a lot common to the whole Church of God; but there is, besides, a mission and a lot peculiar to every part of the redeemed host; and amongst the rest a mission and a lot for our Presbyterian Church in the United States. Where the truth of God is most pressed and imperiled—there is her place. Where the battle rages most fiercely, there men look for her banner. Where the enemies of God thirst most ravenously for Christian blood, there let her be ready to offer her own freely for Christ's sake. Thus has the mission of our fathers been, always. Thus is our mission to-day. Thus will be the mission of our true successors, to the end of time. We are not called to enjoy honour and repose; we are called to fight the good fight of faith. And if we would win eternal life, we must fight it to the end. Why then should not the Church consecrate herself absolutely

and without reserve, to her Master and her work? She knows what it is, and she knows who set her on it. Behold the immense resources which He has put at her disposal! What an army of ministers; what an array of congregations; what a host of private Christians! So much knowledge and light; so much power and wealth; such a theatre; such opportunities; such motives! What hinders but that she take the lead? Ah! now for the heart; now for the spirit; now for the burning love, the consuming zeal! And now for the curse of Meroz upon every one who will not come to the help of the Lord against the mighty!

V. Fathers and Brethren, I have spoken but the more freely, because the entire habits of our Church, as well as many things personal to myself, admonish me that the duty will no more devolve on me to plead with you from this position, and upon this aspect of this great subject. Bear with me, therefore, while I finish this testimony with one remaining word of still greater freedom.

I know this Church well. I have known it long. From my youth up I have sat under the shadow of her altars, where my fathers had worshipped for many generations; and for five and twenty years I have gone in and out in the presence of her great Assemblies. I have sat, from my childhood, at the feet of the great leaders amongst us; and have seen them, one by one, pass away—and others raised up by God to sit in their vacant seats. Things were not always as you see them now. I have seen this Church on the very brink of ruin. I now behold it in abounding prosperity. I have seen the hand of God deliver this Church, when the help of man had failed. And the same mighty hand conducts her still, along her glorious way. To-day a purer, more united, more powerful Church exists not on earth. All the efforts she ever made are as nothing beside the efforts she can make now; all the triumphs

she ever won are but intimations of the triumphs she is now capable of winning.

This is the condition in which you receive this Church from the hands of those who are rapidly sinking into the grave. They did not receive it in this condition. I see in the midst of you, here and there, the relics of another age. They know full well that you receive this Church in a widely different state from that in which we received it from those who went before. They know better than you can ever know, that we deliver it over to you far otherwise than it was delivered to us. Think you it was through sloth and cowardice—time-serving and self-seeking—temporizing and conformities—the devices of men and distrust of God—the love of the world and indifference to God's truth—that so great a change was wrought, such mighty works done? Think ye, verily, in your hearts, that such results follow such causes?

I speak to you in the name of the great dead, whose ashes, as yet, are hardly cold. I beseech you, in the name of the scattered remnant whom the inexorable stroke of death still respects. I charge you in the name of our covenanted God—our Saviour and yours. See that ye keep this great Church steadily on her great career. See that ye conduct her steps in the fear and the power of God. See that ye transmit to those who will follow you, her name untarnished, her garments unstained, her faith unpolluted. I call yourselves to witness—I appeal to posterity to judge between us—I invoke our common Lord and Master to take note, that ye receive it a glorious and a blessed Church, in the midst of which Christ dwells—and that ye are bound to deliver it up in like estate, when your warfare is accomplished. It is not that I distrust you, that I speak thus: for I do not. It is because I know that great prosperity is full of great perils, and that the good of my country, the salvation of my race, and the glory of my Saviour, are deeply staked on the fidelity of this Church, and

of you into whose hands her guidance is now come of God, for such a time as this.

To eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God; to receive a crown of life, and to be out of the reach of the second death; to eat of the hidden manna, and to receive a white stone, with the new name; to take power over the nations, and rule them with a rod of iron; to have a name written in the book of life, and openly confessed by Christ before his Father; to be a pillar in the temple of God, and to have the name of God, and the name of the city of God, and the new name of the Son of God, written thereon; to sit down with the glorified Redeemer on his own throne, even as he when he had overcome, sat down with the Father on his throne—these are the rewards of victory! Are they not unsearchable? But they are also certain and eternal!