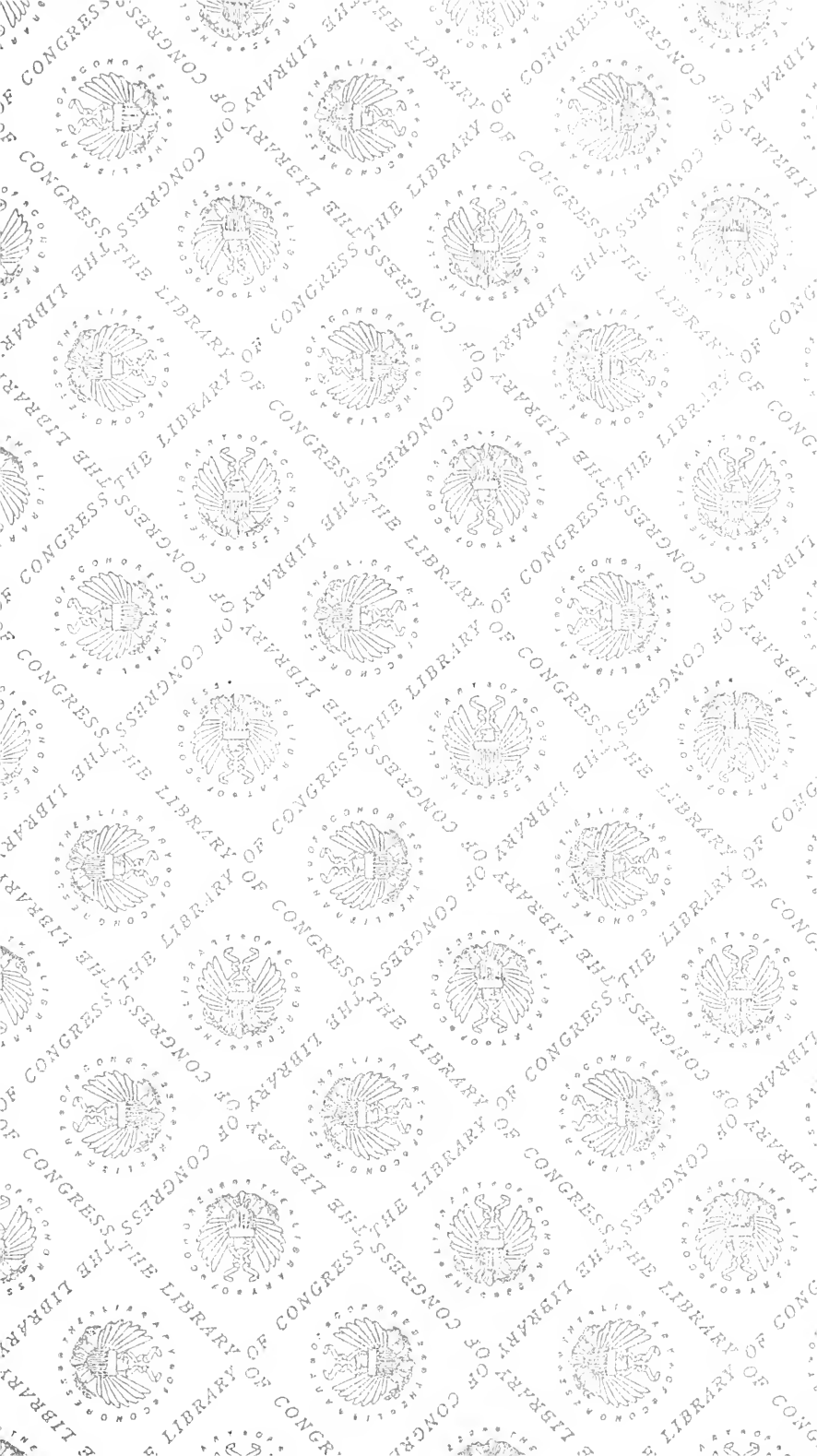


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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED

NOVEMBER 17, 1847,

AT THE INTERMENT

OF THE

HON. BENJAMIN SWIFT,

Late U. S. Senator from the State of Vermont;

BY WORTHINGTON SMITH, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN ST. ALBANS, VERMONT.

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DISCOURSE.

BELoved, NOW ARE WE THE SONS OF GOD, AND IT DOTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE; BUT WE KNOW THAT, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS.

1st John, III, 2.

IN this passage, the apostle not only reminds us of the high and honorable distinction conferred on believers in the present life, but indicates, also, the far more exalted state of excellence and glory which is prepared for them, and to which they are encouraged to aspire. Even *now*, while beset with infirmities and, it may be, oppressed with trials and sorrows, they are known on high as “the sons of God;” and are assured that hereafter, in ‘the glorious appearing of the great God—even our Saviour Jesus Christ,’ they “shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is.”

Grace, contemplated as the germ of a new, spiritual life in the soul, is, in its development and fruits, progressive. Like that creative power by which man becomes a living soul, its force is not all

spent in a single exertion, nor its highest results realized at once. The human Mind no sooner awakens into life than it takes its place in the high order of being to which it belongs. Yet how feeble are its powers when first brought into action; how indistinct and dubious its self-consciousness; how inadequate and confused its perceptions of outward objects! But the life, that has been given, is never to be extinguished: and the soul, enlarging and perfecting itself by a ceaseless growth in energy and knowledge, shall survive all the changes of time and live on forever.

Under a like progressive aspect does the text exhibit the workings of that mysterious power, by which a new and divine life is imparted to the soul. The first manifestation of this power is in a life—the ‘life of God’ in the soul: and the first fruit it yields appears in the new relations to God into which the soul—once a stranger and an alien—is now introduced. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” So much has grace achieved for us. It has ‘opened the eyes of our understandings’ to apprehend, and endued our hearts with an affinity for divine things; it has impressed on our minds the image of the heavenly, and asserted for us a place among the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. “Now are we the sons of God.”

But the privileges of sonship are not all, of necessity, a matter of present possession and enjoyment; indeed, for the most part they are objects of expectancy—things to be waited for. “Now I say,

that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.' Hence the apostle adds in the text—"and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." The privileges of sonship, so far from being all realized in 'the life that now is,' are in fact beyond our present knowledge and apprehension.—There is progression here as in other of the works and gifts of God. A glorious beginning is made when the soul awakes to the life of God, receives the spirit of adoption, and feels 'the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost;' but there are new treasures of grace and glory yet to be unsealed—heights and depths of experience in the things of God which the thought of man is yet unable to explore, and which the spirit of God has not seen fit to utter. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be"—the heart of man has not conceived it, the word of God has not announced it. The glorified state of the sons of God, is a subject which, in many respects, still awaits a revelation. "But," proceeds the apostle, "one thing we do know, that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." *This* is a truth that has been made to appear; and it is one, which, in the judgment of the apostle, offers high attractions to a soul that is born of God, though it may serve to wither and blast the hopes which are nourished only by the sordid and carnal affections of the unsanctified heart.

I propose, then, to improve the present occasion in contemplating, under a few of its many aspects, the one great truth which is revealed concerning the glorified state of believers—*that they shall be like Christ*. And I may here say, that in selecting this topic for our meditation at this time, I have been influenced by a desire not only to inspire the bereaved with the consolation which it is suited to impart; but also to impress on the minds of us all the important reflection, that the only reliable evidence of our title to that state is to be derived from the present, moral resemblance we bear to Him, ‘who sitteth on the right hand of God.’

In asserting for the sons of God a future likeness to Christ, the true moral type of the heavenly community, the apostle will not be understood as discarding the idea of an existing likeness. Indeed, the idea of such a resemblance, at least in its incipient stage, is inseparable from the phrase “sons of God;” and is in itself the ground on which the application of this language to believers is to be justified. While he affirms an existing resemblance to Christ in his glorified state; he would assure us as the most precious feature of the Christian’s hope, that hereafter this resemblance shall be more entire in all its parts, more perfect, and glorious, than the eye has yet seen, or that has entered the heart of man to conceive. “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

In noticing some of the points in which this resemblance will be manifested, I remark—

I. That it will appear in the more perfect freedom and activity given to our rational powers.—*Mind*, it will be conceded, constitutes the glory of man. It is here alone we seek for the image of the intelligent, wonder-working God. By virtue of mind and its high endowments, man claims dominion over the earth, and exacts obedience and homage from irrational creatures. But how sluggish is the action of this ethereal element; how misdirected or utterly aimless are most of its efforts; to what extent are its powers unemployed or wasted, while connected with the grosser element of the body! If to the time that is consumed in necessary repose, we add all that is lost in administering to the ever returning wants of the body, and in bearing its discomforts and pains; or that is wasted in sloth, or in pleasurable or visionary pursuits; how little remains, even from a long life, for the earnest, undivided application of its powers to its own appropriate ends? But the time cometh when mind will assert its rights and true dignity, and make its own ends predominant; when all present hindrances, and interruptions, and misguiding influences will cease to annoy. The redeemed before the throne are denominated ‘the *spirits* of just men;’ even the *bodies* which they assume, are *spiritual* bodies, ‘for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.’ This language of inspired men seems designed to teach us, that *mind* constitutes the existence of glorified beings; and that the very *form*, with which it is clothed, is adapted to its utmost

freedom and activity, as well as to its most successful efforts. In this state, no brooding cares or vexing anxieties will depress its powers; no vain discourse or trifling thought interrupt its nobler pursuits. No *repose* even will be required, save what change of employment may supply. The heavenly state is most often exhibited to our minds under the form of a *life*—a term which conveys the idea of ceaseless activity, of free, delightful occupation, and joyous emotion. Such a state as this we anticipate for glorified beings, because no other state is suited to our conception of the son of God—the Word that was made flesh; or to the nature and demands of our intellectual being.

II. Glorified spirits will exhibit a more perfect resemblance to Christ in knowledge. The apostle clearly intimates that it is in *limited* measures only that divine knowledge is imparted even to inspired men. ‘Now we know in part, and we prophesy also in part.’ Whatever is needful to men in their present state, and, perhaps, all that is suited to their present capacity, is communicated through the divine Word; but the fountains of wisdom and knowledge are not exhausted. The time however cometh, adds the same apostle, when ‘we shall know even as we are known.’

If, as our Saviour teaches, believers in this life are sanctified through their knowledge of divine truth, and in *proportion* to the true knowledge of the Word to which they have attained; then by the same instrumentality, we may suppose, will the ho-

liness of heaven be consummated in their hearts. Indeed, this sentiment is distinctly announced in the text, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Whatever then may, in this world, be thought of the maxim—'ignorance is the mother of devotion'—we may rest assured that it has no authority in heavenly places. The perfection that is to be realized there, is not the result of any manipulations with beads, and crucifixes, and holy water, or the talismanic influence of prayers uttered 'in an unknown tongue;' which, says the apostle, makes him who useth it 'a barbarian unto me.'—Ignorance can never enter into the constitution of the heavenly state;—'every where it is accounted an element of *sin*'—'alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.'

The true designation of the Christ of God, is 'the Word'—the infinite, underived reason—the light of an intelligent creation—the 'God manifested in the flesh,' 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Such is Christ; and his followers are to be like him—like him, it may be, only as the taper is like the sun; but still *light* even as 'He is light.' 'But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.'

And how glorious the transition, when the soul is permitted to turn from the earthly medium, in which it has seen things darkly, to contemplate the truth face to face! Yea, to sit down before the

heavenly Oracle and listen, while it utters forth the deep things of God. What questionings of the soul, in its present twilight state, will then be answered; what gloomy doubts resolved; what mysteries unfolded; what dark providencies, which once struck dumb the lips of believers and sent faintness into their hearts, will then be interpreted: and what harmony, and goodness, and beauty, will be seen to pervade all the designs and works of God! Christ, who knows it all, will teach it to His disciples; and therein fulfil the promise He made to them on the earth—‘what I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.’

III. There will be a more perfect resemblance to Christ in the whole aspect and symmetry of their character. Then will be corrected a sore evil, which in this world serves to mar the noblest specimens of christian developement, and to supply to the depraved heart the occasion which it eagerly seeks, to fortify itself in infidelity. I do not intend it for a *startling* remark, when I say, that even the sanctification of believers, in the form and degree in which it exists here, furnishes a strong argument in support of the fallen and corrupt nature of man. This sanctification, so far as it is exhibited in this world, indicates the existence of formidable obstructions to be overcome, of powerfully disturbing forces, which not only limit the *extent* to which the sanctifying process has been carried in any one direction; but give, moreover, a disproportionate and even distorted appear-

ance to the whole. The influence of inborn propensities, of early vitiated habits, of sinful indulgencies, of false opinions long cherished—is most clearly to be traced in the characters of, perhaps, the holiest of our race. In the best of men we discover imperfections enough to convince us, that their original state was *evil*; nay more, that their progress has been the fruit of earnest *conflict*—of a conflict, in which the victory was not always *theirs*. Here, an advantage has been gained, and there it has been lost. One virtue of the spirit has been cultivated with success, and meets the eye like an olive tree, vigorous and laden with fruit; another is dwarfed and blighted like the heath in the desert. On this side, the field is hedged in and clothed with verdure and beauty; on that, it lieth waste and is smitten with sterility.

But the moral beauty of Heaven appears not so much in the maturity of certain individual virtues, as in the developement and just proportion of *all* the graces of the spirit. The incongruity which so often meets the eye here, will not meet it there. The many infirmities which good men now have occasion to deplore, and over which the wicked exult, will not appear in Heaven. No virtue essential to a perfect character, will be wanting; none will be excessive. In the character of Christ there is an assemblage of all possible virtues and graces; and yet, no one feature is obscured by another—the deficiency of no one is compensated by the exuberance of another; but the divine beau-

ty of the whole results from the perfection of each and every part. And herein the sons of God will be like their glorious *type*—"for they shall see Him as He is." There will be a most perfect love to God for what He is in Himself; an entire confidence in His government as holy, just and good; an insatiable delight in his service and praise. An unqualified esteem, a confiding and ever growing affection for all holy beings, will pervade their hearts. No selfishness, no jealousy, no suspicion or envy, will disturb the harmony and peace of that world; for no such jarring elements will be found in their great exemplar. There, too, will be cherished the spirit of an ingenuous, all-embracing benevolence. The sympathy, such as Christ feels in the sorrows and woes of the world they have left, they will feel. The progress of the great work of redemption on the earth—the conflicts of the Church, in her militant state, her disasters and triumphs—will affect their minds, as they affect the mind of Christ. The *joy* that circulates among the angels of God when one sinner repents, will vibrate on their hearts also—for 'they shall be as the angels of God.'

IV. Time will allow me to advert only to one more particular, to wit, that the saints will be like Christ in their exemption from the changes and trials incident to their present state. To similar trials and afflictions, even, Christ was subject while He abode in the flesh; for 'He was tempted in all points like as we are'—'a man of sorrows and

acquainted with grief? But from His work of toil and suffering He has ceased, and entered into His rest. And in this respect, believers are to be like Him — ‘there remaineth also a rest for the people of God.’

The well-beloved Son of God was the subject of dark and mysterious events while He dwelt among men. His humble parentage, His poverty and privations, the ungenerous and cruel treatment He received from those for whose welfare He came to suffer and die — offered to the mind such a succession of misfortunes and disasters, as led those who had knowledge of Him, to exclaim, ‘He is smitten of God and afflicted.’ And He himself predicted that the disciple should be as his Master. Yes, the resemblance of believers to Christ appears in their present state of humiliation, as it will in the future state of exaltation. Dark providences attend them in this the house of their pilgrimage. As a trial of their faith and patience, as a check to their wandering steps, as a means to reclaim them from their backslidings, and to make them meet for the heavenly inheritance — they are subjected to the discipline of afflictive providences, ‘till the time appointed of the Father.’ It is ‘through great tribulations we enter into the kingdom of Heaven.’

But into that kingdom an abundant entrance will be administered to all ‘who look for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.’ And then the

painful and disastrous changes of our present state will be known only in remembrance; and they will be remembered only in praise of Him who came ‘to deliver us from this present evil world.’ There no voice will be heard to complain of the privations of poverty, or to say, ‘I am sick.’ The heart will not feel the grief of disappointment, or the anguish of bereavement; or taste the bitter cup of death. ‘The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’

Such is the glorious state of life and experience into which, we are taught to believe, they do immediately enter who die in the Lord. They will be like Christ “when He shall appear,” “for they shall see Him as He is”: and the doctrine of Paul, the apostle, is, ‘that to be absent from the *body* is to be present with the Lord.’

To that state of rest, and peace, and fulness of joy, our thoughts ascend, unbidden, to seek the present and eternal abode of our departed, lamented friend. Irreparable as the loss, we have sustained in his removal, may seem to us, we can hardly entertain a doubt, that, to him the event is unspeakable gain. The Christian character of the deceased is not one of recent formation: it has been subject to our inspection during a period of many years, and our observations have been made under all the lights and shades which time and passing events cast upon the lives of men. Its

foundation, indeed, was laid in very early life, under the counsels and example of his venerable father, the Rev. Dr. SWIFT, then of Bennington; a man, whom an experienced judge of character, the late President DWIGHT, ranked among the most judicious and useful of the New-England pastors. Under the paternal roof he imbibed those strong and enlightened views of divine truth, that high sense of honor and integrity, that profound respect for the word of God and the institutions of religion, that self-reliance, and firmness of purpose, that quick sensibility, that earnest, direct tone of utterance and action — qualities which could hardly escape the notice of any one, and which are suited, at first, to attract, and afterwards to nurture and adorn the Christian principle in the soul. His whole life, we may say, is an illustration and proof of the doctrine of holy scripture — that paternal care, piously and judiciously employed, is seldom lost upon the offspring; that the direction given to the child, determines the course of the man — that the sentiments impressed on the tender mind, and the habits to which it is trained, will become the chosen sentiments and the cherished habits of after life.

BENJAMIN SWIFT, the fourth son of the Rev. JOB SWIFT, D. D., was born in Bennington, April 5th, 1781. At the time of his death, which occurred suddenly, at Enosburgh, October 20th, 1804, Dr. SWIFT left behind him a family of seven sons and four daughters; of these, the subject of our

present notice was the third to be removed by death. The childhood and early youth of the deceased was spent at home and in those agricultural pursuits which, at that time, principally occupied the youth of our State. Having subsequently obtained a good academic education, he was entered a student in the Law School at Litchfield, Connecticut, then under the direction of Judge REEVE. Being admitted to the Bar, he became connected in business with his elder brother, then in practice at Manchester, in this State. A short time after, he opened an office in this village;—where, by his talents and assiduity, his unquestioned probity and honorable deportment, he soon rose to a high reputation in his profession, and secured a large measure of the confidence and esteem of the public. In 1827, he was chosen Representative of this district in Congress; which token of public confidence was repeated at the ensuing election. In 1833, he was elected to the Senate of the United States for the term of six years; at the expiration of which period, he cheerfully retired from public service to enjoy the quiet and cherished pursuits of private life.

Some forty years have now transpired since the mind of the deceased assumed a decidedly Christian aspect—when the truths of religion, which before were a matter of belief, became the inner *life* of the soul, and awakened within him those moral sensibilities which, we have reason to think, were never afterwards extinguished. The *time*

when this event occurred, as some present may remember, was in no degree favorable, to one in his situation, for inducing religious impressions. In the absence of an organized religious influence and of the instructions of the sanctuary, and among a class of adventurers recently gathered from almost every quarter and devoted to the pursuits of gain or pleasure; we can easily credit the voice of tradition in regard to the infamous state of public sentiment and morals. The legal profession, it would seem, was deeply infected with the infidelity and vices of the times. But the same independent spirit, and resolute adherance to the convictions of his own mind, which the deceased exhibited in the later period of his life, were doubtless still more conspicuous while the fervor of early years was upon him. Regardless of the sneer that might assail him, or the unmanly insinuations with which his motives might be traduced, he openly avowed his religious sentiments by connecting himself with the Congregational Church, then in an incipient and depressed state. The position which he then assumed, together with the earnest and judicious appeals which he addressed to his friends and associates, was instrumental of attaching other influential names to the cause he had espoused, and of effecting a perceptible change in the moral aspect of society. From that time to the day of his death, his uniform Christian deportment justified the confidence reposed in him by the Church. At all times and in all circumstances he was found in his

place, and ready for every good word and work. In seasons of prosperity we accounted him among our joys; and in days of gloom and darkness, we cast our eyes upon him, as upon a guiding light. In 1841 he was unanimously chosen one of the Deacons of the Church; and oftener, perhaps, than any other member, he represented the Church in Ecclesiastical Councils—a field of usefulness for which his long experience, sound judgment, and keen discernment, pre-eminently fitted him.

So uniform was his attendance on public worship and at the social, religious meeting, so interested his appearance on such occasions, and so ready to contribute to the edification of those present; that we must think his heart truly found delight in the ordinances of God and in the assemblies of His people. Though decided in his views of religious truth, and strong in his preference for the forms and discipline of his own Church, he was still free from the charge of an illiberal and narrow spirit. And so, too, though his religious impressions were of a deeply serious and solemn cast, was his mind cheerful and buoyant, and his feelings eminently social. That the prosperity of the Church of which he was a member, and the spiritual welfare of his friends and acquaintances, were interests that lay near his heart, no right-minded person will doubt. Who of us *can* doubt it, till we cease to remember his importunate supplications on our behalf, or forget the solemn, tender appeals to the impenitent, and especially to the youth, that have

burst from his lips! Surely, it is not from those who knew him best, that his memory will ever be assailed with the charge of insincerity and cant.

Did time permit and the occasion call for it, I might speak of the deceased in the various relations of life—all of which were sustained in a manner creditable to himself and to the principles he professed. As a member of the Bar, he enjoyed the reputation of a sound and fair-minded lawyer. To the high, public stations in which he was placed by the suffrages of his fellow citizens, he carried an honest and patriotic heart, and faithfully devoted the powers of a well-practiced and clear-sighted mind to the public welfare. I might speak of him as the *head of a family*, over which he diffused the charm of domestic endearment, and of truly christian hospitality:—As a *philanthropist*, interested in all those charitable movements which contemplate the improvement and happiness of the human race; and liberal in their support:—As a *citizen*, upright and honorable in his transactions with men; warm in his sympathies; free to impart aid and counsel to the needy and afflicted:—As a *friend*, open, confiding, steadfast—but these are things which those who know and appreciate his worth, will remember and speak of in future days.

But while we lament the removal of one so generally esteemed and beloved, as among the lights and ornaments of community, we cannot but notice how kindly and mercifully, as it regards himself, the circumstances of the event were ordered.

In the enjoyment of perfect health he was permitted to join his family in their morning repast; to peruse, as was his daily custom, the oracles of heavenly truth; and at the throne of all grace to commend himself and his, to the protection or disposal of God. Vigorous as in the mid-hour of life, with no trace of disease upon him, buoyant in spirit, his mental powers undecayed, unobscured—he sinks down in the open field, and with but a transient feeling of discomfort, sleeps in death! Sure it was a gentle hand that led him away. No lingering confinement, no loathsome, torturing disease, no long and gloomy anticipation of the last struggle, was reserved for him.

But strangely merciful as was the event to him, it is still *death* to his, and death to us all—an event that has filled many a heart with grief; and I would hope, impressed on all our minds the truth, that ‘man knoweth not his time;’ and that it becomes the living to watch and pray, ‘for in such an hour as we think not the Son of man cometh!’

WERT BOOKBINDING
JAN 1989
Grantville, PA

