

ARTICLE IV.

CHURCH POWER.*

THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.—1 Timothy iii. 16.

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul says “the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Calvin points out how this signifies that the Church is founded on *the doctrine* of the apostles and prophets, so that if this foundation of true doctrine be subverted, the edifice itself must fall. So, by this Scripture, Calvin proves that there is no true Church where there is no true doctrine.

But in my text, Paul seems to reverse the figure. He makes the Church now to be the supporter of the truth, instead of the truth being the foundation of the Church. He says the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. She stands under it like a pillar, and holds it up. She is a beacon-tower, and bears up on high that light which lightens the tempest-tossed, enveloped in darkness and gloom. It is light and not darkness she exalts and sustains—it is truth and not falsehood she holds up and holds forth. Thus, whilst the apostle has reversed his figure, it is still the same truth he is teaching. As Calvin expounds his meaning in this second passage, it answers precisely to the first: “Where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy, there is no Church.” Both texts teach that doctrine is the life of the Church. The one plain and simple mark of a true Church is true doctrine.

* According to previous appointment, this discourse was preached before the Presbytery of South Carolina, in the Presbyterian church at Walhalla, on Friday, the 11th September, 1874. The thanks of the body were voted the preacher, and a copy of the sermon was requested, that it might appear in this REVIEW, and in the *Southern Presbyterian*, and a thousand copies of it in pamphlet form be printed for the use of its ministers, elders, deacons, and church-members. The Presbytery also resolved that when printed, the sermon should be read in every one of its pulpits, on the first Sunday in November, or as soon thereafter as might be practicable.

Still, of course, there is often a true Church where much imperfection prevails, both of doctrine and of practice. And no uninspired man more fully and beautifully than John Calvin has expounded how we must adhere to the Church, howsoever imperfect, so long as she maintains fundamental truth. A perfect Church has never existed on the earth. Such a Church does not now exist, and never will exist, till the final consummation. We must be tolerant of the Church's minor imperfections. We must be submissive to the authority of imperfect churches.

When informed, my brethren, of your appointment to preach on *Church power* before this meeting of the Presbytery, the question presented itself, In what aspect of the subject does this venerable court design to have Church power considered?

In the first place, did they have in their thoughts the old distinction made by Calvin, of three departments of Church power, viz.: the power *diatactic* or law-making, the power *diacritic* or judicial, and the power *dogmatic* or doctrinal?

If this be the aspect in which we are now to consider the subject of Church power, let it be observed that of the *law-making* power very little indeed is possessed by the Church. Her officers are not God's councillors, but only his servants. Not a movement can she lawfully make, not a step can she lawfully take, at her own discretion. She is permitted to act only by divine command. For everything set up by her, she must be able to produce a "thus saith the Lord." In religion, whatever is not commanded is forbidden; for the Word is our only and sufficient rule of faith and practice. "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture, unto which nothing is at any time to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of man." Our doctrine, our discipline, our worship, are all divine and revealed things, to which the Church can add, from which she can take away, nothing. No more discretion has the Church in regulating those who compose her membership. She can make no new laws to bind their conscience. Neither contrary to, nor yet beside the Scripture,

can she impose any new duties not imposed on men by the Word. On the other hand, she cannot make anything to be sinful which God himself has not forbidden. In fine, the Church has no law-making power, except as to circumstances of time and place, order and decency, which, from the nature of the case, Scripture could not regulate, and which must needs be left, and have therefore been left, to human discretion. All the power which the Church has about laws is declarative and ministerial. Her officers are servants of the Lord, and declare not their own will, but the Lord's, and that only as he makes it known in the Word, which is open to all men, and which every man is entitled to judge of and interpret for himself.

Now, how is it as to the Church's power in declaring doctrine? This certainly is one main office of the Church in this world. She bears testimony to his truth, sets to it her seal, and publishes it as faithful and true. In two forms the Church exercises the power of declaring doctrine: the one as her teaching elders severally proclaim the truth, the other as the ruling elders assembled in her courts, from the lowest up to the highest, are authorised jointly to render deliverances upon all questions of truth and morals which properly come before them. This is the old-time Presbyterian distinction of *several power* and *joint power*, first drawn forth from the Scriptures, by Calvin, accepted and embodied in her standards by the Church of Scotland, and every way fundamental in our system. It is this idea of the minister of the Word having in his single hand the key of doctrine, and so wielding, severally and by himself, the power to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven, which exalts so highly the Presbyterian conception of that office, and makes our Book to say that that office is "the first in the Church, both for dignity and usefulness." It is indeed by very far the first, and because of this several power conferred on it. There is no one-man power of ruling in the Church, but there is a one-man power of teaching. So that the teaching elder, *as he is a teacher*, is superior to the ruling elder. But then there flows also out of this same distinction of several and joint power, the idea of the parity of all presbyters, *as they are rulers*. Presbyterians need not and do not care much to assert the

parity of all ministers or teaching elders *as such*. No great error hangs very much on the denial of that parity. But prelacy and all its deadly consequences flow out of the denial of the equality of all presbyters, *as they are rulers*. Let your church-government be by "*clergy*"—in other and better words, by the *teaching presbyters as such*—and you have taken one long step Romewards by the halfway house of Prelacy. Let your ruling elders be denied to be true and proper presbyters, wielding all the right of rule which teaching elders exercise, and you have taken an equally long step in the same direction. The Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus sets men apart from worldly cares and avocations to preach his Word, and these accordingly are invested with Church power; but in the matter of ruling the flock he unites with these teaching elders another class of other and different qualifications, who are called ruling elders. And so the teaching elder severally carries the one key of doctrine, and the teaching and the ruling elders together jointly carry the two keys of doctrine and discipline.

Thus to Peter singly the Lord gave power to bind and loose in declaring the doctrines of the Word touching the way of our being justified and saved—and herein Peter stands for every minister of the gospel. He is an ambassador, declaring terms of peace with rebels on the part of his Sovereign, and his words bind heaven for pardon, and loose sinners from condemnation. To all the apostles as a body, including Peter, our Lord gave the same power jointly, and herein the apostolic college stands for every lawful assembly of rulers in God's house.

But it is the diacritic or judicial department of Church power which is chiefest and most important practically. Here the courts of Christ are seen, judging and deciding in all the cases which properly come before them—not declaring so much as *applying* the truth, and so administering the sacred and holy discipline of the Lord's house. Doctrine (says Calvin,) is the life of the Church, discipline its nerves. There cannot, of course, be any healthy life where the nerves of the body are in an unsound condition. A church where discipline is low must languish—and that it is

low in our Church, and in every other Church the world over, is unhappily but too manifest to all the sincere lovers of Zion.

Or, *in the second place*, did Presbytery, when they made this appointment, have in mind still more definitely and distinctly than we have yet considered them, the questions which separate us, on the one hand, from Prelacy, and on the other from Independency, and upon which our Church is seen to stand in the true scriptural middle? Was this Presbytery thinking how the former system just sets one exaggerated ruling elder in the room of the divinely revealed government of the Presbytery; and how at the other extreme Independency will have a direct government by the people, instead of the heaven-descended representative system?

Let us compare the church-government of the Scriptures with each of these two opposite extremes. Under the prelatie system a whole diocese is put into the hands of one Bishop, who governs singly many churches and many ministers. But Presbytery demands that each particular church have set over it a plurality of elders or bishops, and that all elders or bishops be acknowledged to be equal in church rule. The apostles always ordained *elders*, and never one elder over a particular church, just as a bench of elders and bishops ruled each particular synagogue of Old Testament believers. Accordingly, George Gillespie, the great Presbyterian divine of the Westminster Assembly, says: "We boldly maintain that there is no part of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the power of one man, but of many met together in the name of Christ." To set up one of the equal presbyters over the remainder, is the beginning of Popery. And to allow one presbyter alone to do any act of church government whatever, is to subvert the system Christ reveals in his Word. Presbytery, or the government of the Church by a plurality of elders, is the Lord's ordinance; Prelacy, or the government of the Church by one man, is the invention of men. And so certainly true and so plain is this, that Episcopalians ordinarily do not claim to derive their system from the Bible, but from the Bible and the fathers.

Look now at the other extreme. Independency refers everything to the vote of the congregation directly. But Presbytery

teaches that the people shall elect whom they will for elders and bishops to overrule and direct all. Note the difference. Under Independency, the whole company of believers directly govern themselves. The rule is popular—it is of the multitude. Passion and feeling, then, not reason, most naturally will find'sway. But Presbytery commits every affair to tried and trusted leaders, whom the people freely choose to elect as their elders or bishops, and who are set apart authoritatively to this work. Presbytery accordingly is *the representative system*, so much admired, so eagerly desired by the nations. This is the system set up by our Lord in his Church. She is to be ruled by her representatives freely chosen and set apart.

The Presbyterian system of Church government, therefore, stands in the true and safe middle between the two extremes of a despotic one-man power and the wild anarchy of mob-rule. These are strong but just expressions. As for Prelacy, it cannot be denied that historically it formed just one step in the development of Popery. The question was entertained, which of the equal brethren shall be the greatest? Then, in reply to it, there came to the front five great prelates as chief bishops of all Christendom, viz., those of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. And then, inevitably and necessarily, there ensued a contest and a struggle betwixt these five for the supremacy over one another, and out of this contest there at last emerges one, the Pope, triumphant. So teaches Church history; so works human nature. Such is a true and proper representation of the essential nature of Prelacy, which always exalts one over his fellows. But on the other hand, Independency shivers the one body into a thousand fragments, overturning the divinely established order. This is as clearly a human invention as Prelacy; for on the very surface of the New Testament it lies revealed that God hath set teaching elders and ruling elders in and over the Church, and also that his Church is one body. Moreover, on the very face of Scripture it is seen that Christ set up his kingdom on the earth as an organised body, ruled and governed by assemblies of free representatives. The reason why the people do not all come together in one to direct the affairs of the king-

dom, is not simply that they *cannot*, but that they *must not*. That would not be acting "after the due order." The King has ordained that his called and appointed officers shall rule his house. But it is the right of his people to choose freely their own representatives, and they are to rule only in the Lord.

Or, *in the third place*, when South Carolina Presbytery appointed me to discuss Church power, was the question before its mind that of authority against license? Did you mean, brethren, to have me discuss the rule of the parochial Presbytery over its church members, and the rule of the classical Presbytery over its ministers and its sessions, and the rule of the Synod over its Presbyteries, and the rule of the Assembly over the whole Church? Let us then inquire at the outset, What is the ground and reason of this kind of rule? The answer must be, The unity of the Church and the representative character of her government. The whole must govern every part, because the body is one; and the only possible way in which every part can be thus governed, is for each particular church to be ruled by a body of chosen representatives; and then for such primary bodies of rulers to be classed together into different Presbyteries, for mutual government and for convenience of appeals from individuals, churches, and sessions; and then for these Presbyteries to be grouped in like manner under the government of Synods, and these under that of the Assembly. As Dr. Robert Rainy, of the Free Church of Scotland, has expressed it, "From the broad base of the believing people, the sap rises through Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, to the Assembly, and thence descending, diffuses knowledge, influence, organic unity, throughout the whole system." This, then, is the reason why the Assembly is to rule the Synods, and each Synod its Presbyteries, and each Presbytery its ministers and its Sessions, and each Session its elders and deacons and members of the church. All make one body, and each must submit his mere will to the others, and the whole must in a lawful way, as provided in the Church's Constitution, govern every part, that there be no schism.

Such being the ground of the mutual government where each submits to all, the question next arises, What force belongs to

any decision of the General Assembly? Precisely what is the nature and value of such a deliverance, and how far does it bind every member of the body? The answer is simple, and as solemn as simple. It binds completely and perfectly. For it binds in heaven, and surely it must bind also on earth. The Assembly is our Supreme Court; its decisions our supreme Church law. They are final. We must obey. To refuse obedience is rebellion, and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. There is hardly any sin worse than wilfully setting ourselves against legitimate authority legitimately exercised, especially when the authority resisted is that which Christ sets up in his Church. Very conscientiously, therefore, is the Assembly to be obeyed by Synods, Presbyteries, Sessions, ministers, elders, deacons, and private church-members. What it speaks is presumably spoken by the Lord himself. What it binds on earth, is bound in heaven. We dare not refuse or neglect to obey. And equally are we required to give heed to the voice of Synod and of Presbytery and Session. Each of these courts wields the joint power of doctrine and discipline. They teach the truth, and they also apply it to particular cases. It is the Lord's testimony they deliver. What they impose on us legitimately, we must bear. They bring to us the law of Christ's house. To refuse obedience to any of their lawful injunctions, is to rebel against Christ; for they are by him invested with authority.

This consideration renders solemn every meeting of these courts. They are making Church history. They are bearing the keys, and using them. They are opening the kingdom and shutting it. Beware lest you intrude unworthily, that is, without the Lord's call, into the sacred office of a ruler in his house! And you who compose the membership, beware whom you call with the external call to enter on this tremendous work! And you whose constitutional duty it is to send representatives to the higher courts, beware whom you commission! Many have been the erring Synods and Assemblies deciding wrongfully, to the disturbance of the Church's peace and her detriment every way. How can you expect better, if you send men to these high places on the principle of rotation, or of personal favor and friendship, or of honor

and glory, or for the convenience of their being able to travel a little, and see the world, and visit their kith and kin in distant regions? How can you expect better, if you send commissioners to the Assembly, such as you know are not qualified by experience and wisdom and grace, rightly to handle the grave affairs of the whole Church! Oh! speed the day when we shall not be thinking about the honors, but only about the work—when we shall send men to the Assembly, or elect them Moderators, or appoint them on committees, never, never, never for compliment, but only and always to do a service! O brethren! it is earnest work, this work of the Church, and let us be earnest men!

But here arises another question: Are there no limits to Church power? Can these spiritual courts bind us to do whatsoever they may say? Are we not Christ's freemen? The answer is, they can bind us only *in the Lord*; the Word is our only rule of faith and practice. We may refuse obedience when Synods and Assemblies decree things contrary to the Word, or even contrary to the Constitution of the Church. And many, very many times has this thing happened; and often, very often, has it become the duty of Christ's people to resist unjust Church power, as also unjust State power. And resisted they have, even unto death; and so now and forever, a halo of glory encircles their names! Well, but who is to decide for me my duty as to obedience or resistance; who is to say for me whether the Church power is legitimate and legitimately exercised? The question is a grand one, and it has a grand history. The bare repetition of it here this morning, up in these mountains, and in this little Presbyterian assembly, the very statement of this question stirs our blood, and our hearts beat high, and our ears tingle, and our hair feels as if it would rise on end, for we remember the struggles of freedom against tyranny, especially of religious liberty against spiritual despotism, which are immortally associated in the memory of man with this grand and glorious question. But the answer is easy—you are of course yourself to decide for yourself! Sacred and inalienable is the right of private judgment! Leaving out, of course, all such as have spoken by the direct and positive inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you may assert against all

the Doctors that ever taught, against all the Assemblies that ever sat, your birth-right as an immortal and responsible creature of God to freedom of conscience and the privilege of judging for yourself in every question of duty. Of course I am not speaking now of slaves, nor yet children in their father's house, nor yet pupils in a school, nor yet sundry other special classes, such as prisoners, soldiers, and sailors, respecting which various sorts of persons I should have to make sundry qualifications of the position assumed. But speaking now of men in ordinary circumstances, I insist that each has the right and the duty of judging for himself, whether the power in question is legitimate and legitimately exercised. There is one Lawgiver, Christ; there is one law, his Word. To that test I may bring and you may bring every decree of every Assembly. And numerous, indeed, are the occasions when we *may*, nay, *must* refuse obedience, or even silence.

But then, on the other hand, you are yourself very liable to err; and the thing you refuse to submit to may very possibly be altogether accordant with the Word. And hence the necessity of patience and humility and candor and forbearance and docility, and also of being well instructed. Madame Roland, going to the guillotine, cried "O Liberty! how many the crimes committed in thy name." And so, too, in the name of conscience. Conscience is not our rule of practice, any more than it is our rule of faith. We must always go to the Word. But we are each of us entitled to judge for himself about its meaning. Thought and opinion are free. Yet we must take the consequences of our error, if unhappily we form wrong opinions, and act on them. The right of private judgment is a high and sacred privilege, and necessarily involves a tremendous responsibility. Under any moral system, freedom and responsibility are inseparable.

Now, in ordinary times and circumstances, it is to be supposed that what the Church courts ordain is scriptural and constitutional and right. Differing, then, from the body, only as to the expediency of their action, our duty clearly is to yield to our brethren. The authority of the Lord himself binds us to yield;

for he set up these courts, and gave them authority. The Word commands all church members, to "obey them who have the rule over them." But we office-bearers have covenanted to submit to our brethren in the Lord. On this express condition were we put into office, and we are covenant-breakers if we do not obey.

Still further, loyalty to our Church's interests requires us to obey. What can we ever accomplish if we do not coöperate, and how can we coöperate without observing order? Dear to our hearts is the ecclesiastical organisation we belong to. We love *the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, known otherwise as the *Southern Presbyterian Church*. If needs be, we all would die for her. Days of darkness and sorrow those were, indeed, during which she first came into separate being; and linked together are our hearts with the hearts of all her people, as with hooks of steel, by the imperishable recollections of a bloody and dreadful past. Yes, indeed, we are ready to die for the Southern Presbyterian Church! But if willing to die for her, we must also be willing to live for her. And how can we live for her, unless we carry out faithfully her plans, and take part earnestly in all her operations? O brethren, we must conscientiously comply with every lawful requisition of the Assembly, representing as it does this dear Church of ours, even to the laying aside our private predilections and preferences, when they stand in the way. If our way of doing things is not the one which the Assembly has seen fit to adopt, let us by all means see fit to adopt the Assembly's way, unless we believe some great principle is violated thereby, and are very sure that we are not mistaken about it. In what other way can the Church's organic life be fully eduved? How else can all the vigor of the whole body be combined and put forth effectively in the accomplishment of its appointed work? So, too, we all love the Synod of South Carolina and this dear old Presbytery of the same name, and of which this present meeting is the one hundred and eighty-eighth sessions. Well, then, let us combine and coöperate together in loving obedience to the authority of Christ in this court of his. It is for our interest as a Church to do so. Any other course is suicidal. Every man cannot have his own way. Every one should wish the Lord's

will to be done and the Lord's way to be followed; and the Lord's will and the Lord's way will ordinarily be found in the plans of Presbytery. If you do not believe that this is so, take up your staff, O wandering pilgrim brother, walk out of this Presbytery and our Church, and travel on your way until you find your own proper ecclesiastical home. For you are not at home in our Church. You are not a Presbyterian, and ought not to claim to be one. Because to be a Presbyterian is to believe that the Lord has ordained his Church to be governed by Presbyters in Presbytery assembled. But if you do believe this, then act accordingly, and strive in harmonious coöperation with your brethren to forward the kingdom of our Lord. United, harmonious, and earnest, we can, with his blessing, accomplish a great work. Disunited, discordant, disobedient, each man choosing his own way, every enterprise of our Church must fail, and the body be covered with shame.

Bear with me whilst I indicate some few particular manifestations of the doubts which exist and prevail amongst us as to the reality of Church power.

1. Take the relation of the Presbytery to its licentiates. What is licensure but one of the steps taken in the trials of a candidate? Can one be licensed without promising to obey the Presbytery? Can a licentiate, except by the leave of Presbytery, remove without its limits? May not Presbytery, for reasons satisfying itself, recall, without trial or other ceremony, the license it has given? Does not the Book expressly refer to "reports from the churches," concerning its licentiates? Is it not right and proper that Presbytery should call for reports *from* as well as *concerning* them, at every stated meeting? Shall Presbytery look after its ministers and churches, and demand reports from and concerning each of these, but take no special oversight of its licentiates? And can it be right and proper for licentiates to enter into arrangements for serving churches without seeking the sanction of the Presbytery for these arrangements? And now does not the fact that there is any room for asking such questions as these, indicate the existence amongst us of a strong tincture of Independency?

2. Take the relation of the Presbytery to its churches. Have our vacant churches the right to make arrangements with any minister or licentiate they may choose to supply them, without the permission of the Presbytery? When Presbytery requires ministers, licentiates, sessions, and churches, all to submit to its regulation and control in this matter, does it thereby encroach on the rights of either of these parties? And here, again, I ask whether the fact that there is any room for such questions to be asked amongst us, does not point to the prevalence of some elements of Independency in our body? If we were genuine Presbyterians, could any questions like these ever arise?

3. Take the case when Presbytery, in the fear of God, determines upon some plan for overtaking the destitutions within its bounds, and money is needful for its execution. Now, may or may not Presbytery call with authoritative voice upon the churches to sustain the work? The churches are all represented in the Presbytery, and compose a free commonwealth, and the commonwealth requires money to be spent for its advantage. With what kind of voice, now, shall it speak to its churches, over which it bears rule? The voice of entreaty? The voice of suggestion? The voice of advice? The voice of exhortation? Every one of these is authorised and proper and suitable—but can the commonwealth, as represented, go no further? Has the Presbytery no voice of authority? When a certain sum is necessary for her missionary work, or to meet the Assembly's call for its contingent expenses, may not the Christian commonwealth assess the same upon its members? and when it does apportion out the sum in this way—for that is the same thing as assessment—when the Presbytery does thus apportion out the sum, and a church wilfully refuses to meet the call, is not that an act of disobedience, and a proper ground for censure? Is Church power but a name? Are we out and out Independents, or what is far worse, a mongrel breed, half Presbyterian, half Congregationalist?

To conclude: Presbyterianism is order. Speaking generally, you may say it is *doctrine and order*, and both are essential elements of the system. But strictly speaking, our Church name does not relate to doctrine at all, but only to order. Calvinism is doc-

trine, and it is our doctrine. But what makes us Presbyterians is our Church government in the hands of Presbyters. Our doctrine is Calvinistic, that is, Pauline; but our Church government is Presbyterian, that is, by elders. Presbyterianism, then, is not doctrine, but order. And what is order? It is the harmony of liberty and law. It is not the destruction of freedom, but its regulation and confirmation. Presbyterians have always been distinguished for their love of freedom. Rivers of Presbyterian blood have been poured out for it. But then Presbyterians have ever sought to combine liberty and law. As to mere political freedom, of which they have ever been most ardent lovers, what they have always believed in is a freedom either inherited or else otherwise lawfully acquired, and not the mere general "rights of man" or the doctrines of equality. Their Calvinistic theology has ever taught them that a Sovereign God makes differences between different men and nations, and they would not quarrel with his wise arrangements. As to religious freedom, two considerations will be enough to show that true liberty enters into the very essence of Presbyterianism. *First*, it is government never by one man, but always by free representative assemblies. *Secondly*, it is government not by caprice or despotic will, but by a written constitution and law, and that the law and Word of God. Nothing but what is in the Bible can bind the Presbyterian conscience. Our system, therefore, is essentially one of freedom. But see, now, how law enters likewise as of the essence of our system, and harmonises with liberty, for Presbyterians ascribe a real and not a mere nominal authority to their assemblies of elders; and they fortify every decision of these bodies by an appeal to God's Word. Thus does our Church government have regard at once to liberty and law, and thus Presbyterianism is order. It means, as Dr. Rainy says, "organised life, regulated distribution of forces, graduated recognition of gifts, freedom to discuss, [and I add freedom also to act,] authority to control, agency to administer"—"it means, a system in which every one, first of all the common man, has his recognised place, his defined position, his ascertained and guarded privileges, his responsibilities inculcated and enforced." It is a grand system. It is a divine system.

The Scriptures reveal it. The apostles practised it. Early it was corrupted in the Church, and decay fastened upon it; and the ruling elder, its most characteristic feature, passed away into oblivion for ages. At the Reformation the system was exhumed by Calvin and his coadjutors and successors. It prevails widely now in Protestant lands. But it is imperfectly understood and imperfectly carried out, even amongst those called by its name. Many of the narratives from our churches, read here yesterday, confess to the low state of discipline amongst them. And in all our Presbyteries, Synods, and Assembly meetings, we behold the evidences of the imperfect hold which the system has upon us who are office-bearers, as well as upon our churches. The cause is what I just now named—imperfect acquaintance with the system. Still more, the cause is our want of an earnest belief that the system is enjoined upon us in the Scriptures. As Dr. Thornwell used to say, Presbyterians, for the most part, do not believe their own principles. Alas! alas! it is with us generally not a matter of divine right, but merely of human wisdom and expediency.

Brethren of the South Carolina Presbytery! We are living in a slack time. Dr. Rainy well says, “a powerful tide is running in favor of a general relaxation of belief.” The tendency in our day is towards a broad Church, a liberal Christianity, and a progressive gospel; towards the laying aside all strict construction, all peculiarities of principle, and the merging of all distinctions in a mere general and negative uniformity. But God is in his Church and with his Word. He has established his own doctrine, discipline, and worship. Let us give our profoundest reverence to these divine things. God will, in his own time and way, vindicate them all.