

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER JOHN TAYLOR,

DELIVERED

In the Fourteenth Ward Assembly Rooms, Sunday Afternoon, November 16, 1873.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

In rising to make a few remarks this afternoon I shall not attempt to take any text, or to confine myself to any particular subject. My impression about this is, that both speaker and hearer ought to be under the guidance and direction of the Almighty, for unless a man speaks by the dictation of the Spirit of the Lord, his discourse will be of very little benefit to those who hear; and unless those who hear also hear by the Spirit, and are prepared to receive correct instructions, no matter how eloquent the discourse may be, or how forcible and powerful the truths which are enunciated, it amounts to very little. It is not the hearer of the word, we are told, who is benefitted, but he that doeth it. And Jesus says that many will say in that day, "Lord have we not spoken in thy name, and prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Yet he will say unto them—"Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, for I never knew you;" or I suppose, in other words, "I never approved of you."

There is one great principle by which, I think, we all of us ought to be actuated in our worship, above everything else that we are associated with in life, and that is honesty of purpose. The Scriptures say—"If the truth shall make you free then shall you be free indeed, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." We are told again that God requires truth in the inward parts. It is proper that men should be honest with themselves, that they should be honest with each other in all their words, dealings, intercourse, intercommunication, business arrangements and everything else; they ought to be governed by truthfulness, honesty and integrity, and that man is very foolish indeed who would not be true to himself, true to his convictions and feelings in regard to religious matters. We may deceive one another, and, in some circumstances, as counterfeit coin passes for that which is considered true and valuable among men. But God searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men. He knows our thoughts and comprehends our desires and feelings; he knows our acts and the motives which prompt us to perform them. He is acquainted with all the doings and operations of the human family, and all the secret thoughts and acts of the children of men, are open and naked before him, and for them he will bring them to judgment. These ideas are believed in by men generally, who, with very few exceptions, whatever their general conduct or ideas on religious matters may be, believe in an All-seeing eye which penetrates and is enabled to weigh the actions and motives of the children of men. This is an idea that will not be disputed by any race of men now existing upon the earth; nor perhaps by any who have existed heretofore, for whatever may have been the theories or notions of men in former times, they have generally had a reverence for, and a belief in, an Allwise, Supreme, Omnipotent Being who, they supposed, was greater than all of them, and who governed and controlled all their actions. A feeling of this kind is frequently made manifest in the Scriptures, and it is nothing new in our age to believe in a God of this character.

When Paul was preaching at Ephesus he said, among other things, that he saw an altar to an unknown God. Among the variety of gods which they worshipped there was an altar to an unknown God. "Him," said he, "whom ye ignorantly worship declare I unto you, the God who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the fountains of water." If we examine the pages, either of sacred or profane history, we find the same ideas prevailing to a greater or less extent in former times. Even Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the great empire of Babylon, had a knowledge, or an idea of a certain Being who ruled and governed the universe, who was superior to, and ruled over all other influences and powers; and was more intelligent

than any of them; and when the magicians and the soothsayers, the astrologers and wise men were called upon to tell him the dream and its interpretation, they were unable to do so, and they told him that it was beyond their science, and that there was nothing connected with their systems that would unfold anything pertaining to such things as those referred to; but they said that if he would tell them the dream they had rules whereby they could interpret it. He insisted upon the interpretation. Said they—"that is unreasonable, O King, there is no being but that God whose dwelling is not with flesh, who can reveal those things that thou speakest of." They had their gods which they worshipped, their deities in whom they had confidence; but they declared that there was no God but that Being whose dwelling was not with flesh who could unravel those mysteries that he desired them to make known to him. Hence, in those days we find the same principle existing, and you can trace it out in various examples in holy writ, men had their theories and ideas about God, generally speaking; but very few of them understood anything about the true God whose dwelling was not with flesh.

Our Bible purports to be the account given us of him by men who were inspired by him, for we are told that, "holy men of old spake as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost." It is related within the lids of this sacred volume that a great many of the ancients had dreams, visions, the ministering of angels and revelations; and the accounts of those visions, ministrations of angels and manifestations of the power of God, together with a little history, is what this sacred volume is composed of. Hence Jesus said to the people in his day—"Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me;" they are they which unfold many things concerning my mission, the circumstances with which I am surrounded, and events which will transpire in connection with my ministry. Holy men of God in former times had prophesied of him. Isaiah, for instance, had said—"Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us." It is said of him that he came to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and a great many things were said and written of him in the holy Scriptures, before he came, while he lived upon the earth and after he left it and ascended up to his Father in heaven.

There is very little difference among mankind in relation to many of these facts, men, generally, view these things alike, I mean in the Christian world, especially the nation in which we live, the British and French nations, the empire of Austria, Russia, Prussia, the inhabitants of Scandinavia and most of the European nations; and some of the Asiatic nations also have faith in what we term the word of God, and hold its truths in reverence, according to the ideas they entertain and the creeds they profess. There is little or no difference among the men of these various nations in regard to the existence of a Supreme Being, who rules and controls the destinies of nations, as well as of individuals; and there was no difference, in former times, between the magicians, and Daniel and those associated with him in his faith relative to the true God. They all believed in him, no matter what deities of an inferior nature they might have. But there were very few who knew how to worship the true God; hence they made to themselves all sorts of gods, some of wood, stone, ivory, gold, silver, brass, iron, &c. They had deities of every imaginable kind, and through these various forms and mediums they wished or thought to propitiate the Deity, and to secure to themselves some kind of happiness in the life hereafter.

We, in this generation, are a good deal like them. We think we are very superior in intelligence and in religion. Men, everywhere, are egotistical, they always think they are the smartest and most intelligent that ever lived; and it must be confessed that in many respects the generation in which we live are very far in advance of many others, and in regard to the arts and sciences, and certain branches of literature and mechanism, but how vague and uncertain are the ideas entertained by men in general, about the Deity! Are we intel-

lectual in this? I think not. We have our bodies of divinity, our schools of theology, our religious seminaries, and places where ministers are manufactured and prepared to perform certain work which they call preaching the gospel, and these ministers, as well as the people, have different ideas about the Deity and the proper modes of worshipping him. Does the incongruity of this state of things ever strike the minds of reflecting men, men of science, who are accustomed to weigh the force of an argument and to solve knotty problems? When I was a little boy I used to wonder, if there was a God who created man, and who ruled and dictated the affairs of heaven and earth, why he had pointed out so many different modes of worship. I think so still. I know, and so do you, according to the principles of science, that the laws which govern the operations of universal Nature are true to themselves nine hundred and ninety-nine times, and then the thousandth time; they are always true in all the various phases of Nature's works. This is so under the most severe tests which scientific criticism can apply; with every known principle in nature, whether we refer to light, heat, the gases, or any and all of the elements of which the earth is composed or by which we are surrounded. In their operations they are governed and controlled by eternal, unchangeable laws, and you can not violate any one of those laws in any particular without producing the inevitable result of such violation. In the motions of the starry heavens, the sun, moon, earth day and night, summer and winter, and the various seasons as they pass along, the wisdom, intelligence, prescience and power of a God are manifested; and the same is true of the organization and operations of all the myriads of organisms that exist upon the earth—symmetry, beauty, order and law pervade and control all their operations, all manifesting the wisdom, intelligence and power of God. You do not find one man differing from another, only in certain respects, a little in stature or strength. One is a little stronger than another, one has a more beautiful face, perhaps; may be more exquisitely formed than another; but all bear the same impress; all are governed by the same laws, all possess the same properties, powers and faculties to a certain extent, so far as the body is concerned, according to the strength or weakness of the individual. You do not find men with four arms, six eyes, ten heads, or fifteen feet or legs; they are alike, and there is a uniformity in relation to their general organism. So when you come to examine the properties of water, caloric or fire, earth, air, the different gases, electric fluid, or any substance or matter you please, you will find that they are governed by certain specific laws, and those laws are universal in their application; and furthermore that all the elements with which we are surrounded are controlled by certain eternal and unchangeable laws which can not be departed from.

Now what can God think of a people, placed here on the earth, the most intelligent of his creations, possessed of reasoning faculties, who, in many instances, have investigated and understand the laws of Nature, I say, what can he think of men who set up every form, notion and theory, every species of absurdity that can be imagined, and call it the worship of God? Suppose we were to put ourselves in his place for a little while, we should think there was something a little strange in relation to these matters. He might reasonably say, these men exhibit wisdom and intelligence in many respects. So far as discovering the operations of Nature, and examining and testing the laws thereof they all agree, but in religious matters they exhibit imbecility and weakness, in that there is no union. A philosopher in America, France, Germany, England, Spain, Italy, Russia, Prussia or any other nation will arrive at the same conclusions, precisely, that all other men or scientists of all other nations do; that is, when they examine the laws of nature and operate in the actual sciences. No matter where they are, or in what language they may convey their ideas—for words are merely the signs of ideas—whenever correct ideas exist and these ideas are properly explained; whenever submitted to scientific analysis, and proper tests, they all arrive at the same conclusions; no matter what nation it is you are among or where you live.

This reasoning is correct, and in regard to nature and its laws, the world and the elements with which we are surrounded, and the laws operating in the world with which we are acquainted all men arrive at the same conclusions, and their is no difference, unless we come to theorizing, and then there is always difficulty. Well, in regard to all these things we all think alike, because our thoughts are based on correct principles. But when we come to religious matters, we discover that, though men are naturally intelligent, they act like fools; they do not use their common judgment, reason or intelligence. "Well," say they, "you know we are governed by the Bible." Now that is exactly what we do not know, and therefore I doubt it. "But our divines tell us we are." Oh, do they? Well suppose somebody was to tell you the result of some scientific analysis, you would be very likely to say—"I believe you in part, but I would like to test it for myself, when I have done that I shall know it." Yet strange as it is, you are willing to take anybody's ipse dixit in relation to religious matters; in relation to things of the most vital importance; things pertaining to the immortal part of man. We act like the veriest babies, or consummate fools, while in regard to the affairs of this life we act intelligently.

Is there a way of arriving at a knowledge of the things which pertain to man's eternal welfare? Why yes, we are inclined to think there is. God, we are told, "is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness shall be accepted of him." Is that true? Yes. God "has made of one blood all the families of the earth," we are told. There seemed to be an idea of this kind prevailing in ancient days according to the sayings of some of the inspired men mentioned in the Scriptures. We are in the habit of going along like flocks of sheep—following our leader, no matter where he goes. I have seen sheep sometimes, and perhaps you have, running along a road, and one thought there was an obstacle—perhaps there was not anything—and it would make a leap, and when the others reached the same place they would all make the same leap; if one leaps they all leap. It is so apparently among men.

If we would examine Christianity there is something peculiar about that. We call ourselves Christians, that is, we Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians and "Mormons," we all call ourselves Christians. Well, perhaps we are, and then, perhaps we are not; it is a matter that would bear investigation, I think; and, then, I think, too, that it is very proper, as I said at the commencement, that we should be honest with ourselves, about all things, and especially in religion and the service and worship of God. "Well, but, my father was a Methodist and I am one;" "my father was a Presbyterian and I am one;" "my father was a 'Jumper' and I am one;" "my father was a Mohammedan, and I am one;" "my father was a worshipper of Buddha, and I am one;" and among us Christians we are Episcopalians, Wesleyans, Presbyterians and members of the various professional phases descended from that remarkable man, Martin Luther, or Catholics or Greeks. Let us examine these things for a little while; or, at a least try to go to the foundation. Believing in the Bible we will not go at once into these outside systems, but examine our own for a little while, and see how it stands, and how we stand in relation to it.

Jesus, we are told, "brought life and immortality to light by the gospel." There was something peculiar about it—it gave men who lived up to and honored its principles in their lives and actions, a knowledge of life and immortality. They were not dependent upon the sayings or doings of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi or any of the prophets; but the gospel brought a knowledge of life and immortality to all who obeyed it and lived according to its precepts. It informed all such that they were immortal beings; that they would exist after they had got through with time; if they died they should live again; if they were buried they should burst the barriers of the tomb and come forth to immortality.

Seeing, then, that man is both a mortal and an immortal being, having to do with eternity as well as time, it is proper that he should become acquainted with those principles that are so nearly concerned

with his happiness and wellbeing in time and in eternity. We will let John Wesley, Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Henry the Eighth, and any other organizer of religion go, and we will come to the Scriptures of truth and see what they say about it. Christ, we are told, brought life and immortality to light, and he did it through the medium of the gospel. And what course did he pursue in doing this? The Scriptures inform us that when Jesus commenced to preach the gospel he called men from the various avocations of life, among others from the occupation of fishing; he called twelve men, whom he ordained as apostles. He inspired these men with the gift of revelation and with a knowledge of God; he placed them in communication with God, so that they had revelation from him and were enabled to teach the laws of life; he breathed upon them and said—"Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and they received it, and that Holy Ghost took of the things of God and showed them unto them, it drew aside the curtains of futurity, whereby they were enabled to penetrate into the invisible world and comprehend the things of God. This was the position they occupied and the kind of gospel they had.

Well, how did they operate with it? Jesus told them to go out and preach it; and he called seventy men and inspired them too; and told them to go out and heal the sick, cast out devils, and preach the gospel, they were furthermore to go without purse and scrip, he saying unto them—"Freely ye have received, freely give." They went out in this kind of a way, without purse and scrip, to preach the gospel. By and by a number of them returned, and he asked them how they had fared. They told him they had been preaching, and healing the sick, and even devils were subject to them in his name. Said he—"Rejoice, not that devils are subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven," that you are the Lord's, that God is your friend; rejoice that you have been brought into communication with God, and that you have received the everlasting gospel, which brings life and immortality to light. This was their position, and they listened to the teachings of Jesus, and we all, that is all these various parties of which I have spoken, believe that Jesus was the Son of God; we all believe that he was the Anointed, elect and sent of God. And speaking of himself he said—"I and the Father are one," and "he who has seen me has seen the Father." He taught them a great many things pertaining to their present happiness and future exaltation, and he spoke of a time that should come when the Saints should inherit the earth. When he was about to be crucified, to be offered as a sacrifice to do the will of his heavenly Father, and to open up the way of life and salvation, that man might attain to exaltation in the kingdom of God, he told his disciples that it behooved Christ to suffer, and to be raised from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.

Now let us examine the position of those disciples. I believe a good deal in first principles. I want to examine things candidly and honestly, and to see what kind of a position they occupied in those days. When Jesus was about to leave his disciples he told them that it was necessary that he should go away; for said he, "If I go not away the Comforter will not come." There was something remarkable about this expression. "If I go not away the Comforter will not come; but if I go away I will send you the Comforter." What was that Comforter? It is important that we should understand this. That Comforter was the Spirit of Truth. What should it do to them? It should "bring things past to their remembrance, lead them into all truth and show them things to come;" in other words it should bring life and immortality to light; it should open the heavens to its possessors, enable them to understand the designs of God and lead them into all truth, not into one little truth or two little truths; but into all truth. What a privilege, what a blessing, what a rich legacy to impart unto his followers! Only think of men being in possession of a principle which should enable them, under all circumstances, to discriminate between truth and error, virtue and vice; between those principles which would ennoble and elevate, and those which would overthrow and destroy, and which should make