

Poetry.

(For the DESERET NEWS.)

TWENTY YEARS AGO.

Written by request of Mrs. Bathsheba Smith,
and Dedicated to Mrs. Margaret T. Smoot.

Beneath the mountains crown'd with snows,
With future prospects rife;
The desert blossoms as the rose,
And teams with joyous life.
Roll back the curtain of the past
Where time's swift changes flow,
And take a retrospective cast
Of twenty years ago.

This, then was but a wild retreat,
Where nature had no charms—
Untrod by all but savage feet,
In most degraded forms.
'Twas all a waste, a barren sod—
A part of Mexico,
Unsought by man—unblest of God
Till twenty years ago.

In summer's sunshine, crickets here,
And snakes, their rights maintain'd;
And o'er the winters, bleak and drear,
Cold desolation reign'd.
Let fall the curtain—look and see
The present bright tableau,
Contrasted with the scenery
Of twenty years ago.

We've brav'd the desert's trackless wilds—
We've tested untried soil,
And here, a rich abundance smiles
To compensate our toil.
From bondage and oppression free—
With friendship's social flow,
We meet and chat with merry glee,
Of twenty years ago.

The earth, its richest gifts, bestows,
And plenty smiles around—
A sea of life among us flows,
With love and beauty crown'd.
Thanks be to God, the Holy One,
From whom all blessings flow;
For what achievements we have won,
Since twenty years ago.

E. R. SNOW.

G. S. L. City, July 24, 1867.

DISCOURSE

By President D. H. Wells, delivered in the
Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, June 30, 1867.

[REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.]

I have been pleased whilst listening to the remarks of br. Eldredge. The recital of his reasons for receiving the principles of the gospel, forcibly reminded me of the days of Joseph, and of the effect which those principles had on my mind as I heard them proclaimed by the servant of the Lord. Many of the principles which he taught were in the world—they were not new, yet it seemed as though they had never been thought of, comprehended or understood by the children of men; at least they had not been by me. I did not know anything about God my heavenly Father, nor the connection which existed between Him and the children of men, nor the object He had in view in sending them through this earthly probation, until I learned it from the prophet; and I apprehend that this is, to a very great extent, the case with the world to-day. I had no more confidence in Joseph Smith being a prophet, or in his knowing anything about religion, than I have now in a juggler or a wandering mountebank. I knew nothing at all about Joseph, except what I had heard from his enemies, or read in the papers.

It was not very far—only two or three counties—from where I was born, in the State of New York, that this work took its rise. I had frequently heard through the religious papers of the miracles that had been performed by the "Mormons," and I supposed the whole affair was a great humbug, that the "Mormons" were fanatics and very bad people. The days of my youth were days of religious excitement—the days of revivals which so pervaded that section of country at that time—and I can well apprehend the effect these things must have had on the mind of Joseph; he was a young man, I was but a boy, and I know how those revivals affected young minds in the neighborhood in which I lived. Some of those preachers would hold their protracted meetings for days and weeks, and sometimes for a month, one meeting after another, every day and every evening, getting around the young with their influences and concentrating their prayers, perhaps, on a single individual and praying for no other until he would say he had got religion and was converted. Suffice it to

say, that I was disgusted with it, and did not believe in any of it, and rested my chance, so far as religion was concerned, on trying to do that which was right as near as I could, and running the risk.

In this frame of mind I was introduced to Joseph Smith by Sidney Rigdon, who remarked, at the time, that he was the man who was talked about so much. He was a fine looking man; he did not say much to me, nor I to him. Time passed along, and for years after I was occasionally thrown into his society, and frequently heard him speak; and, though I did not at first believe that he was inspired or that he was more than a man of great natural ability, I soon learned that he knew more about religion and the things of God and eternity than any man I had ever heard talk. I read the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants without their having any particular effect on my mind. I did not get the principles from either of these sources; but I obtained them from Joseph; and it seemed to me that he advanced principles that neither he nor any other man could have obtained except from the Source of all wisdom—the Lord Himself. I soon discovered that he was not what the world termed a well read or an educated man; then where could he have got this knowledge and understanding, that so far surpassed all I had ever witnessed, unless it had come from Heaven? It commended itself to my understanding and my sober judgment; and although I admitted nothing and did not embrace the gospel, but stood aloof, yet the words and principles which I heard from him had their effect on my mind.

I had been a reader of the Scriptures, and had learned a great deal by heart in my youth in the Sunday school. I had read a great many religious publications, and had a tolerable idea of what the sects of the day believed with regard to the principles of salvation. I had investigated and had been raised according to orthodox notions, and in my early youth I believed in the "Trinity." I investigated the principles of the Unitarians who did not believe in the "Trinity," and also the doctrines of the Universalists; and I believed about as much in Universalism at the time I was introduced to Joseph, as in any of the religions of the day, if not a little more; but had not united myself with any church organization, because I was not fully satisfied. I heard Joseph Smith state at one time in Nauvoo that whether "Mormonism" was right or wrong, the people were just as well without as with the ordinances taught and administered by the sectarians of the day. That was exactly what I thought, though I did not comprehend so much then in relation to the ordinances of the gospel, and those authorized to administer in them, as I afterwards learned. And although my understanding of these things may have been of slow growth, yet I can say, and feel, that it is grounded in the truths of heaven, for with the few keys I received from the servants of God, I obtained corroborating testimony from the Scriptures, which I have read from that time until now with an understanding I never had before; and even now, whenever I search the Scriptures, I find things that are new to me, that I never understood nor comprehended before, although I have been familiar with them from my youth.

When I first heard Joseph Smith enunciate the principle of baptism for the dead and the method of administering it, I was astonished that no person had ever thought of that before, it was so plainly laid down in the Scriptures. The principle of acting by proxy was just as plain to me as the noon-day sun, the moment it was explained to me; but I never thought of it until that time. When I heard these principles my heart leaped for joy, and although I was not a praying man, I prayed inwardly, that whatever else I might do, I might never be left to deny the principles of truth which the prophet was revealing. That was the inward conviction of my soul. Still I did not join the Church, and I did not know that I ever would; I was not fully satisfied. Some things were made very manifest to me; others I could not comprehend. He preached a funeral sermon once in which the doctrine of eternal judgment was dwelt upon considerably; this I received, and many a time in Council have I heard him develop principle so plainly that it would have been a sin against light and knowledge for me to have rejected it,

therefore I treasured it up in my own heart. Many and many a time he would go right along developing principle without ever alluding to the Scriptures; while my own knowledge of them would bring passage after passage to my mind in corroboration of that which he was advancing.

When he said it was the privilege of the Latter-day Saints to be baptized for their dead, I remembered the words of Paul, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" and when he spoke upon the principle of preaching to the spirits in prison, it flashed across my mind, as quick as lightning, that the Savior did that between the time of His crucifixion and resurrection. The analogy of the thing struck me with such force that I could not get it out of my mind. And so scripture after scripture, and testimony after testimony came to my mind, proving that the principles he advanced were true. But had I ever thought of them, or had the Christian world for ages? No, not until Joseph revealed them. The Catholics, even for praying for the deliverance of the dead from purgatory, were scouted and ridiculed; yet this principle of administering for the spirits in prison was unfolded to my mind, and in and of itself was great and glorious. Said I, if they who were disobedient could be administered to by the Savior of the world, how much more reasonable is it to suppose that they can be administered for who have not been disobedient, but who have died without a knowledge of the gospel? This seemed reasonable and consistent to me, and the principle was sustained by the Scriptures of divine truth which I had been taught to believe from my youth up. When the apostle used the expression "If the dead rise not, then why are ye baptized for the dead," he was instructing the church at Corinth on the principle of the resurrection, some of them apparently having been imbued with the doctrine of the Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the dead. I saw the reason and propriety of the expression. I never had comprehended it before; I did not know God, nor His Son Jesus Christ, nor the relationship that we, His children, bear to Him. That is the condition of the Christian world at the present day. They do not comprehend God, themselves, their past, nor their future.

These principles have come to us by revelation through the Prophet Joseph. There may be those here who have not received these principles; it will do no harm to talk upon that awhile, and it may not harm those who have. They are incontrovertible. Arguments to sustain them, can be adduced if necessary, but I do not think they need it. Still it has a tendency to open up the mind and prepare it to receive those principles which have been made manifest in this our day for the salvation and exaltation of mankind. It showed to me that there was a work to be done, and that the time, so long talked of for its accomplishment, was hastening on. I saw that there was a necessity for it, for truly all people seemed to me to be blinded concerning the things of God. Like the Jews at the appearance of the Savior, they multiplied words, made long prayers, made great pretensions in religious matters, but their hearts were far from God. The fact of some of the Jews denying the resurrection, after hearing the Savior and his Apostles elucidate it so clearly, proves to me that they were nearly if not quite as ignorant with regard to the things of God as the Christian world at the present day. They read the scriptures without understanding; they administered in the ordinances without power, and they changed the ordinances, substituting one thing for another, thinking the change would, doubtless, answer the same purpose and suit their convenience a little better.

It was thus that schisms crept into the church, and men began to reason themselves out of the principles of their most holy faith, as was touched upon here a short time ago by the President. I can see how this parity of reasoning would carry men off. To illustrate for a moment: We say that Jesus died for all mankind, that his blood was shed for everybody; but will this save them unless they comply with the requirements of the gospel? Why, no. Some say that the doctrine of one being born to be saved and of another being born to be damned would set that aside. That is the extreme view. Others come

along and say, "If men's salvation depends upon their actions, where is the need of the atonement; for with all the efficacy of the atonement men cannot be saved without repenting of evil, and if they do this they will be saved anyhow."

This is fallacious reasoning. Jesus died that all might live. As we read in the scriptures, "As in Adam all die even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Every son and daughter of Adam may be saved if they will live according to the principles of the gospel. Salvation is within the reach of every human being, because the restitution is as good as the fall. Here is the platform; and if men are not saved it is their own fault. The plan of salvation devised by our Father in heaven is amply sufficient to reach the whole of the human family. He will be justified and we condemned if we do not receive the principles of the gospel. We can receive or reject them as we please, this is our privilege. We can receive the principles of the gospel with its virtues and the attributes of God; or we can go on in the practice of evil until we go down to death and destruction, if we choose.

Here comes another man, however, who reasons that the virtues and attributes of God are what make God, and that without these attributes He would not be God; hence, that the attributes alone are God. Do you not see how fallacious this reasoning is? What is a principle without being acted upon? It is no more than the iron in the ore, it is inert and dead. Of what benefit are principles in the abstract, however good they may be? They are of no benefit to humanity unless manifested through organized intelligence. Food when appropriated to its natural use imparts vigor to the system, but unappropriated it is comparatively worthless. The same is true of water and other beverages; they are good to quench thirst if rightly used, otherwise they are of little value. By partaking of the Spirit of God, our thirst for knowledge will be satisfied, and it will be within us as a well of water springing up to eternal lives. But if we partake not of that Spirit we will sink, and our course will be continually downward. Hence we see, that in and of itself, the attribute is no more than the iron in the ore; to be beneficial it must be developed by use. If there is a disposition in me to live according to good and true principles they are bound to elevate and exalt me, just the same as the growth of a child is promoted by proper supplies of nutritious food; whereas, if it did not partake of this food it would starve and die. It is just so in spiritual matters. It is not in those matters themselves, but in the individual and the capacity of the individual who receives and applies them to his own use, and practices upon them, that they are calculated in their nature to elevate and exalt him.

Such views as I have referred to do away with God entirely; they do away with the Savior and the virtue of the atonement. They are worse than infidelity. They turn things completely around. Men advancing them say if such things had been so and so, other things would have been so and so. For instance, "What would have been the condition of the world of mankind if the Savior had not died?" I do not know anything at all about it. It was in the plan devised in the councils of the Gods, before man was brought forth to inherit the earth. One came with, and as a consequence of, the other. I do not know what the condition of man would have been if the Savior had not died. I do not suppose man would have been here if that had not been part of the arrangement. It is not a supposable case with me. I take things as they are. The Lord has arranged it, and if I do not like His arrangement it will not make any difference to Him, though with mankind, generally, it might. It is for me to submit to the arrangement as I find it, having faith and confidence that it is the best, and the only way for us, as the children of God, to walk in, that we may obtain salvation and exaltation in His kingdom.

Do you suppose that our heavenly Father would have sent us through this probation of sin, trial, misery and death, if it would have been as well for us to have stayed in our spiritual state in the eternal world? I do not suppose any such thing; but I believe there is a wise purpose in sending us to pass through this mortal state, and that was so well understood by our spirits that they were