

THE
PRIMITIVE GOVERNMENT
OF
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

ALSO,
LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

BY JAMES P. WILSON, D. D.,
Late Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

"Nil nisi justum suadet, et lene."

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
THE SERMON,
PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR,
BY REV. THOMAS H. SKINNER, D. D.

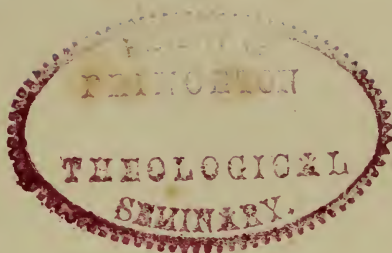
PHILADELPHIA:
FRENCH & PERKINS—159 CHESTNUT STREET
BOSTON:
PERKINS & MARVIN—114 WASHINGTON ST.
1833.



James P. Wilson

ENTERED according to the act of Congress, in the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two, by MATTHEW WILSON, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

WM. F. GEDDES, PRINTER, 9 LIBRARY ST.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS work is a defence against unfounded pretensions; and intended to exhibit, without wounding any individual, the illiteracy of excluding from mercy or covenant favors, all but the subjects of the hierarchy; and of making mute presbyters a characteristic of the primitive church. The inquiry is first orderly pursued through the early testimonies, that innovations might be detected; and the Scriptures afterwards examined according to original ideas.

This book has been printed in numbers in the Christian Spectator, but merely with the design to elicit objections, that it might be rectified, if found unjust, or in error on any point. Compensation was offered by the publisher at New Haven, but refused, because the right was reserved.

CONTENTS.

SECTION I.

	Page
The ordinary officers at the demise of the apostles. Barnabas spurious. The Pastor of Hermas a forgery. The testimony of Clement of Rome, - - - - -	1

SECTION II.

The evidence furnished by Polycarp. The fragment of Papias, -	7
---	---

SECTION III.

The disinterested representations of Justin Martyr. The letter of the church of Smyrna. The fragment of Hegesippus, -	16
---	----

SECTION IV.

Tatian. The letter of the churches of Vienne and Lyons. The fragment of Melito. The writings of Athenagoras. The tract of Hermias. The books of Theophilus of Antioch. The works of Irenæus, - - - - -	25
--	----

SECTION V.

The facts appearing in Clement of Alexandria. Novatian's writings in Tertullian and Cyprian. The testimony of Tertullian, -	36
---	----

SECTION VI.

The letters ascribed to Ignatius are evidence of the third century. A reply to Philo-Ignatius, - - - - -	45
--	----

SECTION VII.

The dialogue of Minucius Felix. The writings of Hippolytus. The testimony of Origen, - - - - -	61
--	----

SECTION VIII.

The character and evidence of Cyprian, - - - - -	69
--	----

SECTION IX.

The epistle of Firmilian.	The writings of Gregory Thaumaturgus.	
The fragments of Methodius.	The seven books of Arnobius.	
The writings of Lactantius,	- - - - -	82

SECTION X.

The character and writings of Eusebius,	- - - - -	89
---	-----------	----

SECTION XI.

The origin and history of councils prior to A.D. 787,	- - - - -	99
---	-----------	----

SECTION XII.

The writings of Hilary of Poitiers.	The learned productions of	
Hilary the deacon,	- - - - -	108

SECTION XIII.

The important writings of Athanasius.	The six books of Optatus.	
The testimony and sufferings of Aerius,	- - - - -	118

SECTION XIV.

The writings of Basil the Great.	The life and writings of Gregory of Nazianzum.	
The works of Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of Basil,	- - - - -	127

SECTION XV.

The ordination and writings of Cyril of Jerusalem.	The writings of Ambrose,	
- - - - -	- - - - -	137

SECTION XVI.

The works of Epiphanius the imbecile Metropolitan of Cyprus.		
His testimony of the Apostolical Constitutions,	- - - - -	144

SECTION XVII.

The supposititious writings of Dionysius the Areopagite.	The voluminous writings of John, since called Chrysostom.	
The fragments of letters of Isidore of Pelusium,	- - - - -	153

SECTION XVIII.

The works of the learned Jerom,	- - - - -	162
---------------------------------	-----------	-----

SECTION XIX.

The ten tomes and supplement of Augustine of Numidia.	The	
---	-----	--

CONTENTS.

vii

remaining writings of Synesius of Ptolemais. The history, epistles, dialogues, &c. of Sulpicius Severus.	177
--	-----

SECTION XX.

The writings of John Cassian of Marseilles. The history of So- crates of Constantinople. The nine books of Sozomen of Pal- estine. The writings of Theodoret of Antioch,	188
--	-----

SECTION XXI.

The writings and ambitious efforts of Pope Leo the first,	198
---	-----

SECTION XXII.

SEPARATISTS OF THE EIGHTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES.

The Piedmontese a part of the Latin church, A. D. 817. They were episcopal at the death of Claude. The history of the ori- gin and progress of the Bohemians. The Waldenses of France sprang from the followers of Claude,	208
---	-----

SECTION XXIII.

THE HISTORY OF ORDINATIONS.

The extraordinary offices of Apostle and evangelist were not by ordination. There were no ordinations but of presbyters and deacons. The first diocesan bishops were not constituted by im- position of hands. Canonical ordinations arose after the second century,	221
--	-----

SECTION XXIV.

LAY ELDERS EXCLUDED BY EPISCOPACY.

The Syrian churches, Waldenses and Culdees were all episcopal. Lay elders were introduced at Geneva, by a compromise. Af- terwards adopted by other cantons; also in France, Nether- lands, Scotland, England, and America,	253
--	-----

SECTION XXV.

The primitive state of the church having been sought from credible witnesses of the facts, without regard to their opinions, or hear-
says; and the changes marked from the commencement of the
second to the termination of the fifth century, and having seen
the successive introduction of parochial and diocesan episco-
pacy, the canonical ordination and human authority of the latter,
and the creation of quasi presbyters by Calvin, we are prepared
better to understand the New Testament by the rejection of these
novelties. But bishops are by some supposed to be the succes-

sors of the evangelists, and Timothy is made bishop of Ephesus.—How Timothy received authority and for what purpose. An evangelist before he came to Ephesus. He was left by Paul at Ephesus, the last time Paul was there, Timothy having returned thither after Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Timothy left Ephesus after ordaining presbyters there, and came to Paul in Macedonia, before his return to Jerusalem and first imprisonment. The first letter to Timothy was before he left Ephesus to go to Paul in Macedonia, and instructed him in choosing and ordaining the presbyters. He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and Rome, where he was during the Apostle's first imprisonment. The second letter to Timothy was written during the second imprisonment, and discovers that Timothy was not then at Ephesus; it calls him to Rome; and it no where appears that Timothy ever returned to Ephesus after ordaining the elders there, -

251

SECTION XXVI.

TITUS WAS ALSO AN EXTRAORDINARY OFFICER, AND NOT A BISHOP OF CRETE.

He was Paul's attendant or evangelist, before the Gospel was carried to Crete.—Apollos is named in the epistle to Titus, but as they first saw Apollos on Paul's last visit to Ephesus, it was written after that visit. Every movement of Paul, from the riot at Ephesus unto his first imprisonment, is given, and events show he did not leave him in Crete before he went to Rome.—His letters from Rome discover that Titus was not with him during his first imprisonment, and of course he could not have left him in Crete on his return from Rome.—Titus had been with Paul at Jerusalem, but after separating from Barnabas, he was no more with Paul till his second visit to Ephesus; probably he was sent with the letter to the Galatians, and met Paul at Ephesus on his last visit there, from whence Paul sent him to Corinth, and he came to Paul in Macedonia, and was sent back to Corinth.—At some period after his first imprisonment, they may have gone to Crete; and Titus being left there, received this letter as a discharge from thence, when a substitute arrived. He was at Nicopolis one winter with Paul; and the Scriptures leave him in Dalmatia, -

263

SECTION XXVII.

THE FIXED STATE, AND ORDINARY OFFICERS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

Under the spiritual dispensation of the gospel, the extraordinary officers were the apostles, to confer gifts and teach by means of

the inspiration of suggestion; the evangelists, to plant and water churches; prophets, with occasional inspiration to explain the Scriptures.—The gifts are described, 1 Cor. xii. 28; Rom. xii. 6—8; Ephes. iv. 11, 12.—Officers qualified to administer ordinances, succeeded the extraordinary gifts, and churches, which were Christian societies, were substituted for the synagogues. But two orders or kinds were adopted—presbyters, who were called also pastors, to teach, ordain, administer baptism and the eucharist, and to govern, and deacons to serve.—Among the presbyters, a bench of which was at first in every church, and but one presbytery in a society or city, there was one who presided, denominated *πρεσβυτης*, angel, and by other names; yet the ordination was not different from that of the rest.—The first change was by a gradual transition into pastoral or parochial episcopacy, afterwards into diocesan.—This was established by the Council of Nice, and at length produced papacy, - - - - 270

LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS, - - - - 290

SERMON.*

AMONG the reasons, my brethren, which induced the speaker to undertake, at your request, the performance of the present service, he is unwilling any one should reckon, a sense of his competency to the task. If one's ability to speak justly of another, is at all proportional to their degrees of mutual conformity in talents and virtues, there are not many persons among the acquaintance of your late pastor, of whatever experience and attainments, who ought to think themselves adequate to a complete description of him. An intimacy of nearly sixteen years, has made him who addresses you very conscious, that his inferiority in age, though a great disqualification, is probably the least considerable point in his unfitness to that undertaking. He was led, however, to hope, that he would receive so much assistance from the papers of his lamented friend, that he might almost make him his own biographer; but, to his great surprise, that peculiar man was found to have left not a sentence about himself, among all his manuscripts; nor have many particulars in his history been ascertained, besides such as are of extensive notoriety.

* Preached in the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, January 16th, 1831.

Hence it became necessary to make a discourse of a very different character from that which was first projected, and which perhaps would have better met your anticipations.

MICAH VI. 9.—The Lord's voice crieth unto the city; and the man of wisdom shall see thy name. Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.

It is one of the consequences of man's fallen state, that he is apt to misapprehend the design of God's gracious measures for his recovery. Shadows of good things he mistakes for the reality; ordinances of mercy become means of spiritual pride; grace is turned into licentiousness; and Christ himself is made the minister of sin.

The prophet had given, in the Jews of his day, an exemplification of this trait of human perverseness. He had represented that idolatrous generation as apparently sensible to the dangerous consequences of their idolatry, and desirous to discover some way in which they might avert the divine displeasure. “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord; and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings; with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” These interrogatories betray a radical misconception of the purpose for which sacrifices were appointed. They make God vindictive; and appeasable, only by expensive oblations. So had the heathen, amidst their guilty darkness and fear, reproached the divine nature; but that the Depositaries of revealed

truth should have fallen into this error, was scarcely to have been expected. An illustrious example in their own history should have made them wiser. The royal penitent's memorable declarations—"Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise," should have left them at no loss, as to the way of regaining the divine favor. But this people were strangers to the relentings of godly sorrow; they had formed no purpose of a genuine change of life; but merely desiring to avert the consequences of their infidelity, and thinking this might be done by offering costly sacrifices, they declare themselves ready to go to any practicable length, in such a way of escaping the displeasure of God. The prophet answers rebukefully to their infatuated inquiries, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Sacrifice not your first-born, but your sins. Reform your dishonest, oppressive, profane practices. Humble yourselves before God with a penitent, sin-renouncing, obedient spirit. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

The madness which the prophet thus sharply reprehends, in his own people, has not been limited to them. There are multitudes even now, who, to escape the punishment of their sin, would do any thing which might be exacted, in the way of expense or penance—would fast and wear sackcloth, and give all their goods to feed the poor, and their own bodies to be burned, who yet most

stubbornly withhold from God the acceptable sacrifice of a subdued and obedient heart.

This, however, is God's great demand of the sons of men—the main end and argument of all his overtures, ordinances, instructions, and commandments; and any ritual observances which do not involve compliance with this demand, are a perversion of the right ways of the Lord, to which and its authors, as in the case of Cain, the beginner of this iniquity, God hath not, and, without being opposed to his own institutions, cannot have respect. Hence the remonstrant strain of our prophet, after exposing in the manner we have seen, the mistake of his countrymen—a most culpable mistake, which might well incur a divine rebuke. What was the pretext of that ignorance which caused the perplexity of this people? Had not their means of information been adequate? Had God winked at their iniquity? Had he called them to repentance with an indistinct or feeble voice? His voice, said the prophet, “crieth”—not speaketh with a still small accent—but crieth, putteth on strength, calleth aloud, and reacheth afar—not to one or another, but the chief place of concourse, “the city,” where the multitudes of men dwell—to all, from the least to the greatest, doth the almighty voice extend: As said Solomon, speaking of the Lord's voice under the fit names of wisdom and understanding—“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way, in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city; at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is unto the sons of men.”

And now, if we would know what had hindered this people from comprehending that voice, by attending to the

next words of the prophet, we shall learn that they had become so worldly-minded, so sensual, that in respect to the things of the Spirit of God they were as men without understanding. Into this deep fatuity does the prophet insinuate they had sunk, when to his announcement that the Lord lifteth up his voice, he upbraidingly subjoins, "the man of wisdom shall see thy name." This it is which makes graceless men contemptuous of God's calls, that they heed not these calls as coming from God; full of all that is awful in his nature and imperative in his sovereignty. If they so regarded them, both their ears would tingle until they ceased to resist them; and that they should not so regard them, is almost enough, as the Scripture in several places intimates, to provoke unconscious nature itself into outcries of wonder and sorrow.

And shall this stupidity pass unrebuked? Shall not that divine majesty which is not acknowledged in God's calls to repentance, assert itself at length in inflictions of just displeasure? Why then the mention in our passage, of "the rod," along with "the voice of the Lord;" the one to punish the contempt of the other. If ye will not hear his voice, said the man of God, "hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." That awful rod which is already stretched out, before your eyes, in the judgments which are abroad in your land, who think ye hath appointed it, and for what purpose? You can despise calls to repentance, as though they were but the breath of a mortal like yourselves; shall the judgments which are upon you, be held in like contempt?

Now what, brethren, was the manner and fashion of that crying voice of God, which it was so fearful a thing not to understand? Was it, do ye suppose, like that which poured through the open heavens at the baptism of Christ?

Did it sound forth from the clouds with the loudness and terribleness of thunder? It was the simple expression of his will by the ministry of his servants, the prophets. So it was that God anciently spake to the fathers of the Jewish people. The voice of the prophets—that was His voice of which it is said, the voice of the Lord is powerful, is full of majesty, breaketh the cedars of Lebanon, maketh Sinai to skip like a young unicorn, divideth the flames of fire, shaketh the wilderness, maketh the forest bare, by which the heavens and all their hosts were made, which spake and it was done, which commanded and it stood fast—that same almighty voice proceeded forth from the mouth of holy men of old, when they spake in the prophetical character.

I. And now, in shaping the tenor of our discourse to the occasion of the meeting, our first remark is, that the fact just asserted in respect to the ancient prophets, is true also, in respect to the Christian ministry, the prophets of the present dispensation. The official and veritable utterances of the evangelical ministry are as surely “the voice of the Lord” as were the testimonies of the holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The outward rank and condition of that ministry—their birth, breeding, civil standing, and connexions—for the most part confessedly low, make nothing against this high speech concerning them. For the prophets and even the apostles, what were some of them in these unessential respects? Nay, what, in such respects as these, was the Incarnate Word, the voice of the Lord embodied and speaking with its own and not another’s mouth?—It shows the depth to which our nature is degraded, that almost nothing seems of worth in the world’s estimation, compared to outward distinctions and possessions: And, therefore, God, that he might employ the strongest mean

possible for recovering us from this insanity, hath poured the full vials of his infinite contempt on these idols of mankind; in his choice and separation of persons, both unto the honors of his heavenly kingdom, and unto the management and labors of his kingdom on earth: Not deigning, as his usual way has been, even to look on princes, and judges, and mighty commanders, while he puts his Holy Spirit in poor, unknown, uncultivated men; and from the mouth of such babes and sucklings, sounds out his own almighty voice, by which he hath shaken the earth, and not earth only, but also heaven; and will yet shake the deepest foundations of hell, and establish order and peace throughout his vast dominions, never to be disturbed again in all the ages of eternity.

If any one still think, that the claim which we set up in behalf of the ministry of reconciliation, cannot be sustained, since these men, not being inspired, are fallible and may misinform their fellow men, which it were blasphemy to say the voice of God might do—let such an one call to mind, that the present ministers of the word have this advantage over the Old Testament prophets, that whereas those prophets received the communications of the divine will, in sundry parts, here a little and there a little, unto us are committed at one and the same time, the whole mass of the inspired oracles, both of the old and the new dispensations; whereby we are far better furnished as organs of the counsel of God to mankind, than they were, although unto them the manifestations of the Spirit were immediate and fresh. For all those manifestations, whenever and to whomsoever first made, having been written down under infallible guidance, and the record intrusted to an almighty guardianship, are at this moment as genuine, as excellent, and as directly from

the Spirit, as if they had just been given to the world: The only difference is, that while ancient prophets received them in visions, dreams, extasies, and trances, they are presented to our minds through the medium, and surely not less desirable medium, of letters. Though the Christian ministry, then, be not inspired men, they possess all the inspirations ever given—all that God has thought needful, for the benefit, whether of his ministers themselves, or those to whom he sends them. What prophet was ever so thoroughly furnished to his work, as far as inspiration could furnish him, as the New Testament man of God?

But it will doubtless not escape recollection, that the ministry may misinterpret inspired Scripture; to meet which seeming argument against their being considered as “the voice of the Lord,” let me put you in mind, that neither did the ancient prophets fully comprehend some of their own inspired deliverances, but were left to discover, in the free exercise of their own fallible understandings, what, and what manner of time, the Spirit which was in them did signify, in his deep revelations to them concerning things to come. Inspired prophets, then, commenting upon their own oracles, might perhaps err, as the Christian ministry may and do, in their commentaries on inspired Scripture. But the prophets, notwithstanding the possibility of their misinterpreting some things, were the mouth of the Lord to mankind; and so, notwithstanding a like imperfection in our case, may be the regular preachers of the everlasting gospel. Take a distinction between the pure dictations of the Spirit, and our uninspired expositions and reasonings upon them, and understand us as extending the high ministrual communications, whether of prophets or preachers, not a hair-breadth beyond the former, and where is the arrogance or the ill-consequence in either

case of pronouncing these communications “the voice of the Lord.” If preachers speculate, and sometimes, perhaps, they may do even that to edification unless they seek to become wise above what is written, let them apprise the people that they are not then presuming to speak in the name of the Lord; as the prophet who told a dream, as a dream should have let it pass—let but this needful precaution be used by preachers, and let the people carefully make the forementioned distinction, and there will be no danger of their receiving as inspired doctrine the commandments and speculations of men.

Still, perhaps, some cannot but stand in doubt of this view of the ministerial function, as attaching to it a sacredness and a sanction unwarranted by observation. Among those who profess to exercise that function, there is a radical discordance both in doctrine and life: Some unquestionably are not the Lord’s mouth, and what sure proof is there that such sacred honor belongs to any of them? Now freely do we grant, nay, loudly protest, that there are indeed false teachers, bearing the name of Christian ministers, who privily and otherwise bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them; but is it not forgotten that there were false prophets of old, who made the people of God to err through their “lies” and their “lightness?” And if in the presence of many hundreds of such deceivers, one solitary Elias or Micaiah could stand forth and sound out a voice as convincingly the Lord’s, as if no counterfeit of that voice had ever been attempted, so may the regular ministry now on the stage, show credentials, no less clear, of a divine commission, in the midst of all the varieties of self-sent preachers on the face of the whole earth. Indeed, complaint on the ground now taken is as perverse, in this case, as it could be in any other, wherein genuine excellence

should be denied existence, merely because there are pretenders who say they have it, and have not. Real and apparent, genuine and spurious, are designations which men find occasions to use, in reference to almost every thing with which they have to do; and shall they, therefore, become universal skeptics? All things in this world are such and so evidenced, as to suit a state of trial; and if this be proof of divine wisdom and goodness on the general scale, why should not these attributes be recognized as displayed, particularly, in the plan of Providence concerning the ministration of God's saving counsel and grace?

But now while you yield to the conclusiveness of these observations, you are probably but the more solicitous to know THE MARKS OF THE TRUE MINISTRY, that you may be sure of not paying your personal attendance where "the voice" which "crieth" is not that of the Lord, but another.

How, while one saith, lo here, and another lo there, is many a poor wayfaring man to know whither he must go? Is his rustic ear acute enough to try this confusion of exclamations, and distinguish the heavenly cry amidst all the imitations of it which the father of lies hath been able to invent? Men of corrupt minds are often in great fear, where no fear is, and surely there is none here, although the show of danger be not small. Scorners and sectarists have led heady and heedless people into the apprehension of an insurmountable difficulty, which is, in fact, no difficulty at all. And who that is not utterly overpowered by the spirit of bigotry; can allow himself soberly to think, that God would give forth his compassionate voice for the guidance of benighted mortals in the way of life, and not make that voice intelligible even to the feeblest mind, in

defiance of all the great deceiver can do to drown or to mimic it? How can it be the opinion of any thoughtful mind, that unless a man be learned and logical enough to explore and sift the arguments for and against the claims of a certain denomination, to be considered as descending with its ministers in an unbroken succession, from the apostles; unless he can do all this, he cannot know, by sound conviction of his own understanding, but that he is the dupe of a false teacher, who, in the guise of a sheep, may be inwardly a ravenous wolf? In no such way did Christ instruct his disciples to satisfy themselves as to the true character of teachers professing to have been sent from God? He gave them a test, at once infallible, and so easy of application, that any unlearned man or child may use it, as will as a master of Israel. Not by their having the apostles at the beginning of their ministerial line—no, said He, who was even higher than the apostles, but “by their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” Here—I would think it no boldness to affirm, in the midst of the whole multitude of strivers for exclusive apostolic countenance—here, is the true criterion of ministerial pretensions. A minister exemplifying the heavenly spirit of Christ in his walk before the world, and in his doctrinal inculcations ever enforcing the pure and entire truth of the gospel, and thus striving to win souls and build up converts in their most holy faith—such a minister, of whatever Christian denomination, approved by his brethren and having a seal to his commission in the hearts, perhaps, of hundreds begotten, through his preaching, to holiness and heaven—is a minister of Christ, who hath entered by the door into the sheepfold, the porter having opened to him as a true shepherd of the sheep, however some may suspect that hands were laid upon him which wanted pure ordaining virtue. But, on the contrary, a minister who, by light-

ness of manners, or by lies in his preaching, causes God's people to err from the narrow way of the gospel; who, in the tendency of his life and ministrations, makes little distinction between the world and the saints, whether in present character or eternal destiny; who pleads against a strict, and in favor of an easy and fashionable religion; and who, instead of having a seal to his ministry in the hearts of the elect, has there a witness against him, whose complaining voice, day and night, enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth—such a minister, though of a church unquestionably the most apostolical in Christendom, is one against whom all heaven, if it might speak, would protest, and whom every one who cares for his soul, ought to shun, as a kid should shun the den of a hungry lion.

II. So evident it is that “the voice of the Lord” truly “crieth,” in the testimony of the Christian ministry; and so easy is it, to distinguish that voice amidst all evil attempts to assume or imitate it:—Now, the next thing which the text and the occasion of this service lead us to set forth in our discourse, is the infatuation of mankind in not discovering the name and majesty of God, through the medium of his voice lifted up and crying in our humble testimony. That this discovery is not made, except by a very small remnant, it were preposterous to dispute, while almost the whole world as evidently lieth in wickedness, at this day, as when the trumpet of the gospel was first sounded by the apostles. For such surely would not be the state of the world—they would not be slumbering so securely in the lethean arms of their sins, with the clouds of eternal wrath gathering and thundering about them, if they discerned in the simple cry of their preachers the presence of the almighty and uncontrollable will. No, they neither discern it, nor believe it to be there; but rather, in their deceived heart, if not with open clamor,

they scorn the very pretence that God is with his ministers, and speaks with their mouth—they supremely scorn it, as the consummation of arrogance or delusion. “Who,” say they, “are these that speak as if they were God himself, and were armed with celestial power? Do we not see that they are sinful mortals as well as we?” If any thing pertaining to the persons or circumstances of the ministry—their weakness, their poverty, their obscurity, their want of great learning and refinement, their having no connexion with courts, and no countenance from princes—if things like these seem appendages not likely to be found about the ministry of Him who covereth himself with light as with a garment, and stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and layeth the beams of his chambers in waters, and hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet—if any one think such a being would be ashamed of a ministry so mean as are the preachers of the gospel, then let him deny that God spake by Elias, and Amos, and other prophets of like personal disadvantages: and let him also justify the Jews in rejecting their Messiah, on these same grounds; and let him hold, moreover, that the fishermen of Galilee were not the holy apostles of the Lamb, but emissaries of Satan. If God would have ministers great and dignified enough to be worthy of their office, where, among all the sons of men or even his holy angels, could they be found? Should we measure the divine majesty by any personal exhibitions of grandeur in the power of archangels to make, we should limit and degrade the Holy One even to the depriving Him of his essential glory. Why then do we not acknowledge the wisdom of God in choosing representatives of Himself, whose personal appearance and character could never be thought of, as the medium of judging concerning His nature? Other obvious reasons there are, why the meanness of the ministry should be their recommenda-

tion; but these need not be mentioned: No "man of wisdom," none who is not smitten with the spirit of slumber, having eyes that he should not see, and ears that he should not hear, will fail to discern the excellency of the gospel, merely because we have that treasure in earthen vessels. No excuse for this insensibility to the majesty of God, can be derived from the manner in which that majesty reveals itself. If it should be revealed daily in voices directly from the skies, and amidst all the apparatus of terror which invested Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, while such a mode of disclosure would be wholly incongruous with God's good and wise purposes, and with the present state and circumstances of man, it needs no penetration to see that those ever-sounding voices would be as little likely to secure due acknowledgment, as the voice of nature ceaselessly proclaiming, in all her works and movements, the presence of her God. "The man of wisdom" will consider, not so much the medium by which "the Lord's voice crieth," as the evidences that the voice is truly that of the Lord; and when that is the fact, the evidences of it, most assuredly, cannot be justly weighed for a moment, without overwhelming the mind with conviction. For is it even supposable that God may speak and room be left to doubt as to the source of the utterance? Must there not be something in the very voice itself, marking it as impossible to have come, save from the mouth of the Lord? Can any creature speak like the Creator? A man is not so far above a brute as God is above the greatest of his creatures; and if a man's voice sound differently from a brute's, must God's be undistinguishable from a man's? Let all the voices in the whole creation cry, and after that the Lord's; shall He, before whom the whole creation itself is as the small dust of the balance, utter a voice so little wiser, greater, better, than every other, that it is hard to discern the difference? Compare God's workmanship to

that of a creature's. What pencil can paint, what hand can build like His? How coarse and clumsy seem the cunningest copies of art in the presence of His originals? And if the difference be so vast in what He **DOES**, shall it be almost undiscernable in what He **SAYS**? When the mind which contains the original conceptions of all the forms of beauty, and sublimity, and strength, and goodness, which are to be found in creation—when the fountain of all intelligence, opens His mouth, shall nothing be expressed beyond the power of a breathing atom to utter? What else were to be expected but that what ever is truly divine, whether it be deed or word, will bear the impress of divinity so clearly in itself, that it need but be considered in order to be known as wholly unlike what might come from a creature. So all likelihood leads us to conclude; and if any man on the earth will now candidly hearken to the voice of which we speak, he will find in this instance our conclusion confirmed: that is such a voice, that no ear is so dull but must confess it divine, unless resolved against a fair and submissive hearing. Think ye that the Christian ministry, whether of the present or any past generation, could of themselves have uttered such a voice? Could their narrow and sinful hearts have conceived such thoughts as that voice reveals? O could the tongue of men or angels, unless moved by the inspiration of God, have uttered, and uttered with an eloquence such as mortal ears never elsewhere heard, such high lessons of virtue and righteousness, such sublime conceptions of God and his works, such humiliating views of man and his state, such a scheme of grace, such histories, such proverbs, such parables, such psalms, such prophecies, as that marvellous voice repeats, of which ministers of the gospel are appointed to be the echo, from land to land, and age to age. But the height of human infatua-

tion will not be fully discovered without considering also the effects and achievements of that testimony which men so dishonor. If a voice should be uttered which should break the cedars of Lebanon, make Sirion to skip like a young unicorn, dry up rivers, set the mountains on fire, and melt down the ancient rocks, almost as much amazement would seize you to hear a man question whether that voice came from God, as to witness the proof of its stupendous efficiency; yet it is certain that even such a voice would not accomplish greater wonders than that hath done in which the world sees nothing to awaken their attention. It needs more than a mortal's tongue to tell, and more than a mortal's heart to understand, the number and excellency of the doings of this voice. It hath produced a new creation; a creation resplendent with the Maker's glory, in a far higher sense than was the outward world in the freshness of its being. It hath dispersed a worse than the primeval darkness, with a better than the primeval light. It hath built for ruined man a far fairer than his first habitation, and new-made him in the likeness of God, that he might be fitted to dwell in it; and scattering the powers of darkness before him, subduing hell and death under his feet, it hath brought him triumphantly to his new Paradise, and opened its everlasting gates for his admission, and in that bright world it hath enthroned him a king and a priest unto God, to reign and shine for ever as the sun in the firmament. To use plainer speech, it hath in unnumbered instances illumined poor man's benighted mind, melted his stony heart into tenderness and love, conquered and renewed his obstinate will, refined and sanctified his vile affections, broken him off from all manner of vicious habits, and established him in habits of the strictest purity, given him immortal hope for the gloom of despair, spoken his storms of trouble into peace, made great tribu-

lation the occasion to him of heavenly rejoicing, and changed for him the grave into the gate of heaven. Such have been and such are some of the actual and manifest effects of this voice: but what more might not be added? If there is any thing desirable in refinement of taste and manners, in learning and the arts, in liberty and peace, the praise of it will not be bestowed where it is most due, unless it be acknowledged as an incidental legitimate fruit of the same wondrous voice. How soon would our entire world be as a vast field of blood, where wickedness in every frightful form would raven without restraint, if the voice which speaks through the gospel ministry should be silent. And yet mankind see nothing of God in it, but for the most part hold it in less esteem, than many of the empty cries which they raise among themselves.

III. Now this in itself is an evil more deplorable than every other in the present lot of man; a strange evil truly; at the same time, the greatest of calamities and the greatest of sins; and yet what we are in the next place briefly to declare is, that bad as it is in itself, it draws after it worse consequences—consequences which it had been well for him who has to meet, that he never had been born. These consequences will teach the incorrigible despisers of our testimony what it is they hold in such contempt. It now appears to them as having nothing in it to be feared; they take liberties with it and find no hurt; they hear it or hear it not, as may suit their convenience or caprice: they mock at it; they gainsay it; they treat it in whatsoever manner they please, and yet it injures not a hair of their head. They sometimes do worse; seeking even to silence it, by stifling the breath that gives it expression. They lay their hands on the persons of the ministry, they scourge, they imprison, they kill them, they account them as sheep for the slaughter, and still what

harm do they suffer? So dealt the Jews with the prophets, the apostles, and the Prince of Life himself; and thousands of God's faithful witnesses have fared in like manner in subsequent times. If this voice be the Lord's why is it not proved to be his, by some instant stroke of divine anger on every one who offers it the least disrespect? The patience of God which bears so long with the world's blasphemies and crimes; the spirit of Jesus which restrained him from coming down from the cross to prove his Messiahship at the challenge of his murderers, is not less mysterious than that the miracle performed on Lot's wife is not repeated upon every one who in any way dishonours the gospel ministry. Could the judgment, however, of these disdainful men be now realized, no one would complain that it seemed to linger. As the voice of civil law which is treated as if it were without strength by successful robbers and ruffians, appears sufficiently powerful at the terrible moment of their shameful execution, so when the doom of these contemners of "the Lord's voice" has once overtaken them, that now unavenged voice, will convincingly show whose it is, by inflictions as demonstrative of an almighty hand, as the creation of the world. Time allows us not to enlarge here beyond one or two remarks. When the word of God came to the prophet Jeremiah, a man of like passions with ourselves, "See," it was said to him, "I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to plant and to build;" so tremendous was the strength that dwelt in a prophet's tongue: yet was it not equal to that with which Christ has armed the commissioned heralds of the gospel. "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven;" "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" "Whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted unto

them, and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained;" "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." O when the voice of the evangelical ministry shall be honoured by the full revelation of the power here given it by Christ, no creature will be left in doubt whether that voice be their own, or His who called the world out of nothing and it came. Then will be seen how truly Christ said, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me: and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."

This also should be remembered, that the penalty of these despisers though not immediate, does not slumber for a moment; neither is it slack in its approach as some count slackness. It is coming, as directly as the arrow to its mark; and when arrived it will be thought that light itself is not so swift. Nor are there wanting tokens of its terribleness and its haste. For God, still rich in mercy, gives much warning to rebellious men; bringing forth the cloud of his indignation as from afar, with his lightning playing gently before it, that they may be without no inducement to make their escape from the fury of the coming storm. Since they contemptuously turn away their ears from his "voice," he lifts up his menacing "rod," to alarm them if possible out of their desperate stoutness. He visits them with corrective stripes: they are stricken, smitten, and afflicted in their minds, in their persons, in their families, in their connexions, in all their outward circumstances; others are struck with death for their admonition; child, lover, and friend, one, another, and then another, are known no more in the sphere of their social intercourse; and yet for all this his comminatory anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring

back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. But when these methods of correction have failed of their designed result, when men after proving their contempt on the voice of the Lord, refuse also to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it, God having endured these vessels of wrath, with so much long suffering will hasten to show his wrath and make his power known in their everlasting destruction.

But there is one way whereby God sometimes reveals his admonitive indignation against the refusers of his mercy, which though seldom so esteemed by them, is of all others by far the most dreadful in the view of the man of wisdom; and the event which has this day convened us makes it specially proper to mention it. It is when God withdraws his voice and appoints silence to instruct them: when he smites not them but his own ambassador; and calling his rejected witness home, leaves them only his grave and his dust to remind them of eternity. This is a kind of warning which almost no one lays to heart; and yet, in the way of reproof, what could the Lord do more than this, to strike the rock of impenitency into contrition?

It were most ungracious to insinuate that the recal of that very eminent man, who so long sounded out the "Lord's voice" from this place, should be regarded as a judgment upon the congregation; but this we may freely say, that every person, "man of wisdom," or otherwise, who was accustomed to hear the word at his mouth, should not be unexercised in deep thought and feeling, by that solemn act of a most deep meaning Providence. Especially does it concern those of you who though his testimony is ended, remain yet in your sins, to ponder this, to you surely, serious occurrence. How often have you heard from him as he was about closing a powerful argument against your unbelief, the tender premonition that his days were almost num-

bered: what he then said has come to pass; and how soberly does the fulfilment of his word in this instance warn you, that though heaven and earth may pass away, nothing that he ever spoke to you, "as the voice of the Lord," shall fail to be accomplished. He is not more certainly gone the way of all the earth, nor was it at all more certain that he would go, than that what he has often told you out of the Scriptures respecting the final doom of the wicked, will be fulfilled in yourselves, if you do not repent.

But, however his removal should be interpreted in respect to the flock of which he was specially the shepherd, it reads a lesson to the church and the community at large, which nothing but the stupidity reprehended in this discourse can misunderstand. When one of the first luminaries in our heaven disappears, shall the inhabitants of the land have no concern at the event? When Elias is taken up, shall the cry be nowhere heard, "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." We shall not now venture to present a character of this great man; which, whoever attempts, should aim at an exactness of resemblance, such as when in water face answereth to face, lest, by being confronted with the very precise image which he has left of himself in your hearts, and in his works, it should be reprov'd as untrue to so rare a specimen of God's handiwork. Our remarks concerning him, will be such only as may be prompted by an endeavor to enforce the instruction afforded us by the Providence which has removed him.*

* It may be well to record in this place, the following biographical particulars concerning this distinguished man. He was born February 21st, 1769, at Lewes, in the state of Delaware. He was graduated in the University of Pennsylvania, in 1788. He was admitted to the bar, in Sussex county, Delaware, in 1790. He

While ministers of a certain class, possessing little intellectual furniture, besides a bare knowledge of the essential truths of the gospel, are, with warm spirits, with a most exemplary zeal, and with much success, constantly employed in applying those truths to the hearts of their fellow men, they are sometimes disposed to hold in too little esteem, the labors of those of their brethren, whose taste, learning, and sense of duty, incline them to deep research into the principles of things, to careful analysis of complex subjects, to critical investigation, and minute exegesis of the sacred text, to elaborate inquiry into ecclesiastical antiquities and the opinions and productions of early days, and to the knowledge and solution of all the most subtle objections that have at any time been urged by heretics and unbelievers, against the true Christian faith; as if without such vast labors at the fountains of wisdom, these less curious divines could have been supplied with some of those sweet streams, of which they are content to drink, without considering to whom next to God they are most indebted for the privilege. When our

was licensed to preach the gospel in 1804, and, in the same year, was ordained and installed as pastor over the united congregations of Lewes, Coolspring, and Indian river. In 1806, he was advised by the Presbytery of Lewes to accept the call of the First Presbyterian church in Philadelphia, to which he removed in the same year. In May, 1828, he removed to his farm, about 20 miles from Philadelphia, on account of the infirm state of his health; preaching, nevertheless, to his congregation frequently as his health permitted. His resignation of his pastoral charge was accepted in the spring of 1830. In the same season, he visited the city, and preached for the last time to his people. He triumphantly departed to heavenly rest, December 9th, 1830, at nine o'clock in the evening, and was buried on the following Monday (Dec. 13th) in a spot, selected by himself, in the grave-yard of the Neshamony church.

friend fell asleep. in what pulpit of this land, was a man to be found so enriched as himself, with the fruits of this patient, and, at this day, too unusual researches of mind? Our ears never listened to a preacher whose common discourses discovered as rich treasures of recondite learning. And what more surprised us than the extent and variety of his acquisitions, was the ease and simplicity, and nice exactness, with which, on all occasions, he used them. In proportion to the depth and difficulty of his subjects, his tongue was loosed and moved nimbly and trippingly, as in its favorite sphere, expressing the most subtle distinctions and discriminations of thought; pursuing the most refined and complicate argumentations; collating, criticising, paraphrasing, Scriptures hard to be understood; reciting out of ancient and uncommon books, historical testimonies, and statements of doctrine; without the assistance of notes, and yet with a fluent precision and perspicuity of language which no such assistance could have improved.

Another recollection of him, which deepens exceedingly our sense of the loss we sustain by his departure, is, that with his great elevation in other respects he united in a rare degree what transcends all other excellence, and is the highest proof of true greatness, a catholic and charitable spirit. We never knew one who scrutinized more severely the evidences of doctrine; and he was, consequently, when convinced, not liable to be soon shaken in mind; nor did he lightly esteem the truth which with so much diligence and honesty he had acquired, or think it unimportant that others should be ignorant of it, much less that they should pervert or falsify it. But his reading was too various, his observation too wide, his acquaintance with the history of theological strifes too ample, his persuasion too lively, that the differences among religious parties are

rather referable to a sectarian than a truth-seeking spirit, and while they anathematize one another, may be consistent with the existence, in some degree, of real piety in both, and their ultimate reconciliation in heaven—he was, in a word, too sound-minded and enlightened a man to be a fierce champion of an ecclesiastical shibboleth, or to eliminate those whom he might suspect of having no readiness in framing to pronounce it right. He was among the worthiest of those ministers in our own denomination, who, espousing no side in our debates about orthodoxy, are willing to let those debates proceed as long as they threaten no schism, but when that danger is seen, throw in their influence, as a balance wheel in a vast machine, whose movement, without such a regulator, would presently stop with a terrific crash and damage. Such was the spirit of this high-souled man; and who of us can consider the present state, might we not almost say, crisis, of affairs in our church, without sighing deeply in his spirit, that the voice which he could raise, were he now in the midst of us, is not to be heard again till time shall be no longer.

Nor was it merely in his high place as a minister of Christ that he singularly honored his Master: he was distinguished by simplicity as his disciple, not less than by gifts as his representative; and it is when these two exist in union, that they become worthy of admiration. What a charm is there in gifts when simplicity exercises them; and how venerable is simplicity when it invests illustrious gifts. Never have we seen the person, in whom simplicity dwelt in an equal degree. Whether in his public ministrations, or in private life, this great man was unassuming as a little child, claiming no distinctions above the plainest individuals, and appearing to be conscious of no superiority to them in understanding and knowledge.

And such exemplifications of the Spirit of Christ are not so common amongst us that we shall suffer little by this privation: How often does the church, not to say the world, concede reputation for greatness, where it is no sooner received than it becomes manifest there was a mistake, by the immediate taking on of stateliness which it occasions? Such a transcendent instance of the reverse of this weakness was not to be lowly rated by true judges of excellence, and by them at least the loss of it will not be unlamented. With such rare simplicity in such a man, it was unavoidable that other great virtues should be united: in two of which especially, he was almost excessive. How did justice, as beaming from his example, rebuke those inconsistent religionists, who, by their *pious*, would fain make atonement for their *dishonest* deeds; and how did his generosity, a kindred principle, put to shame those covetous professors who uphoard treasure for themselves, as if orphans and widows, and the children of want, had ceased from among men. Time fails us to speak of his other high excellencies; the strength and calmness of his feeling, his gravity and cheerfulness; his ease, pleasantness, and exhaustless resources in conversation; and his most exemplary manner of life in his family. We shall leave his defects to be reported by those who would remind us that human nature is imperfect; only begging them, if they censure his excitability, and his too great confinement at home, to imitate his nobleness in retraction; and to remember what an invalid he was for the last twenty years, how open his door ever stood to visiters, and what a good use he made of retirement.* It being our purpose by these remarks to

* Dr. Wilson's self-seclusion from company and society-meetings should not be imitated, at least to the extent to which he prac-

stir and strengthen in our minds a just sense of the dispensation which has taken him from us for ever, we choose rather to remember, to what a height of excellence he attained, than that he did not rise beyond it.

It does not alleviate the sadness of the event we deplore, that it occurred not unexpectedly, but by means

tised it, by the generality of ministers of the gospel: he had reasons for retirement peculiar to himself; but the best and most available kind of influence which a minister may exert, especially in a large city, is, for the most part, we think, that which prayer and intense study, rather than free intercourse with mankind, and abundant parochial visiting, are adapted to supply. With few exceptions, it may be questioned, whether ministers who are much abroad in the families of a city congregation, not to say in other social circles, do not receive more injury to themselves, in the loss of time, in discomposure of spirit, in dissipation of thought and feeling, than is compensated by any benefit, obtained or imparted, in such discursive modes of pastoral activity. Where, indeed, the private conversation of ministers with their people, is like Paul's preaching "from house to house,"—a succession of sermons addressed to individuals or families, unspeakable good may be both communicated and received, and ministerial usefulness and influence, and even power in the pulpit, be greatly promoted: But the gifts of ministers must be very peculiar, or there must be an extraordinary state of religious feeling in their congregations, to admit of regular parochial visitation being so conducted in such a city, for instance, as Philadelphia. At least, if much of this sort of work is indispensable to the success of the gospel, in our cities, there should be more than one minister to a church; for certain it is, that the character and frequency of public preaching, the attention to benevolent societies, the attendance on funerals, and the visitation of the sick, demanded of the ministers of city congregations, in this day of unusual excitement and action, make full requisition on all their time, and form a burden of effort which few men can long endure, without exhaustion and perhaps irreparable loss of health.

of a very lingering illness which slowly enfeebled his frame, until it could no longer perform the least function of life. On his own account indeed we rejoice that the days of his patient suffering are ended, but he had not yet numbered three-score years and ten, and the force of his mind was never greater than at the moment of his expiration.

He departed prematurely in the full strength of all his intellectual powers, and that disease should have so long interfered with the use of those powers before his hour came, only gave cause in a less degree for the same grief which his death more loudly calls for. But let us now cease from recollections of what we have lost, whether by the infirmity of his years, or the too soon completion of them, to secure in our breasts, if possible, an indelible stamp of the precious lesson of his dying conduct.

Having protracted his pastoral labors until his breath became almost too short for the purpose of continuous utterance, he reluctantly concluded, as he was wont to say to his friends, that his work for the church and his God was done, and all that remained for him now was to prepare for his change. And how seriously did he set himself to that most momentous of all the undertakings that mortal men are concerned with; choosing as the scene of it, a country retreat, and there amid the quiet, for which he always pined, ordering his conversation and reading, his prayers and meditations, with constant reference to the great event—whereby, while he established his own heart in the faith of the gospel, the hope of immortality, and confidence in the fullness of God's forgiving mercy, he became so instinct with these divine themes, that with the pen of a ready writer he indited for the edification of mankind a treatise on each of them. His favorite books

now were those of the most spiritual and heavenly strain; whereof the Saint's Rest of Baxter was almost always found with the Bible upon the stand beside him. Of that work especially he would speak in strong terms of commendation, at the same time remarking, "there is no book to be compared with the Bible, and if I might prefer one part of that blessed book before others, I would say, I love the Psalms the best; I can always find in them something more expressive of my feelings than my own language." At the last communion-service of the church within whose bounds he resided, which was but a little while before his death, he took part in the distribution of the sacred symbols, and in a manner which revealed his consciousness that he should never so officiate again—solemn from a sense of a near eternity and with a heart enlarged with the love of Christ and the hope of soon being with him—he addressed his fellow worshippers on the great things of their common faith, far beyond his strength. His soul henceforth spread her wings for the world of rest. He said to a friend, "I have a strange difficulty, and you will perhaps think strangely of it, I am at loss what to pray for"—and added, in a most solemn tone and with his eyes lifted to heaven, "God knows I am willing that whatever he pleases shall be done." His triumph too over the fear of death was complete. "I have," said he, "been looking the case between God and myself, over and over and over again; and though I see enough to justify God in casting me off a thousand times and more, my conviction of my interest in Christ is so firm, that I cannot make myself afraid; the only thing I fear is, that I have not fears enough." He remarked on the last Sabbath evening of his life, "I am almost home, and I thank God that I am—I went astray from him, but in his rich mercy he brought me back. I am unworthy of the least

of his mercies, and if I may lie down beside his footstool, or if he will even put me under it—I will take the very lowest place in heaven.” He needed some refreshment, and when the cup was handed to him, he took it and said, “O God bless this cup—I think I have a covenant right to it.” A few hours before he died, he asked a brother in the ministry to pray for him, and specified this petition, “Pray that God will do with me just as he pleases.” Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace! We mourn for him, but not on his own behalf. Such a life, and such a death, to those who believe the Scriptures, are equivalent to an assurance from heaven, that he now shares the beatitude of that holy world. We sorrow that he has left us, but not as those who have no hope. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you, by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who are asleep: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord.”