XXV.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN

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SERMON.

"ARISE, SHINE; FOR THY LIGHT IS COME, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON THEE."—Isaiah lx. 1.

THE Church is here addressed. She is contemplated as in a state of depression. In some of the preceding chapters, she is represented as deeply guilty before God, and deserving his displeasure. But, instead of visiting her with wrath, he encourages her with promises of mercy. Instead of leaving her to total ruin, he appears for her deliverance. And while despondency paralizes her energies, and prevents her from availing herself of the assistance which God has granted, he forbids this desponding frame and calls upon her to "arise and shine, her light being come, and the glory of the Lord having risen upon her." And, what is thus addressed to the whole Church, is addressed to each of her several parts, when placed in similar circumstances.

The connexion in which this passage stands, shows that it relates to times future to those in which the prophet wrote. It is generally believed to refer, in an eminent degree, to that period of the Church, which stands nearly connected with the light and glory of the millenial state. That it refers to gospel times, there can be no doubt. And whether primarily or not, it is evidently suitable to the Church when, under the pressure of trials, arising from her unfaithfulness and degeneracy, God her Saviour has appeared for her deliverance. I shall, therefore, appropriate the passage on the present occasion, and endeavour to elicit from it the instruction and encouragement, which it is calculated to impart.

Upon the Church, in her depressed condition, certain duties are enjoined. She is commanded to "arise and shine." These duties are enforced by a specific reason; "for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." The DUTIES enjoined, therefore, and THE REASON of them, are the points which will require our attention.

I. The first duty of the Church, in the posture referred to, is

to "ARISE." This implies, 1. That she SHAKE OFF HER INDOLENT, DESPONDENT FRAME OF MIND—that she cease to indulge discouraging thoughts, in relation to the mercy and power of God, and her own future condition. The people of God are too apt, in seasons of difficulty and defection in the Church, to indulge a spirit of despondency and unbelief. Thus Israel is represented as complaining: "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." (Is. xl. 27.) And Zion is represented as saying, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But, in reply, God says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hand, thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers, and they that made thee waste, shall go forth of thee." (Is. xlix. 14—17.) God would not have the Church, therefore, to indulge in heartless despondency, in times of difficulty and embarrassment. But, instead of yielding to the pressure of the occasion, she must dismiss her gloom and unbelief. She must shake off her discouragement, which, as long as it is suffered to remain, will unfit her for honouring God, by the faithful discharge of her duty.

2. This command to "arise," farther implies, THAT THE CHURCH ASSUME THE POSTURE OF ACTIVITY; THAT SHE PREPARE FOR ACTION. It involves exercises of repentance and faith, and the taking hold of God's plan for the accomplishment of his purposes, in relation to his Church. In shaking off her lethargy, and assuming the posture of activity, the Church is not at liberty to proceed upon her own view of the means to be adopted; but she must make her arrangements, in accordance with the prescriptions of her Head. The armour which she must gird on, is that, which "the Captain of her Salvation" has furnished. And, in its use and application, she must be regulated by his will, as made known in his word.

This part of the requirement seems to be preliminary to the practical developement, or exhibition of her character and energies. As marred by sin, and depressed by difficulties, her first duty is to have her mind restored to its proper exercise, and directed towards its proper objects. Indolence, despondency, and unbelief must be laid aside. She must repent of her sins. Her

faith must be directed to the promises of God, in relation to her deliverance and glory; and with her eye fixed upon the appointed means, she must have a settled determination to use them, for the exhibition of her true glory, and that of her ascended Lord. When the Church assumes this posture, the command to "arise," has been fulfilled. Her position, is that of a soldier roused from his state of slumber and inaction, clothed in the panoply of his vocation, and ready to shed lustre on his country, by the display of his energies, in deeds of high and noble daring.

II. But the Church is, also, commanded to "SHINE." First, "arise," and then "shine." The Church is supposed to be the subject of glorious attributes—to possess, within herself, the elements of beauty, which, when properly developed, will appear attractive to those around. It is assumed, that she is "all glorious within." Her external embellishments too, comport with her internal glory. Her ornaments are all of a heavenly kind. In this, she is distinguished from those who would falsely assume her character, and claim her honours. Hence, she is described by John, under the emblem of a woman, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." (Rev. xii. 1.) On the other hand, her false competitor is described as a woman riding in state, "arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations, and filthiness of her fornication." (Rev. xvii. 4.) Here, you will observe, that while the ornaments of the latter are all earthly, those of the former are all heavenly. And it is to this Church, suffering a partial obscuration of her external splendour, but still "all glorious within," that the command in the text is given. Having assumed an erect posture, she must put forth her activity in such a way, as will exhibit her true character, and unfold her heavenly lustre before every beholder.

But how is this to be done? By what process of action shall she make her glory resplendent, and shine in the unclouded beauty of her heavenly character? To this I answer:

1. That she must do it BY THE EXHIBITION OF HER DOCTRINAL PURITY. The Church is the depository of the truth. She was so under the former dispensation.—"To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." (Rom. ix. 4.) What-

ever God had instituted, promised, and revealed for the benefit of man, was deposited with the Church, to be preserved and employed for his glory, and the salvation of souls. She was made the receptacle of the truth, and responsible for its maintainance and exhibition. It is so still under the Gospel dispensation. The "Spirit of truth" was promised, and has been sent "to abide with the Church for ever"—to "teach her all things"—to "guide her into all truth"—to "testify of Christ," and to "receive of Christ's and show it unto her." (John v. 14—16.) And hence, the Christian church, as being the repository of the Spirit of truth, and of the truth as communicated by him, is called by Paul "the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. iii. 15.)

Now, the doctrines of the Gospel constitute a large portion of the truth, as revealed by the Spirit of truth; and much of the true glory of the Church consists in her being the living depository of these doctrines. To a mind properly trained, there is a beauty even in philosophical and mathematical truth. This is still more emphatically the case in *moral* truth, in which the character and relations of God and man, and all the gracious movements of the eternal mind, in regard to the recovery and salvation of sinners, are clearly presented. This beauty is found in the pure system of truth contained in "the lively oracles," received by the Fathers and given to us. (Acts vii. 38.) Hence, the Gospel containing this system of truth, is called "the *glorious* Gospel of Christ," and "the *glorious* Gospel of the blessed God." (2 Cor. iv. 4. 1 Tim. i. 2.) The Church, therefore, having received this *glorious* deposit, is bound to preserve and exhibit it. She must not allow it to be diluted or corrupted by foreign admixtures; but she must preserve it in its original purity, and hold it up before the world in its own heavenly forms, that it may be seen and admired of all men, as the offspring of heaven.

Of the obligation of the Church to preserve and exhibit the doctrines of the Gospel in their uncorrupted purity, we have very decisive indications in the word of God. Paul evinces the greatest anxiety, that the churches of Galatia should preserve the truth as it had been delivered to them by himself, and manifests much grief when he found them departing from the faith. "I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel, which is not another; but

there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Gal. i. 6—8.) "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth." (Gal. iii. 1.) Nor did Paul content himself with idle lamentations and anxious feelings on this subject; but he actually excluded from the communion of the Church, those who had departed from the faith. Such were Hymeneus and Alexander, who had made shipwreck of the faith, and whom he "delivered unto Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." (1 Tim. i. 19, 20.) He moreover, enjoins upon Titus the exclusion of heretics from the Church of Christ. "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition, reject." (Tit. iii. 10.)

How earnest is he also, with both Timothy and Titus, that they should attend carefully to the reception of the true doctrine, and that they and others should preach it as they had received it. "Take heed to thy *doctrine*," says he to Timothy, "for the time will come, when they will not endure *sound doctrine*." To Titus he says, "Speak thou the things which become *sound doctrine*"—"in *doctrine* showing uncorruptness—*sound speech* that cannot be condemned." And he tells him that a bishop should be a man, "holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by *sound doctrine*, both to exhort and convince the gainsayers."

From these injunctions, we see how important it was, in the estimation of the Apostle, that the ministry be sound, and present the doctrines of the Gospel in their pure and uncorrupted forms. As the Church speaks by her ministers, it is essential that *they* be sound in the faith, that they may give a fair exhibition of the truth, as it has been deposited with the Church, by her exalted Head. And, besides, as Christian morality is based upon evangelical truth, it is manifest, that in order to the highest developments of Christian character in the conduct, there must be a cordial reception and full exhibition of the doctrines of the Gospel, in their native purity. A sound faith lies at the foundation of a holy practice. And when these are found together, they present Christianity, in a highly attractive point of light. "I have no greater joy, says John, than to hear that my children walk in the truth," (3 John 4.) Would the Church shine, then, according to

the requirement of the text, she must preserve and exhibit uncorrupted soundness in the faith. Her doctrinal purity must be maintained, at all hazards, as this lies at the foundation of all her other excellencies.

2. The Church should shine, BY THE SCRIPTURAL SIMPLICITY OF HER ORDER AND FORMS OF WORSHIP. The order of the Old Testament Church and her forms of worship, were highly complex. They were made so by Divine appointment, and for reasons connected with the character and circumstances of the Church at that time. But the case is different, under the New Testament dispensation. The cumbrous ceremonial of the Jews, has given place to the simplest forms of order and of worship. The reading and preaching of the word, prayer, the administration of the sacraments, and of discipline, with occasional fasts, constitute the sum of that system of observances, which has been imposed upon the New Testament Church, by her gracious Head. And, it is by a rigid adherence to these appointments, in their simple, Scriptural form, that the Church is to exhibit her divine beauty and power, while seeking to accomplish the ends of her organization.

On this subject false views began to develope themselves at a very early period. And in different periods of the Church, additions of various kinds have been made to the prescriptions of Christ, tending to render them less simple, and more imposing in their form. Pompous ceremonies, flaming torches, and gaudy vestments have, at different times, been deemed necessary to give lustre to the worship of Christ. And there have been, and still are churches, in which such showy appendages constitute a prominent part of their worship, and where the unction of the Spirit itself, seems to be considered less ornamental, than the splendid decorations of the chapel or the cathedral. All this, however, is foreign to the character of the true Church, which should seek to shine, not in the borrowed robes of "the mother of harlots and abominations," but in the heavenly attire, which has been purchased and bequeathed her by the Saviour.

There is a strong tendency in the Church to multiply the forms of religion, and add to the means which Christ has appointed for the developement of her resources. Hence, when his institutions are not attended with the proper effects, instead of attributing it to a mistake or defect on *her* part, in the use of them, she is apt

to ascribe it to *their* inefficiency, and to resort to some new form of proceeding, by which she may more effectually accomplish the desired object. In this way, new measures and new forms of action, unknown to the simplicity of Gospel order, are introduced, and the glory of the Church is marred. She shines in false colours, the work of man's device, while her own simple forms of beauty are over-shadowed and concealed. Against every thing of this kind, the Church should guard, and preserve unsullied from the touch of human hands, the institutions and forms of order which have been given her by her glorious Redeemer.

3. The Church should shine BY THE ELEVATED PRACTICAL PIETY OF HER MINISTERS AND MEMBERS. That holiness enters very largely into the Church's beauty and power of attraction, is so apparent, as scarcely to require remark. This, according to the Apostle, is that which renders her glorious, and to secure which, the Saviour gave himself for her. "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. v. 25—27.) Holiness, therefore, eminently constitutes the true glory of the Church, and, the greater the amount of her holiness, the more glorious she is in the estimation of God, and of all holy beings.

If, then, the Church would shine in her true glory, she must attend to the cultivation of the personal piety of her ministers and people. It is when the graces of the Spirit are in vigorous exercise, exciting to holy activity in the service of Christ, that Christians exhibit the true excellence of their religion before the world. It is then, that their light shines with such attractive lustre, that men "see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven." And it is when the Church is thus arrayed in "the beauty of holiness," that men, while they gaze upon her, are ready to ask, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" (Cant. vi. 10.)

Perhaps the Church never shone more gloriously, in the personal holiness of her ministers and members, than she did immediately after she received "the promise of the Father," and was baptized with the Holy Ghost from on high. She then appeared

in all the freshness and beauty of a well-watered garden, which the Lord had planted, and not man. Christians bore the impress of divine grace in their tempers, and put forth the fruits of holiness in their lives. Ministers and people felt a common impulse. The love of Christ constrained them, and, while they laboured and suffered for the salvation of souls, such was their holy meekness and intrepidity, that their very enemies "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." It should be so still. Both ministers and people should cultivate such high measures of personal holiness, that they may be known and recognized every where, and by all men as the servants and disciples of the holy Redeemer. When this shall be the case, then the Church will put forth a heavenly lustre. She will then *shine* in "the garments of salvation," bought with the blood of the Saviour, and entwined around her by the Spirit of the living God.

4. The Church should shine, BY PUTTING FORTH HER ENERGIES FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD. The organization of the Church had reference not only to her own benefit, but also, to the benefit of others. Although her officers and ordinances were given "for the perfecting of the saints," and "the edifying of the body of Christ," they had respect, also, to the conversion of sinners to God. Hence, the command of Christ to "preach the Gospel to every creature," and to "compel" sinners to "come in," that his "house may be filled." Hence, the offers of the Gospel, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and all the means of grace which are authorized by Christ, for the restoration of fallen man to the favour of God. Such, then, being the fact, that the Church has been organized with a view to the conversion of the world, it is her duty to put forth her energies for the accomplishment of this object. If you ask, how this is to be done? I answer, in general, that she is to employ all the means which the Saviour has appointed for this purpose. But especially, I would refer to the two following ways in which the Church should put forth her efforts for the world's conversion to God. 1. She should do it, *by seeking a revival of religion, through the special out-pouring of the Spirit of God.* Although the proximate effect of an out-pouring of the Spirit of God, is an increase of piety in the Church, the secondary and more remote effect, is the conversion of sinners, and their visible union to the Church of Christ. This appears to be distinctly set forth in that prophecy

of Isaiah in which God says, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring : and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses—one shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." (Isaiah xliv. 3—5.) Here you will observe, that the results of this *flood-like* effusion of the Spirit of God, are stated to be, the appearance of a number of healthful and growing converts, and their visible union to the Church of Christ. And, such are found, in fact, to be the common results of a copious out-pouring of the Spirit of God. It was so on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit was poured out, converts sprung up "as willows by the water courses," and joined themselves to the Lord by a visible profession of his name. It has often been so since. And when this promise shall receive its full accomplishment, by more copious effusions of the Spirit, the same result shall be seen, in a still more extensive form. Sinners shall be converted, and shall be found flocking to Jesus, "as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows." (Is. lx. 8.)

As revivals of religion, therefore, are attended with such gracious effects in the conversion of sinners, the Church should seek for such manifestations of God's special mercy. By repentance for her sins, faith in the redeeming mercy, and promised grace of the ascended Redeemer, and by the use of all scriptural means, she should look to God for the special out-pouring of his Spirit, for the conversion of sinners. And as the Church is required to labour for the conversion of the world to God, it is of special importance that she be revived, in order to her greater activity in this service. For the Church never does, and never will labour so heartily for the salvation of the world, as when she has been refreshed by the reviving influences of the Holy Ghost.

2. But the Church should also labour for the conversion of the world, *by the multiplication of her ministers, and by sending them forth throughout all nations, to preach the Gospel to every creature.* If men are to be brought to Christ, they must have the Gospel preached to them. For "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be

sent?" (Rom. x. 14, 15.) Hence, our Lord said to his disciples "The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." (Matt. ix. 37, 38.) If the Gospel must be preached to men, in order to their salvation, and there are not ministers enough to do it, it is the duty of the Church to seek for an increase of ministers, that all may have salvation tendered to them in the way appointed by Christ. And in seeking for a multiplication of ministers, the Church must throw her influence in favour of those institutions, which are designed and adapted to train up men for this holy office. She must patronize her Boards of Education, her Colleges, and her Theological Seminaries, seeking to give all an impulse, in favour of the object to be attained.

Nor is this all. She must send forth these ministers, when trained, into "the waste places of Zion," and into "the fields which are white already to harvest." As "chosen vessels unto Christ," she must command them to go and fulfil the end for which they are chosen, by "bearing his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel," that, through them, men of all nations may "come unto the knowledge of the truth." It is eminently the duty of the Church to put forth her energies in this way. The Gospel has been committed to her, that she may diffuse its light. The leading form in which this is to be done is through her ministry. By them she must "preach the Gospel to every creature." Such is the arrangement of Christ; and it is the duty of the Church to carry it out. As a great Missionary Society, organized by Christ himself, she should put forth her energies in this form, for the conversion of the world. And never does the Church appear more glorious, or shine with more heavenly lustre, than when under "the Captain of her Salvation," she goes forth in this manner, to the conquest of the nations. When, with a great army of missionaries, she closes in upon the territories of Satan, and pours a flood of light upon his dark empire, the world cannot fail to be attracted and impressed by the lustre of the movement. Devils see it and tremble—Holy angels behold it and rejoice. God himself looks on it with approbation, and will crown it with success!

Such brethren, are the ways in which the Church should arise and shine. And in all this exhibition of her glory and beauty, I

wish it to be remarked, that the Church is under the directing and controling influence of the love of Christ, imparted by the Spirit of grace. This is the great source of her spiritual glory and activity. When she arises and shines, it is because Christ, by his gracious Spirit enables her to do so; and instead of claiming the honour to herself, her children with united voices exclaim, in the language of the pious Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us! but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." (Ps. cxv. 1.)

II. The reason of the duties enjoined in the text, next claim our attention; "FOR THY LIGHT IS COME, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON THEE." The Lord Jesus Christ is eminently "the light and glory" of the Church. He is so indicated in both the Old and New Testaments. Balaam saw him as "a star out of Jacob." (Numb. xxiv. 17.) "I will give thee, says Jehovah, for a light to the Gentiles." (Isa. xlix. 6.) And at his appearance in the world, it is said, "The people which sat in darkness, saw great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." (Matt. iv. 16.) Christ himself also says, "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.) The ark, which was a type of Christ, is called "the glory of the Lord." (1 Sam. iv.) So also, the tabernacle is called "the place where his honour dwelleth," or "the dwelling of God's glory." (Ps. xxvi. 8.) In reference to this, John says of Christ, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John i. 14.) But what fixes the interpretation beyond doubt is, that in the preceding context, we are expressly told that "*the Redeemer* (Christ) shall come to Zion;" and then in the following context, this same Redeemer is described as the light and glory of the Church: "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and *his glory* shall be seen upon thee." "The Lord shall be unto thee an *everlasting light*, and thy God, *thy glory*." The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, is "the light and glory" of the Church. And the reason why the Church is urged to "arise and shine" is, because Christ, who is her light and glory, is come.

That we may see the force and extent of this reason, I would observe that it may be understood,

1. As referring to THE ACTUAL INCARNATION OF CHRIST, FOR THE PURPOSES OF REDEEMING MERCY. As Mediator, he has come in the flesh; has made an atonement for sin; has brought in an everlasting righteousness; and is now carrying on his work by renewing, justifying, and saving his people. To the functions which Christ, as Mediator, came to perform on behalf of his Church, there is an evident reference in the language of the text. In the exercise of his various offices of prophet, priest, and king, there is a developement of light and glory, connecting essentially with the Church's prosperity, and presenting a powerful motive to activity in the work which she is bound to perform. For the Church, surely, should be willing to employ her instrumentality, and should derive strong encouragement to do so, from the fact, that the Saviour himself has appeared, to put forth his efficiency for the consummation of her salvation.

But we must not confine the affirmation to Christ's first appearance in the flesh, for the Church's salvation. The prophet evidently referred to other special manifestations of the Saviour's power and grace on her behalf, in times of darkness and affliction. I observe, then, that what is here affirmed, may be understood,

2. As referring to Christ's appearance on behalf of his Church, when in seasons of darkness and perplexity, SHE IS LED TO MORE DISTINCT AND SETTLED VIEWS OF TRUTH AND DUTY. There are seasons, in which the Church loses, to a great extent, those clear and comprehensive views of truth and duty, which are essential to her highest spiritual prosperity. Error creeps in, and by its injurious influence, mars her beauty and glory. The Church is scarcely able to distinguish between truth and its counterfeits. At such seasons, the Lord Jesus often interposes for the restoration of the truth. By his special providence, he raises up men to detect and expose the prevailing errors, and lead the Church to the formation of correct opinions. In this process, there may be much discussion. But, even this may be of great value. The faculty of perception may be thus sharpened, by the action of mind upon mind, and thus the truth, under the directing power of the Spirit of Christ, be more clearly elicited. Such was the case, during the controversy respecting circumcision in the primitive Church. Discussion led to investigation. The Church hereby obtained distinct views of the subjects in question, and the whole matter was finally settled by the decision of the As-

sembly at Jerusalem. Such was the case, also, during the Pelagian controversy in the fifth century, and afterwards, during the period of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, as well as at other times, of more recent date, which might be mentioned. On all these occasions, the most important advantages were obtained to the cause of truth. It was divested of false glosses. Its true character and proportions were ascertained and settled, and men were taught to understand and distinguish it from its counterfeits. It thus became "a light to their feet," to direct them in the performance of the moral duties which they owed to God, and to their fellow men. And thus the truth lent its influence to the production of a sound morality, which, in its manifestation, tended largely to render the Church glorious in the eyes of the world. And in all such cases, where the great principles of truth and duty have been obscured, and men have been raised up by the Lord Jesus, to restore them to their native lustre, he may be said to have appeared as the light and glory of his Church.

3. The affirmation in the text may refer to those special interpositions of Christ on behalf of his Church, when, in the midst of difficulty and threatened danger, SHE IS DIRECTED TO A WAY OF ESCAPE. There have been times, when the way of the Church seemed to be hedged up on every side—difficulties gathered thickly around her—dangers pressed heavily upon her, and no avenue of escape was presented. At such seasons, the Saviour has frequently appeared, and delivered her from her dangers and her fears. Various instances of this kind, we have in the history of both the Old and the New Testament churches.

A remarkable case of this kind occurred in the time of Ezra. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin conspired to prevent "the children of the captivity," from rebuilding the temple. At first, they sought a participation in the work. Their object, no doubt, was, as one observes, "that they might obtain pre-eminence, foment dissentions, introduce their corruptions, prejudice the minds of the people against their rulers, and, in short, to seize the temple, when built, for their own use; or, to retard, spoil, and put a stop to the work." Being defeated in this dishonest scheme, they obtained the interposition of the civil power, putting a stop, for a season, to the work. In this emergency, however, friends were raised up by the Head of the Church, and by the decree of Darius, confirming that of Cyrus, the building was allowed to pro-

ceed. In the time of Esther, and of Hezekiah, also, the Church experienced special deliverances from imminent danger, by the interposition of the Saviour. When, also, Herod would have destroyed the infant Christian Church, He, by whose permission, Herod ruled, appeared as her glory and defence. How remarkably, likewise, was the Church afterwards delivered from the efforts of the Pagan power to extinguish her rising glory, by the conversion of Constantine, "who planted the cross upon the capitol of Rome." In the progress of the Reformation from Popery, also, we meet with a number of cases, in which the Church experienced special deliverances, from heaven, at times when all human resources seemed to be cut off. In all these cases, Christ, as the light and glory of his Church, may be said to have come for her rescue. And, the same may be affirmed, whenever the Church, in the midst of difficult and threatening circumstances, is, by the special interpositions of Providence and use of lawful means, led to a way of escape.

4. Again, there may be a reference here to the interposition of Christ on behalf of his Church, when, in the face of discouraging obstacles, SHE IS DIRECTED TO SUCH SCRIPTURAL MODES OF ACTION, AS WILL BEST DEVELOPE HER RESOURCES FOR THE BENEFIT OF HIS KINGDOM AND THE SALVATON OF THE WORLD. Even where the obligation to a duty is apparent, the best method of its accomplishment is often exceedingly difficult to ascertain and settle. Obstacles may intervene—difficulties of a very formidable kind may be in the way. This often occurs with respect to the best mode of applying the moral power of the Church, for the highest good of man, and the fullest manifestation of the Saviour's glory. The Apostles themselves met with serious obstructions on this subject. Although their commission required them to "preach the Gospel to every creature," they had been educated in the belief, that "salvation was of the Jews," and that to them pertained "the service of God, and the promises." Their own prejudices, therefore, as well as the adverse views of the Heathen, presented barriers in the way to the fulfilment of their commission. But Christ appeared in a vision to Peter, and removed these obstacles, and directed to such a mode of proceeding as tended eminently to the enlargement of the Church, and the salvation of the world. And afterwards, by directing to the official separation of Barnabas and Saul to the Missionary work among the Gentiles, he opened

up a way for the Church to develope her resources extensively, by the publication of the Gospel among the Heathen. By this movement, Rome herself, "the capitol and mistress of the world," was made to feel the power of the Church, when Christ arose to direct the application of her energies. And so it has often occurred. The Church at different times, has been greatly embarrassed in relation to the application of her moral power. Diversity of views and feelings has prompted to different modes of action, tending to paralize her energies. But, the Saviour has appeared to remove the obstacles; and following him, she has shown herself powerful for the salvation of the world. And in all such cases, where the Saviour directs to such a mode of action as enables the Church to move onward with vigour, to fulfil the great ends of her organization. Her light may be said to have come, and the glory of the Lord to have risen upon her.

5. Once more, what is affirmed in the text, may refer to those special visitations of Christ to his Church, by which SHE HAS HAD A HEART GIVEN HER TO FOLLOW THE LORD MORE FULLY. There are seasons in which the pulse of Spiritual life beats low in the heart of the Church. But when Christ comes and breathes upon her by his Spirit, the tone of Spiritual life is raised. She receives a greater measure of light and heat. Her reluctance to the service of Christ is overcome, and she is made "willing in the day of his power." Hence, she cheerfully engages in her work, and prosecutes it with animation and delight. She does not need to be pressed forward; for it is her "meat and drink" to do the will of him to whom she is indebted for all her spiritual mercies. She feels her obligations, and takes pleasure in complying with them. Whatever she does, she does it "heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." This was remarkably the case, immediately after the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. For we are told, that "all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." (Acts ii. 44—47.) And whenever the Church has a heart given her, by which she is disposed to act in this way, it is from the Lord,

and it may be said of her, that her light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon her.

Such, brethren, are some of the different forms in which Christ, as the light and glory of the Church, may be considered as appearing on her behalf, in times of darkness and depression, such as that contemplated in the passage before us. And his having appeared to her, in any or all these respects, always constitutes a cogent reason, why she should "arise and shine."

Having thus attended to the duties enjoined, and the reason by which they are enforced, let us now apply the subject to that branch of the Church which we represent, and derive from it the instruction it is adapted to impart.

That the situation of the Presbyterian Church, for some time past, bears a strong resemblance, in one respect at least, to that contemplated in the text, will not be doubted. For her unfaithfulness and sins, God has brought her into trouble, and visited her with rebuke. This has occasioned despondency and perplexity in many minds, and the Church has been ready to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

But although the Lord, her Redeemer, has "visited her transgressions with the rod," his "loving kindness he has not utterly taken from her, nor suffered his faithfulness to fail." He would not, therefore, have her indulge a despondent temper. She has been organized for other and higher purposes, than to waste her time and strength in idle complainings and criminal unbelief. She has been invested with a glory by her divine master, which she is bound to radiate for his honour and the benefit of the world. She has a great work to perform, and the Saviour calls her to lay aside her discouragements, and proceed to its accomplishment.

That the Presbyterian Church, by the grace of God, possesses within herself, the elements of truth and order, of holiness and benevolence, is believed, of course, by all who sincerely belong to her. If we do not believe this, we are not honest Presbyterians. Our duty then as a Church, is to "arise and shine" by the maintainance and exhibition of all that thus belongs to our character. We profess to have the true doctrines of Christ, as they are contained in the word of God, and set forth in the Standards of our Church. These we are called upon to hold fast and defend from every thing that would contaminate their purity, or impair

their divine beauty. Our forms of order and worship, also, we believe to be founded on the Scriptures, and authorized by the Head of the Church. These we are bound to preserve in their simplicity and integrity. For our ministers and members, moreover, we claim the seal of God's regenerating Spirit. None are admitted to our communion, but those who in the judgment of charity, are believed to be "born of God." To mature the graces of the Spirit thus implanted in the heart, is the solemn duty of both ministers and people, that they may shine in "the beauty of holiness." And as our Church is organized as a Missionary Society for the conversion of the world to God, she should recognise her obligation, and proceed at once to put forth her energies for the accomplishment of this great work.

In the performance of these various duties, the Church has ample scope for the exercise of all her faculties, in accordance with the will of her exalted Head, and in the use of the means which he has appointed. As officers in the Presbyterian Church, then, let us, in our different places, and in conjunction with our fellow Christians whom we represent, employ our best efforts for the advancement of the Redeemer's glory, in all the particular respects, which have been enumerated. While we "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints," and let go no principle, either of doctrine or order, let the elevated tone of our piety, and the vigour of our practical benevolence, declare to all men that we are actuated by higher principles than those which govern the men of the world. Let us labour to give a full, practical demonstration of all that belongs to our character as a true Church of Jesus Christ, on whose whole structure, are inscribed the lineaments of Immanuel's hand. Let us "arise" to the work to which we are called, and "shine" in all the glory which has been put upon us, by Him who has bought us with his blood.

But, is there any special ground of encouragement to attempt the fulfilment of these duties? And, is the motive presented in the text, available in our case? Can it, with truth, be said of the Presbyterian Church, "thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee?"

That Christ has come *in the flesh*, to accomplish for his Church, (and for ours, as a branch of the universal Church) all that is necessary to enable her to attain the ends of her organization, we

are all agreed. That he has appeared on her behalf, in the midst of her recent difficulties, in some such ways, as have been mentioned, many of us believe. Now, to those who believe that Christ has specially interposed to lead the Church to a clearer knowledge of her doctrines and order; to point out a way of escape from her difficulties; to suggest the best plans of action for the salvation of the world; and to prompt her to enter heartily on their accomplishment, such interposition presents a very powerful motive to the duties enjoined. If the Saviour has really thus appeared to shed light upon the Church, when enveloped in darkness, she ought to avail herself of his special presence, to walk in his light, and exhibit his glory. And to those who may not accede to this interpretation of the reason assigned, a strong motive for compliance with the injunction in the text, is found in the fact, that Christ has appeared in the flesh, to accomplish for the Church, all that is requisite to the consummation of her highest glory. As the Head of the Church, and in the execution of his mediatorial offices, he is present to direct and assist in all Scriptural plans and efforts for the good of our Zion. On either view, therefore, there is ground of encouragement to lay aside our despondency and unbelief, and proceed with the work which the Saviour has assigned us, and to which, under the circumstances of our present condition, we are specially called. Let the Church, then, hear the voice of her Saviour, and proceed to obey it. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

THE END.