

Curtis Baldwin
& Curtis Baldwin

Mr. Emerson's Sermon,
AT THE
Ordination of Mr. Baker.



The Dignity and Glory of CHRIST'S
Churches and Ministers.

A
DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED AT THE
ORDINATION

OF THE
REV. JOEL BAKER,
TO THE
MINISTERIAL OFFICE
IN THE
SECOND CHURCH OF GRANVILLE,

JUNE 21^R, 1797.

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CONWAY.

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brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." This is manifest, not only from the extraordinary representation here given, but also from the divine character he assumes in his address to John: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.—I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

WITH the ineffable splendor of this vision the Apostle at first was overpowered. "When I saw him I fell at his feet dead." Christ having raised him, and dissipated his fears, ordered him to make a faithful record of all that had been exhibited and of whatever should be farther communicated. "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

IN this general direction, some suppose is comprehended the several distinct parts of the whole book. By the things, which Saint John *had seen*, is understood the vision of Christ amidst the seven golden candlesticks; by the things which *are*, the epistles to the seven churches, to each of which the Apostle was to send a particular message; and by the things which *shall be hereafter*, the several prophecies following.

HAVING given these orders Christ proceeds to explain to John the mystery of the seven stars, which he saw in his right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks, informing him that the former denoted the angels of the churches, and that the latter were a symbolical representation of the churches themselves.

THE Apostle then applies himself to the work assigned, and pursuant to the orders he had received, begins with writing to the seven churches in Asia. My text is contained in the first letter, which is inscribed to the Angel, or minister, of the church of Ephesus. He writes in the name of his divine
Master,

Master, whom he characterises by one of his glorious titles, agreeable to the representation given in the vision above noticed.

You will recollect, that when John turned to attend to the voice, which spake to him, he beheld seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of them a person most glorious and august, who, among other extraordinary circumstances, was exhibited as holding seven stars in his right hand. Conformable to this representation the message to the church of Ephesus is thus introduced. "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

THIS preface of the epistle to that church is selected for the subject of the present discourse. It will lead to a train of useful reflections, adapted to the solemn occasion of our assembling at this time. Here under the emblems of golden candlesticks and shining stars is represented the worth and importance of Christ's churches, and the dignified character and station of his faithful ministers. In this passage we are taught the peculiar care and cognizance which he is pleased to take of both, and the special relation in which they stand to him as their glorious head and king. How pleasing, how animating and joytul is the view here presented of the Son of God as walking in the midst of those his golden candlesticks and holding the stars in his right hand! I hope for the candid and serious attention of this christian audience while I attempt some brief illustration of the blessed truths contained in this sacred passage.

THE first thing which it offers to our consideration is the representation of the churches of Christ under the symbol of seven golden candlesticks.

SEVEN is the number of perfection. This however had primary reference to the churches of Asia, which consisted of just this number; and to these
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the messages and revelations, which Saint John received, were to be first communicated. But it respects also the whole catholic church. This, however dispersed through various and distant regions, and meeting in different and distinct congregations, is really but one body of which Jesus Christ is the supreme and glorious head.

THE church, being thus represented by seven golden candlesticks, may denote its beauty, excellence and glory.

IN the tabernacle of old was placed a candlestick composed of wrought gold. It consisted of seven branches, and contained as many golden lamps. This valuable piece of furniture was fixed at the south side of the holy place and served to illuminate the altar of perfume and the table of show-bread. That candlestick with its golden lamps was a typical emblem of the church, enlightened and enriched by the various influences of the divine spirit. In allusion to this a similar representation is given in my text.

A CANDLESTICK does not give light of itself, but it is an instrument of conveying and diffusing light around it. In this respect it is a fit emblem of the church, which has no light originally in herself; but is illuminated from the great fountain of intelligence, and holds forth the light of truth and grace to others. It is in such a sense that ministers and christians are styled the light of the world. Their spiritual life and light is derived from Christ alone. "Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." When persons are thus divinely illuminated and act in character, then do they become truly illustrious and beneficial. Then do they resemble those golden lamps by which the sanctuary of old was enlightened and adorned.

THIS emblem of a golden candlestick is doubtless designed to signify the exceeding richness, beauty, and glory of the church and its real members in

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the view of Christ. She is indeed poor, wretched and deformed in herself, but comely and excellent by the comeliness that is put upon her. In what high estimation is she held by her royal head and husband? For her redemption he laid down a price infinitely preferable to silver or gold, even his own most precious and invaluable blood. Though so poor, miserable and wretched in herself; yet by her relation to Christ, and in consequence of communications received from his infinite fulness, she is raised to a state dignified and glorious. The scriptures every where speak of the church in exalted terms. She is said to be "beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem." She is described as "looking forth as the morning, clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners." In the Revelation she is represented as the spouse of Christ, the Lamb's wife, and the mother of saints. Her attire and ornaments are vastly superior to those of nature and art. She is represented as clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head.

In the 45th psalm we have a description of the church in terms more accommodated to the figurative representation of my text. After speaking of the transcendent glories of Christ the inspired writer goes on to set forth the beauty and excellence of the church. "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee; with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: They shall enter into the king's palace."

BELIEVERS, the real members of Christ's church are accounted his jewels; his peculiar treasure. These are styled "the excellent of the earth; the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold." But my text leads me more especially to consider in the next place. *Secondly.*

Secondly, THE Ministers of Christ, who are here represented as stars which he holds in his right hand.

THESE stars which Saint John saw in his right hand, he is told, were the angels of the seven churches; that is, the ministers of these churches, to whom the messages were sent, and by whom they were to be communicated.

THUS the word, which ministers are to preach to men, is the message of Christ. His counsel; and this only, are they to declare in his name. They are to come to the people with a "Thus saith the Lord;" or with John, to preface their instructions with saying, "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

BUT what I would particularly notice is the title here given to the ministers of Christ. They are called stars. This appellation naturally suggests several important ideas respecting the ministerial character and office.

I. THE title here given to the Ministers of Christ denotes an eminence of station in the church. The stars have an exalted station assigned them in the visible heavens. And so it hath pleased Christ to appoint to his ministers a distinguished place in the firmament of the church. However despised by many, the ministerial office is truly an honorable one. It is an high and holy calling. Temporal honors and emoluments are not indeed connected with it; and hence it is no wonder it should be held in little estimation by men of the world. But there are honors and privileges belonging to the faithful ministers of Christ, which transcend all earthly dignities. They belong to a kingdom, though not of this world, which yet, in true dignity and glory, as much exceeds the empires of it as the heaven is higher than the earth. In this kingdom they are honored with a high station; and to them is committed a trust of the greatest magnitude and importance

gence—nothing less than the glorious gospel of the blessed God. They are ambassadors of the king of heaven, sent in his name, and by his authority to negotiate a treaty of peace—to propose and explain terms of reconciliation to the guilty rebels of the human race. In their royal Master's name and stead they are to beseech sinners to be reconciled to God. In short, the ministers of religion are the messengers of the Lord of hosts, the servants of the most high God, whose office is to shew unto men the way of salvation. Their place and station is therefore not only all important, but dignified; yet by no means affording any ground for pride or self-exaltation. True the gospel treasure is immensely rich; but they with whom it is intrusted, are poor earthen vessels, that all the excellency of the power might be of God and not of man.

2 THE emblem, by which ministers are represented in the text, points out the regularity and order, which belong to their office, and which are necessary to the due discharge of the important duties of it.

THE true ministers of Christ resemble those luminaries of heaven, which move, in obedience to the laws prescribed them, in one steady undeviating course round their common centre, the sun, from which they derive their light and influence. There are certain *bodies* of a very different description which sometimes make their appearance—fiery Comets, that are eccentric and move in all directions. These fitly represent those false, irregular teachers, to whom the Scripture gives the name of *wandering stars*. These blaze for a while in very unsteady and erratic motions, and then disappear. They are so utterly unfit to be guides to others, that they are unable to guide themselves. Such as follow these fiery meteors, these *ignes fatui*, will be in danger with them of being carried away from the light of truth and involved in the mists of darkness and error.

3. THE appellation of stars, being applied to gospel ministers, may denote that excellent brightness and purity of doctrine and conversation by which they should be distinguished.

MINISTERS should shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars which adorn it. In order to this, and that they may be useful and maintain their dignified station, it is requisite that their heads be replenished with light and, their hearts warmed with the love of God and the souls of men. Would they be instrumental of promoting their divine Master's glory, their own eternal salvation, and that of those to whom they minister, they must take diligent heed to themselves and to their doctrine: Not only to preach the pure and unadulterated truths of the gospel in a plain and clear manner, with fidelity and zeal; but to recommend the religion they preach by a pure and holy life and conversation. Nothing is of more importance to the honor and success of the christian ministry than such a sanctity in ministers. Nothing will so effectually recommend and enforce the truths they preach, as to be themselves holy in their hearts, their lives, and conversation; to be examples to their flocks and the world, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith and purity. This will add true lustre and weight to the ministerial character. But without this grace in the heart, and a correspondent deportment, the brightest parts and the most shining abilities will have little efficacy in winning souls to Christ. This was the opinion of a competent judge. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal."

We have just allowed that gifts and learning in a minister are desirable and important, St. Paul is the same. In his discourses on this subject as well as in other parts of scripture, we are in

ed, that those who are in the ministry, should be men of genius and acquirements. The business of ministers being to communicate knowledge to others, it is certainly requisite they should possess a good share of it themselves. Hence Timothy's charge was to commit the gospel to such as were *able to teach others*. The ignorant and unlearned are incapable of this.

BUT what we here contend for is, that the ministers of Christ must not only be learned and gifted, but truly pious, godly men. It is requisite that both gifts and grace should meet in a gospel minister. One without the other will not be sufficient. He who possesses the largest share of both is doubtless best qualified for the ministerial work and is most likely to be useful therein. It is true, however, that the success of means depends on God, who in his divine sovereignty may employ those as instruments of his glory and good to men, which to human view are weak and unpromising. We are not authorized to say that it is impossible for an ignorant and un sanctified minister to be in any instance useful, or that he may not preach to the saving advantage of some others, though he should himself be rejected. But as such characters are unqualified for the work of the ministry and have no call to engage in it, we cannot suppose that God will much own and bless their labors. But to proceed,

4. FROM the metaphor in the text we may remark on the difference there is even among the good ministers of Christ. As among the heavenly luminaries there is an apparent variety in their size, splendor, &c. One star differeth from another star in glory. So among the luminaries of the church, some shine with a brighter lustre than others. Some ministers have received from the Father of lights superior degrees of light and knowledge. They possess richer gifts and have been enabled to

make higher improvements. These are stars of the first magnitude, diffusing around them a glorious radiance and a benign influence. But others, like the inferior planets, shine with proportionably fainter beams and less effect. Yet these, by faithfully persevering in a regular, evangelical course, will attain to an illustrious rank and to most important dignities in the regions of light above.

Thus we have briefly considered the churches of Christ and ministers of the gospel under the emblematical representation, given them in the text, of golden candlesticks and shining stars; and have endeavored to explain the significant import of this comparison.

THERE is another thing remarkable in the passage before us, which demands our particular attention; which is,

Thirdly, The wonderful person here described as holding the stars in his right hand, and walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. This person we have already seen is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who, in the context, styles himself the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, who was dead and is alive, and liveth forever more. This was the person, and this the character of him whom our Apostle saw in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks and holding the seven stars in his right hand. Here are two blessed views of the Son of God, the glorious king and head of the church, which it will be suitable for us distinctly to consider. First, *His holding the stars in his right hand*; and Secondly, *His walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks*. The first view, which is here given of Christ, is designed to remind us of several important truths.

1. It implies that he perfectly knows his ministers. He who created the stars and placed them in the firmament; he who knows their number and can call them all by their names; that Almighty

Omniscient

Omniscient Being is doubtless acquainted with the ministers of the gospel. Himself hath ordained and set up these lights in his church. By his special providence he hath fixed them in the golden candlesticks where they stand. He knows their particular names and characters. He sees in what manner they perform their respective functions and answer the end of their appointment.

2. CHRIST's holding the stars in his right hand shews that his ministers are upheld by his power. From him they derive all that light and life, that strength and ability, which they possess and exercise. Were not the ministers of the gospel thus divinely upheld they would sink. These lights would be extinguished : these stars would fall.

3. THE expression in the text farther denotes that ministers are under the special direction of Christ. As to the stars, it is to be remembered that the Supreme Lord hath fixed their station. He disposes them to their respective orbits and directs all their motions. The commission which true ministers receive, and the power and authority with which they are invested, comes from Christ. He orders their particular place, prescribes the sphere in which they move, and appoints their various operations. And the light which they diffuse is derived from him the fountain of light and influence. These stars shine with a borrowed lustre, which leads me to observe, once more. Ministers being in Christ's hand implies their entire dependence on him. They are instruments which he employs, in transacting the important concerns of his kingdom—workers together with him in the all-momentous affair of men's salvation. Thus are they honored, but of themselves they can do nothing. All the efficacy of their endeavours, is to be ascribed to HIM, whose servants they are, and by whose aid they perform their work. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."
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LET us now attend to that other view, our text gives of the Son of God. He not only holds the stars in his right hand, but walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. This speaks in general that special relation in which the churches stand, to their supreme head. It denotes more particularly,

1. His absolute authority and dominion. Christ sits king forever upon the holy hill of Zion. This kingdom he hath founded by his power. Its willing subjects, once the captive slaves of the prince of darkness, he hath redeemed by his blood. By an act of sovereign grace, he hath constituted them one spiritual body, of which himself is the glorious head: and by virtue of an unalienable right, presides over, and superintends their concerns, rules in the midst of them, ordains laws and ordinances for them, and claims their entire obedience.

2. THE Lord Jesus, walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks imports his special care and patronage. The Almighty Redeemer hath engaged to uphold and defend his church. "As we have heard, saith the psalmist, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish it forever. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion and go round about her, tell the towers thereof, mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces."

THE church is as much distinguished for her strength and security, as for her beauty and excellence. God Almighty is engaged in her behalf; himself is her glory and defence. Hence the gates of hell can never prevail against her.

Again. His walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, intimates the special presence of Christ with his people. By his word, his ordinances and spirit, he resides among and converses with them. "The Lord hath chosen Zion, he hath desired it

for his habitation. This is my rest forever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it ; I will abundantly bless her provision ; I will satisfy her poor with bread ; I will likewise cloath her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout for joy ; there will I make the horn of David to bud, I have ordained a lamp for mine inheritance." Hence further.

The expression under consideration implies the love of Christ to the church, and the pleasure he takes in his saints. The church is his vineyard, which his own right hand hath planted. It is a garden, which he hath enriched and beautified. He takes pleasure in visiting her with his presence, as men do from walking in their gardens and orchards to behold and partake of the fruit which they yield. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits ; camphire, with spikenard ; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense ; myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices ; a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon." In such a figurative manner doth Christ set forth the comeliness and fruitfulness of the church, and the spiritual fragraney and sweetness of those divine graces, which himself hath implanted.

In a word, and to conclude.

CHRIST'S walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, shews the intimate connection which he holds with his churches ; the exact knowledge he takes of the ministers and members, their characters, circumstances and wants ; how pleased and delighted he is with those, who approve themselves his obedient, faithful children, and servants. These are favored with signal tokens of the divine love, they are enriched and adorned with plenteous communications of the divine spirit and grace ; they shall be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God.

HAVING thus attempted an illustration of the

important truths contained and suggested in our text ; what now remains is some improvement of what you have heard, together with those particular addresses, which custom and propriety demand on these solemn occasions. In the first place, from the present subject we may be led to reflect with devout gratitude on the astonishing condescensions of divine grace.

WILL the Most high in very deed dwell with men on earth ? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him ; yet that supreme Monarch of the universe, God's co-equal Son, has bowed the heavens and come down, and united himself with dust and worms. The eternal *Word* was made flesh and dwelt among men. The Son of God came to enlighten a benighted, as well as to die for a guilty world. Him hath the Father sent, and sealed, and prepared before the face of all people ; a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Israel.

THIS divinely excellent and glorious person has not only, at the amazing price of his own invaluable blood, purchased and redeemed a people to himself ; invested them with many inestimable privileges and blessings ; and entitled them to exceeding great and precious promises ; but he condescends to dwell and walk with them ; to teach, guide and uphold them ; to communicate of his fullness and replenish them with his grace. Hence,

Secondly, WE see whence it is that the church of God has stood its ground through all ages, in the midst of dangers, opposition and enemies, the most potent and formidable. That Almighty Redeemer, who first rescued his people, hath engaged to protect & defend them. The floods have lifted up their voice, the floods have lifted up their waves ; these have threatened to overthrow and swallow up the church ; but the Lord on high has been mightier than the noise of many waters ; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

THE heathen have raged ; the kings and rulers
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and mighty of the earth, under the direction and influence of the more formidable powers of darkness, have combined their forces and exerted their whole strength and policy; have employed all their art and skill to subvert and destroy the Messiah's kingdom: but HE, who sits in the heavens, and walks with his people on earth, has derided their impotent malice: His superior wisdom and power have ever counteracted their infernal plots; have repelled and defeated their daring attempts. While Zion's King fights for Zion, she is perfectly secure and may bid defiance to earth and hell.

AND the same divine power, which upholds the church, doth likewise protect and defend her faithful ministers: for he who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, holds the stars in his right hand. Hence it is that these lights are not extinguished; but are able to maintain their stations; to hold up the light of truth; and the prince of darkness cannot prevail to envelope the church, as well as the world, in total darkness. Therefore

Thirdly. THE view, which our subject gives us, must afford abundant consolation to the friends of Zion. The church, though rich and splendid, beautiful and glorious by her relation to the Son of God, is yet, in herself, very weak and defenceless. Her foes are many and strong. They seek every way in their power, to effect her ruin. The ministers of Christ, though they have the appellation of angels, are but men; though resembled to stars and possessing an eminent station; yet if they had no strength, light, or wisdom, but what they, in themselves possess, the world would be little benefited; the church would have a feeble defence, and would inevitably fall a prey to her enemies. This being the case, how comfortable is it to reflect upon that special relation, which both churches and ministers stand in to him, who is the fountain of power, wisdom and light: That the son of God, the Almighty

mighty Lord of heaven and earth is their glorious king and Saviour, has engaged to support and defend them ; and has promised his all-powerful and infinitely gracious presence to be with them to the end of time. That promised protection and presence he hath hitherto afforded.

THIS day, my brethren, and the solemnity for which we are convened, are witnesses of this blessed truth. They joyfully proclaim the continued care, faithfulness, and loving-kindness of our God and Redeemer to his people. Notwithstanding all the opposition which has been made to the Christian cause, the neglect and contempt, with which Christian doctrines and institutions are, at this day, treated by many ; and that infidelity and ungodliness, which is so prevalent ; yet we see and should gratefully notice how the churches of Christ are still preserved, and divine institutions maintained. And altho' the ministers of the gospel do not long continue by reason of death, and some of these lights are otherwise removed, or extinguished ; yet others are raised up to supply their place, and the glorious head of the church is still making provision for the replenishing of his golden candlesticks. With sentiments of devout thankfulness and praise, it becomes us, at this time, to acknowledge the goodness of divine providence, in this respect, to the church and people of God, for whose sake we are assembled on the present occasion.

He, who, according to Christ's institution, is about to be solemnly consecrated to the work of the ministry, and placed over this people in the Lord, claims our particular attention.

Dear Sir ; CONTEMPLATING with you the dignified station, to which divine providence is raising you, and considering, at the same time, the arduous labors, the manifold temptations, and the vast magnitude of that office, on which you are entering, I feel sensations of pleasure and joy intermingled with
sentiments

sentiments of deep solicitude and concern, which I cannot easily express. An high honor doth the king of Zion confer on you, on me, and on all his ministers, by giving us so conspicuous a place in his kingdom; but you will remember that the post of honor is the place of difficulty and danger. The character, which Christ gives of his ministers, is that of "Light of the world;" but a city set upon an hill cannot be hid. Many eyes will be upon you. You will have need to look diligently to yourself and walk circumspectly before others. Your duty is to instruct, enlighten, direct and guide in things that concern their everlasting peace. We trust you are, in a good measure, qualified for so important a work; but you will stand in constant need of further light and direction from above. The glorious head of the church, by his grace, has called you to his kingdom and glory. From him you are about to receive a commission and a charge the most solemn and momentous; on the faithful discharge of which depends your peace and happiness for time and eternity. He is now, by his providence, placing you in one of his golden candlesticks. This is, that you may give light to all about you. Many of those, to whom you will be called to minister, you will find in a state far removed from light, and in fixed opposition to it. Christ sends you to these benighted creatures to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

I TRUST, Sir, it will not be your chief concern to make a brilliant figure in the world, and to shine in the eyes of men; but, by an active, diligent, and faithful discharge of the various duties of your sacred office, to approve yourself to your divine Lord and Master; that your heart be warmed with love to God and the souls of men; and that, by the purity
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of your doctrines and examples you recommend and enforce that holy religion, which you preach.

THE great end of the gospel ministry, and what above all things, you should seek to promote is, the glory of Christ, and the salvation of precious souls. In the prosecution of your work you must expect much difficulty and opposition from the prince of darkness, from the ignorance, pride, and perverseness of men, from the temptations and allurements of the world, and from the remaining corruptions of your own heart. But let not any of these things discourage you; they are not mentioned with this view; but to excite you to go forth, this day, not in your own, but on the strength of him, who hath said, "My grace is sufficient for you; my strength shall be perfect in your weakness."

You have had a view of the Son of God as holding the stars in his right hand. How animating is the thought! O trust, dear Sir, put an entire confidence in the power, wisdom, and grace of that Almighty Redeemer, and you need not doubt of being supported, upheld, and carried through this difficult warfare. Be faithful to the trust reposed in you, and be assured that you shall receive a rich reward a crown of glory, which will never fade away. Most devoutly do we wish you the divine presence and grace through the whole of your ministry. May you continue here to shine with increasing lustre, and this people long rejoice in your light. And, having turned many to righteousness, may you finally be admitted to the kingdom of glory, and there shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.

I TURN to address a few words to the church and christian society, who worship in this place.

Dearlly Belov'd; We partake largely with you in the joy of this day, and sincerely join in humble acknowledgments of gratitude and praise to God for the manifestations of his love and favor towards you.