

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT

At the Fourteenth Ward Assembly Rooms, on Sunday afternoon, March 10, 1878.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

These words are found in the 5th verse of the 1st Epistle of John: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Inasmuch as God is represented to be a being full of truth, full of knowledge and intelligence, having almighty power, we would naturally suppose that he was also a God of light, that is full of the principle of light; and that there is nothing too deep for him to understand, or too great for his understanding to comprehend or reach. He being full of light, there can be no darkness in him. Indeed, he is spoken of by James as the "Father of lights." In other words, his offspring, his children, his sons and daughters, partake of a portion of that light which dwells in the Father; the same as our children, born unto us, partake, in some respects, of the light and intelligence which dwell in their parents. All creatures that we are acquainted with, that have life, and being, and power to move upon the earth, have a degree of light, a degree of understanding, and that light or understanding is meted out to them, according to the decree of heaven, and according to the condition in which they are placed, to fill the object of their creation.

The Lord does not intrust a fulness of light to any of his creatures in this world, not even his own sons and daughters have this privilege, while in this mortal state of existence. It seems to be in accordance with the great purpose of Jehovah, to place his own children here in this creation and impart to them a very small degree of light and truth. They are required to improve upon this degree of light, adding thereunto understanding, knowledge and truth. Some, in reflecting upon this subject, might ask the questions, "If the Lord is an almighty being, possessing all power, and is full of intelligence, knowledge and truth, and if we are his children, why did he not impart unto us the fulness of this light in the beginning of our existence in this world? why should he give us little by little? why are we not born with an understanding of all things past, all things present, and all things to come?" To my mind these questions are easily answered. The Lord designed, in placing his children here upon this creation, that they should not only attain to great knowledge, and understanding, and wisdom, but that they should show themselves approved in every sphere in which they might be placed. Where little is given, but little will be required; where much is given, much will be required. And having determined in his own purpose and mind that they should be agents to themselves, he designed to try them in their agency, with a small degree of light and truth at first, to see how they would act in relation to the degree of intelligence given; in other words, to see whether they would make a good use of the same, exercising their agency in doing that which is right, cleaving to that which is good, and resisting evil of every kind. And then having been found worthy he would impart a greater degree of light, and exalt them in the scale of being, and impart to them greater knowledge concerning himself, and his purposes, and his ways, and the works of his hands. If we were created with a fulness of knowledge, it would be very difficult for us to conceive how it could be possible, to use this agency properly before the Lord. It is true, we would be placed in possession of a vast amount of information concerning the past, present, and future, but being agents to ourselves we might, peradventure, use this knowledge in a manner to do great injury. Therefore the Lord determined that we should only be intrusted with a little information, and with an agency to use it according to his mind and will.

We are the sons and daughters of God, just as much so as the children, present this afternoon, are the sons and daughters of their parents, and in the same light that we are the children of our earthly parents, so are the children of men the off-

spring of the Almighty. He is our Father in the full sense of the word, and we were begotten by him, and born to him, not in this probation, but in the world prior to the existence of this one—in our former or first estate. There we were born, there we were begotten, there we received a spiritual existence in the image of God, we were then without flesh, without bones, without the organization we now are in possession of. When I speak of a spiritual existence, do not misunderstand me, I do not mean the kind of existence spoken of in the writings of many theologians in which the spirits of men are represented as occupying no space, and as having no relation to duration or time. Such an existence is inconceivable; it is absurd in its very nature, to suppose that there can be any existence, either in an immortal form, or in the present form of body and spirit, as persons occupying no space; it is one of the greatest absurdities ever invented by intelligent beings. Yet this is incorporated in the articles of faith of some of the Christian societies, and especially in their theological writings. They try to make spiritual existence as mysterious as they possibly can, and often declare our Father and God to be a person, and yet, according to their articles of faith, he is said to be without body, parts or passions, as though we could comprehend the existence of something without a body or parts.

Some of you, my hearers, may be surprised, especially the rising generation growing up in these valleys, when I tell you that there are millions of Christians (so called), who believe that God occupies no space, that is, as a body, and yet is a person. You read the 39 Articles of the Church of England, if you doubt what I say, and you will there find what I say; also the Articles of the Methodists, which are more or less copied from those of the Church of England. In the Methodist discipline it reads: We believe in one God, consisting of three persons, without body, without parts, without passions.

In reading these things when a boy, and not having reflected much, I thought, of course, it was one of the mysteries which we were not permitted to understand. I did not then perceive the absurdity of the idea, incorporated as one of the articles of faith of a great and numerous religious body. But after I grew up to manhood, and reflected upon these things, and began to try to grasp in my mind and comprehend, in some measure, a being consisting of two other beings beside himself, and yet having no body, I could not do it. It was a contradiction in my mind, something that did not look consistent; and especially when they, in order to make the thing so plain, in their estimation, that nobody might misunderstand them, declare that he has no parts. Consequently he does not occupy any portion of finite or infinite space. However minutely we may divide a cubic inch of space, though separated into millions of parts, yet every one of these minute portions are parts of the cubic inch; and when you speak about that which has no parts, then you come to the representation of nothing; then you come to the modern Christian God, as represented in their discipline, and in their articles of faith. I have oftentimes wondered how it is, that there are so many who believe in these absurd ideas; men of intelligence, men that would scorn to believe such principles connected with natural philosophy, and with the sciences of the day, yet so mistaken in their minds, and so infatuated by false religions, as to conceive of the existence of a being that has no parts.

Now let me say something about that being, the subject of our text: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Does he exist as a person? Yes. Has he a Son called his Only Begotten? Yes. Did his Son have a body? Yes. We have, this afternoon been celebrating the Lord's Supper, and commemorating his broken body, that was crucified for us. Had he parts? Yes, and those parts occupied space just the same as all the children of men. Did he appear in the form of man? Yes. Was he about the common height of men? Yes. Had he dimensions? Yes, a body and parts. And yet we are really told that God consists of three persons without body or parts. Is Jesus one of these three persons? They will tell you so, and that these three have one body. How did the Jews crucify him when he had nothing to crucify? Please do

not blame me for speaking of these absurdities. But what says the Scriptures in regard to these matters. Paul, in speaking of Jesus, says, he was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." The martyr Stephen, in his last dying testimony said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." How many persons did Stephen see? Two; and the Son was standing on the right hand of the Father. Then we have testimony to show that the Father has a right hand, and it would, therefore, be fair to infer that he has a left hand also. But let me refer you back to a very early period just before, and immediately after man first appeared on our earth; among other things that are said of him, you will find these words: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And then it says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." Hence, whenever we have had any account given us of heavenly beings appearing to man on the earth, they have always come in the form of man. For instance, the Lord and two other heavenly personages appeared to Abraham, who besought them to tarry until something could be prepared for them to eat; and we are told that "a calf, tender and good," was killed and dressed, and cakes also were prepared, which, together with butter and milk, constituted the meal, and that they did eat. Can you conceive of a more ridiculous idea than for a person without body or parts to sit down to a meal and eat? You may say, these were angels; but you will find by reading the whole of this chapter that I have quoted from, namely: the 8th of Genesis, that after the repast, they proceeded on their way toward Sodom, accompanied by Abraham, and that two of the persons went ahead leaving the Lord himself in conversation with Abraham, both of them in the same human form.

Again, we are informed that seventy of the elders of Israel, at a certain time, went up into Mount Sinai, where "they saw the God of Israel;" and they describe his person, and also the appearance of the ground upon which he stood. Jacob also tells us that he saw God face to face; and we have many declarations made by many of the ancient prophets to the effect that they saw him. Isaiah speaks of having seen him, and says that his train filled the temple; he was accompanied by a numerous host of heavenly beings.

In all of the references, the Lord appears as a man, they saw him as a man, and those who saw him describe him as a man, as having a head, eyes, ears, mouth, etc., in common with the human family, his children. The difference, however, between man and God does not consist so much in the personal form, as in the vast, immeasurable amount of knowledge and information in possession of the Father, while we, his offspring, have but little, a very limited amount, comparatively the same as our little children: they have power to move their limbs; and that information apparently is all that they have; their minds are much limited, indeed, and they have to learn by actual experience. They at first learn something that concerns them; they have to learn the nature of their sight, and that is not correct at first, but by experience they learn to compare things, and also find the distances of things. For instance, a little child taken to the door and seeing the moon shining in the heavens, puts forth its little hand to reach that luminary; it does not know the distance of objects, until it learns by experience. And hence it seems we have been placed in the first conditions of knowledge, and we have to cultivate this knowledge by degrees—from one degree to another, until we arrive to manhood and womanhood; and some continue to cultivate knowledge and information until they become old and gray-headed. But some learn much faster than others, from either natural advantages, or those of method. But there is a certain school far superior to any schools established among men. It is this. The Lord has taught us that if we, his children, will only repent of our sins—when I speak of repentance, I mean a reformation, a putting away of sin; when we do this with all our hearts, and are immersed in water for remission of our sins, we have the promise that the Holy Ghost shall be given to us. This is

a blessing that the natural man is not acquainted with; but when he becomes a spiritual man, so far as learning is concerned, he comes in possession of a power he never knew before to a great extent; in other words, he is baptized with the Holy Ghost. What does this do for the education of the children of men? Far more than our academies do. Our children have, by hard study, year after year, to acquire their learning in these human institutions; hard thinking is necessary, reasoning, gaining little by little, and it frequently requires many years of close application to become what is termed a learned man—a man that understands the sciences, that has worked his way through the various departments of mathematics, and perhaps geology, and mineralogy, and all the sciences, such as are usually taught in universities. But the man filled with the Holy Ghost has got the advantage of students who graduate at our universities. Why? Because he can learn more in ten minutes, in regard to many things, than another, not so favored, can in all his life. Indeed, he can learn some things by the operations of the Holy Ghost, which no natural man or woman could learn, however gifted they may be. You may inquire where they could learn these things? I answer, by the revelations of the Holy Ghost, which brings to light many things that are past, and shows things that are in the future. The Lord is just as able to show one of his pupils, who will take the necessary steps to be taught, what will take place a year, or ten years, or a hundred, or a thousand or more years hence, as the principals in our universities are to teach persons concerning things present. God is not confined to the present, or to things immediately concerning his pupils, or those who may enter into the university he has prepared, but he opens the past and future to the minds of men, just as Jesus promised his disciples, when he was about to leave them.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; and he will show you things to come."

Supposing then that the children of God, who are counted worthy to be in possession of the Holy Spirit, should comply with all his commandments, and become revelators, and supposing they should inquire about the condition and formation of the earth, when the Lord rolled it into existence, also about the changes that have come upon it, how easy it would be for the Lord to show them, in a moment, almost in the twinkling of an eye, all about it, giving the whole history of its condition, before and when it was first formed. Geologists may study, year after year, all the best works they can obtain, concerning the geological phenomena of our globe; they may speculate and say, the earth is several millions of years old, founding their speculations upon geological appearances; they may say, that it must have passed through successive changes for millions of years. But after all, what do they really know? They may have a very imperfect idea in relation to the surface of the earth; but they do not know anything about the depths, underneath this superficial stratum—the great interior; they have only a faint idea of certain very limited localities—a few surface scratches, and almost infinitesimal in thickness. From these uncertain data they have drawn their conclusions concerning the age of the earth.

Supposing persons, under the influence of the Spirit of the living God, should behold how many of these changes have been brought about, and how great revolutions have taken place, since the earth was last organized out of pre-existent and eternal materials; supposing they should behold the solid earth gradually emerging from its watery envelope, and becoming one land, the waters gathered together into one place—not into two places, not into different oceans, seas and lakes, but into one place, leaving the dry land in one place. Supposing they should still further see by the power of the Holy Ghost, this dry land, after a few thousand years, separate into great continents, not by long gradual phenomena, in the nature of geological periods, but by the immediate power of the great Creator; supposing again, that the ocean should change from its location, and land, in many places, should be brought to light. Supposing again, that they should behold in vision, mountains sink, forming

deep valleys, and valleys rise up, forming high mountains. Supposing again, that they were to see many parts of these continents sink, and lakes appear in the sunken portions; and supposing too, they were to behold great and important changes, at different times, wrought upon the dry land, and upon the parts called ocean, changing places by degrees.

Now, a geologist would say that all these things, and all these revolutions were brought about by gradual and slow changes; whereas the man of God, being taught by the Holy Ghost, would say that these things were accomplished in a comparatively short period of time. Which of the two would be most correct, the man who speculates from the little he can find out from the surface examination of our little globe, or the man who, by the power of the living God, penetrates in vision, into the depths of the earth, and also beholds those various revolutions which have taken place upon the surface of the earth?

Then again, when it comes to astronomical phenomena, we are taught that there are very slow climatic changes taking place, which occupy very long periods, during which, the northern and southern hemispheres of our globe, are alternately affected with extremes of heat and cold. It is true, there are causes of an astronomical character, which, if permitted to act through immense periods, would necessarily produce alternate extremes of temperature in the two polar hemispheres. It is also true, that differences of temperature in the two hemispheres, would necessarily diminish the polar ice in one, and increase it in the other; thus there would necessarily result a continued change of sea-level—a change in the earth's center of gravity—a rising of the ocean in the colder hemisphere, a corresponding retirement of the ocean in the warmer, giving rise to glacial and interglacial periods of great length.

But all these great phenomena could also be brought about, in a few thousand years, by simply and alternately changing the angle between the planes of the earth's orbit and the equator. He who formed the universe holds the regulating key in his own hand. By his almighty power it was organized; by his law it is governed; by his good will and pleasure it passes through great changes; by his decree it will pass away and be renewed. Which gives the most information, that which comes from God, direct by the power of his Spirit—revelation from heaven,—or that which comes from mere speculation, based upon some uncertain data, that may be correct, and that may not be correct? I would say, give me the privilege of being taught from on high, give me the privilege of being taught by that being who knows and comprehends everything pertaining to this creation, and knows the changes that it has undergone, and how long the earth has continued in its present condition, or nearly in its present condition.

We infer from this good book, called King James' translation of the Bible, that a few thousand years ago the earth was formed. And many have supposed that it was then formed out of nothing. I need hardly say to this congregation, that no such nonsense can be found in the Scriptures; but in the creeds of men, may be found this idea set forth, that God created all things from nothing. Now, how do the founders of these creeds, as well as those who believe in them, know that he did such a thing? Have they any revelation, from the first Chapter of Genesis to the end of the revelations of St John, which states or intimates that the Lord made the earth out of nothing? Not one. This is the addition of man; this is a tradition formed by uninspired articles of faith and discipline to govern people in their religious ideas; whereas the word of God says nothing of the kind. The materials out of which this earth was formed, are just as eternal as the materials of the glorious personage of the Lord himself. Now, he consists of a body and parts, and not only of parts but passions. He has the passion of love, so much so that he is called a God of love; hence this nonsense about God having no parts nor passions is among the inventions of human wisdom. This being, when he formed the earth, did not form it out of something that had no existence, but he formed it out of materials that had an existence from all eternity; they never had a beginning, neither will