

Man.

Remarks by Elder John Taylor, made in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, February 19, 1860.

I am always pleased to hear brother Joseph Young speak, because, as the Indian says, “he talks good talk;” and I always like to hear people talk good talk, and things that are calculated to make one feel pleasant and comfortable.

A passage of Scripture which he quoted attracted my attention. It is one of the sayings of David—“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

In one point of view, man appears very poor, weak, and imbecile, and very insignificant: in another point of view, he appears wise, intelligent, strong, honorable, and exalted. It is just in the way that you look at a man that you are led to form your opinions concerning him. In one respect, he appears, as it were, as the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven. He is changeable in his opinions, in his thoughts, reflections, and actions. He is idle, vain, and visionary, without being governed by any correct principle. He comes into existence, as it were, like a butterfly, flutters around for a little while, dies, and is no more. In another point of view, we look at him as emanating from the Gods—as a God in embryo—as an eternal being who had an existence before he came here, and who will exist after his mortal remains are mingled and associated with dust, from whence he came, and from whence he will be resurrected and partake of that happiness for which he is destined, or receive the reward of his evil deeds, according to circumstances.

If we look at the position of man as he has been and as he is, what is he, whether we regard the most powerful and mighty, or the most humble—whether as emperors, warriors, statesmen, philosophers, as rich or poor, we find he has passed away, and to us is sleeping in oblivion. Where are some of those great and mighty men that made the earth tremble—at whose nod and beck, and at the crook of whose finger nations quaked with fear? They have returned to dust, and ashes and worms prey upon their systems. They have waned away, and many of the great and honorable are as much despised since they died as they were honored while they lived and were in the possession of their earthly glory. What is man?

In some points of view, the human race are feeble indeed. They are feeble in their bodies, minds, and spirits, and need some sustaining influence to uphold them both in body and mind before they can occupy their true position in society, whether in relation to this world, or in relation to the world which is to come. For instance, a man may study for years, and perhaps some faint affliction of his body will overturn his intellect; he loses his senses, his reason is fled, and he becomes a raving maniac. We are indeed poor creatures. Think what a number of infirmities the human system is subject to, until finally death closes its mortal career, and it is laid among the silent dead.

Let us ask what the nations of the earth have accomplished for the last six or seven thousand years. What great work have they achieved? What have the greatest warriors and statesmen that have existed from the beginning done? What good have they accomplished for the world? What boon have they handed down to posterity, and how much better are we off because they lived, because they moved upon the earth, and because they possessed a certain power upon it? They have accomplished a solemn nothing. Where are those mighty conquerors and bright geniuses now? Where are some of the mightiest men? And what has become of the nations and cities where they flourished? It has become a matter of doubt where even the foundations of Babylon and Nineveh were laid. Egypt, it is true, has preserved some of its ancient monuments, kings, and princes unto the present day. What are those men? Loathsome mummies. What are they doing with them? The great Potiphars, Ptolemies, and Pharaohs are now being used for fuel to make steam to drive railway cars.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou rememberest him?

What is man, surely, when we look at him in this point of view? And what are those ancient nations? What intelligence have they communicated to the men of future ages? What real good have they done them?

A great many of the ancient nations were idolaters. They worshipped dogs, cats, crocodiles, serpents, and every

kind of thing that came within the range of their imagination.

They could not get any idea of the true God, any more than the Christian world can at the present time, without revelation, nor any knowledge of the reason of their being on the earth, what they came into the world for, and what they were designed to accomplish. If we look at the world in this point of view, it presents a sorry spectacle.

We talk sometimes about the great works of artists, painters, sculptors, &c. But what have those smart geniuses accomplished of real practical good to the world? What do their records show? Their works may be seen in many of the capitals of the nations of Europe. What are they? So many representations of war, destruction, and death. If you examine some of the galleries of art in France, the history of that country can be traced from the third century to the present time. You find in those galleries splendid specimens of art; and what are they? Here is a representation of a battle fought; there, the representation of death and destruction; and yonder is a splendid picture representing the march of a victorious army, destroying an unfortunate and vanquished people, and treading down the dead and dying. The history of those nations is marked in blood and tears.

How much better is the world now, in any point of view, than in former days? What blessings have the great men of former ages handed down to posterity? Were they all collected, they would appear in little room. It is true there has been some little knowledge of chemistry and astronomy developed. And I question very much whether the people now know more about astronomy than Abraham and Joseph of old did, after all their problems and calculations, and all the intelligence of the schools in relation to this branch of science.

It is true we have obtained a little knowledge of the power of steam and electricity, and have been able to use magnetism and many other such principles which possess some utility at the present time to the human family. But how much better off is the world of mankind now than they were four or five thousand years ago? I do not know. If anybody else does, I should like them to tell me. Tell me how much more union there is now than then, how much more happiness there is now than formerly, how much more conversant the world is now with correct principles than the world was in what is called the dark ages, and how much better principles they are governed by than they were thousands of years ago. They then had their republics, their monarchies, and their despotisms. There is as much of the spirit of war in existence now as in any previous age of the world.

Witness the present position of Europe and China; witness the position of Mexico, Central America, and the United States, of America at the present time; witness the bitter hatred that exists between the North and South in the bosoms of the Representatives in the halls of the nation at Washington, which is manifested when in the Senate chamber.

How much better, then, are we in the present age than the people of other ages? And what is man in reality, with all his boasted intelligence and knowledge? He is a poor, weak worm of the earth.

Look at him in a social capacity. Are we much better off now socially than the people were several thousand years ago, with all the teachings of our philosophers and moralists, and with all the essays there have been written, combined with all the influence of the Priesthood of the present day? Men are paid in our age for doing a great deal, and they ought to accomplish, at least, something. As I told a Catholic priest once in France, when speaking of the position of France—I said, “There are some fifty thousand Catholic priests in France; and if Catholicism does not produce an influence in this nation, it ought to; for there is enough money paid to sustain men to do good among the people.”

When we contemplate all these things, how weak and inefficient and poor and feeble and contemptible man appears! How little he has accomplished for the benefit of his fellow man, or for succeeding generations!

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

What is he? Let us look again and view him in another aspect. Why, he is an eternal being, and possessed within him a principle that is destined to exist “while life and thought and being last or immortality endures.” What is he? He had his being in the eternal worlds; he existed before he came here. He is not only the Son of man, but he is

the Son of God also. He is a God in embryo, and possesses within him a spark of that eternal flame which was struck from the blaze of God's eternal fire in the eternal world, and is placed here upon the earth that he may possess true intelligence, true light, true knowledge—that he may know himself—that he may know God—that he may know something about what he was before he came here—that he may know something about what he is destined to enjoy in the eternal worlds—that he may be fully acquainted with his origin, with his present existence, and with his future destiny—that he may know something about the strength and weakness of human nature—that he may understand the Divine law, and learn to conquer his passions, and bring into subjection every principle that is at variance with the law of God—that he may understand his true relationship to God; and finally, that he may learn how to subdue, to conquer, subject all wrong, seek after, obtain, and possess every true, holy, virtuous, and heavenly principle; and as he is only a sojourner, that he may fulfil the measure of his creation, help himself and family, be a benefit to the present and future generations, and go back to God, having accomplished the work he came here to perform.

And if ever there was a time on the earth, since this world rolled into existence, that man was placed in a most important position, it is at this time. If ever there was a people under the face of the heavens that enjoyed great privileges, and ought to be acquainted with eternal principles, this is the people.

In ages and generations that are past men could not accomplish much. They came in to the world—they lived—they died—they had their Prophets once in a while, and slight manifestations from God. Those Prophets, when wrapped in prophetic vision—when their minds were illuminated with Divine truth, looked through the dark vista of future ages, and contemplated a time when iniquity should no longer triumph, when the powers of darkness should be brought under subjection to the kingdom of God, which should be established in the latter day, and the government of God be maintained, and his holy Priesthood hold universal rule, where there should be a reorganization of light, truth, intelligence, rule, and government pertaining to things that are, to things that were, and to things that are to come. The Prophets in former times had their minds lit up from time to time. They got simply a glimpse of the things that it is our privilege as a people to enjoy.

God has gathered us from among all the nations of the earth. He has called us together by the light of his truth—by the light of his Spirit—by the light of his Gospel of peace. He has gathered us together into one fold; he has given us revelation; he has given us a knowledge of ourselves, and a slight knowledge of himself, so far as we have lived up to our privileges, and so far as we have cultivated the light of the Spirit he has given to us. He has given us a knowledge of our weakness and of our strength and of our imperfections. We are permitted to derive from God all the powers of the Priesthood. The light of truth has been developed, and many things pertaining to the future.

If we will only be faithful, he will lead us on from light to light, from truth to truth, from intelligence to intelligence, until we shall know and see and comprehend God, whom to know is life everlasting. He has planted within us, through the principles of eternal truth, the germs of everlasting life; so that Death, which has been a terror to all nations for generations past, which has caused men to quail, and through which the Jews all their life long were subject to bondage, has lost its terrors on the minds of men who live their religion, who walk according to the laws of the holy Priesthood, and cultivate the Spirit of God. That grim messenger has lost his formidable appearance, and people feel easy and comfortable under any circumstances; that is, those who do right, fear God, work righteousness, and keep his commandments. They know they have within them that principle of eternal life which shall live after this mortal tabernacle shall crumble in the dust.

To them, if it is peace, it is all right; if it is war, it is all right; if it is sickness, it is all right; if it is health, it is all right; for it is all eternal life to the man that is in possession of that principle.

What is man? He is an immortal being. He is a part of the Deity. He is the Son of God, and God is his Father; and he has come here to work out his salvation and accomplish the thing he came into existence for. We have come here to build up the kingdom of God, to establish correct principles, to teach the world righteousness, and to make millions of the human family happy—even all who will listen to the principles of eternal truth. We are here to introduce correct doctrine, to introduce correct morals, to introduce correct philosophy, to introduce correct government and to teach men how to live and how to die—how to be happy in this world and in the world which is

to come, and to lay the foundation for eternal lives in the eternal worlds.

What is man? A god, even the son of God, possessing noble aspirations, holy feelings, that may be governed by virtuous principles, possessing elevated ideas, wishing to realize everything that God has destined to submit to all his laws, to endure every kind of privation and affliction and suffering, as seeing Him that is invisible, looking for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God—feeling to live for that purpose, and that alone.

This is what man is, if he lives the religion of heaven, and performs faithfully those things God has appointed him to do, that he may increase from intelligence to intelligence, and go on with that eternal progression, not only in this world, but in worlds without end.

What are we? Do we expect to immortalize our fame by demolishing cities, wasting countries, and destroying their inhabitants? No. Do we expect to have our name perpetuated by being embalmed and laid by, as the Egyptians were after they died? No. Do we expect to perpetuate our fame by building cities and monuments? No. What then? We expect to perpetuate our fame and our name by living and propagating correct principles—by the establishment of correct laws—by the building up of the kingdom of God—by imbibing and receiving light and intelligence from the living God—by living in the enjoyment of all the blessings that God has in reserve for his Saints—by driving back the dark cloud of error and superstition that has overspread the moral horizon of the world—by establishing a nucleus of truth, intelligence, light, morality, philosophy, religion, government, and everything else that is calculated to promote and exalt the human family in time and in all eternity; and then, like some of the ancient patriarchs—like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and many of the ancient Saints, enter into the New Jerusalem, and there live with our posterity, our friends, and relations; and then pass on by the eternal laws of progression to associate with the Gods, worlds without end, in all intelligence and perfection, and in promoting the happiness of all beings pertaining to this world and the world that is to come.

There is something of man when you look at him in a proper point of view.

How much we shall accomplish in this thing I do not know. Some of us very little, I fear.

Some of us are learning to swear almost as good as some of the Gentiles. Some of us are learning to get drunk almost as good as they can. I do not think that will benefit us very much. Some of us are learning to cheat and defraud our neighbors, and some are learning to steal. There is nothing smart about all this. A negro, a Hottentot, or an Indian can do that. There is nothing in these practices that bespeaks an intelligent mind, or that would recommend a person to the estimation of a good man, angels, or God. There is nothing Godlike in them.

It is for us to do right and cultivate correct principles, and seek to be elevated in the scale of human existence in time, that we may be prepared for an eternal exaltation in the eternal worlds.

I pray that God may enlighten our minds, guide our feet in the way of truth, and save us in his kingdom, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.