



OF THE

Church of Scotland in Nova Scotia and the adjoining Provinces.

"IF I FORGET THEE, O JERUSALEM! LET MY RIGHT HAND FORGET HER CUNNING."—PSALM 137, v. 6.

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RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCE.

Sermon by Rev. Dr. McCulloch, of Greenock.

BUY THE TRUTH, AND SELL IT NOT.—Proverbs, xxiii, 23.

Like other proverbial forms of speech, these words are elliptical. They mean more than they say. And, to apprehend their full import, we must paraphrase them, and construe them as if they had run. "Buy the truth," at whatever cost, "and sell it not" at any price.

And what is the truth we are here commanded to buy? It is manifestly the truth in matters of religion, or, as an apostle would express it, "the truth as it is in Jesus." Not that we are prohibited from buying other kinds of truth. By divine charter we are free of the whole realm of truth. The Bible, so far from shutting us up within the walls of the temple, and barring us from general knowledge and inquiry, encourages us to go forth over the universe, to survey and investigate all the works and ways of God. It enjoins us "prove all things." It is the friend of truth of every sort, and on every subject, and the foe of nothing but falsehood and sin. Well, as was to be expected in a book which aims to be a divine revelation, its main concern is with religious truth. And accordingly, it is to this highest department of truth that the wise king primarily and specially refers, when he says to his readers, "Buy the truth, and sell it not."

At present I take for my text only the words "Buy the truth." And from these words I deduce three lessons regarding religious or divine truth, which I would earnestly commend to your serious consideration.

I. Divine truth is worth possessing. This is plainly implied in the text. For we could not be fitly commanded to buy the truth at whatever cost, if it were not a thing above all price—a possession of surpassing worth.

Even when viewed merely as an accession to our intellectual stores, divine truth is a desirable possession. A true idea on any subject is a thing which all earnest thinkers highly prize; and he is ever accounted a privileged person who is deeply versed in the truths of science or the facts of history. But what are just ideas about science or history, compared with just ideas about religion, about God and Christ, about sin and salvation, about judgment and eternity? To be thoroughly conversant with these, is obviously to have at our command a circle of ideas the noblest, the sublimest, the most momentous that can enter or occupy the human mind.

But the intellect is not the only faculty which divine truth is fitted to benefit. It has benefits for all our faculties. It has benefits for the conscience, for the will, for the affections, for our whole spiritual nature. Is there any such sure arouser of a slumbering conscience as the truth in reference to the future eternal retribution? Is there any such sure pacifier of a guilt-stricken conscience as the truth in reference to the sufficiency of Christ's atonement? What is there that can break the human will of its proclivity to evil, and bend it Godward, if not a sure knowledge of the redeeming love and fatherly character of God? What is there that can charm away the human affections from "things on the earth" to "those things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God," if not a sure knowledge of the beauty of holiness and the blessedness of heaven? In short there is no part of our nature which divine truth is not adapted to purify and elevate. There is nothing dark in us which it cannot illumine; nothing low which it cannot exalt, nothing weak which it cannot strengthen; nothing wrong which it cannot rectify. It has light for the dark soul, and life for the dead soul, and salvation for the lost soul. It is the grand emancipator which unlooses the soul from its bonds and makes it free—"free indeed"—free from guilt, free from sin,

free from sorrow, free from the fear of death, free to love and to do God's will, free of the city and kingdom of God. All this, and far more than all this, can divine truth achieve. And surely, if the one thing needful for a man be a clear and calm and holy soul—a soul at peace with God and with itself—a soul attuned to goodness and strong for duty, and buoyant with hope—then of all things worth buying and possessing, the best and most precious must be that truth which effects such divine enfranchisement and ennoblement of soul.

II. Divine truth may be possessed by us. In commanding us to buy it, the text obviously assumes that it may be bought and possessed. Nor can there be a doubt that, with respect at least to us and our fellow-countrymen, the assumption is just.

There are, indeed, lands which have no market where divine truth can be purchased. Among the heathen there is little on sale pertaining to religion, except error and delusion; and it is much the same in Mohammedan countries, and even in those nominally Christian lands where the priesthood prohibit the reading of the Scriptures. But, happily, in this favored land of ours, truth is in the market, and that market open to all comers. Here there is free access to a Book which contains the whole counsel of God—a Book indited by the Spirit of God, for the express purpose of revealing "the truth"—and a Book withal so complete in its subject-matter that nothing requires to be added to it, and so perspicuous in its style, that nothing but prejudice or indolence can prevent it from being understood. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Nor is the written Word the only means which God has provided for bringing the truth within our reach. He has further provided and promised the teaching of His Holy Spirit. In the case of a human author,