

TRUE NOBILITY.

A SERMON BY THE REV. W. JONES.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed: also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men not a few. — Acts xviii. 11, 12.

LIKE the winds which sweep wider the kindled flames of a forest, persecution has always been the means of spreading the Gospel of Christ. The means employed by its enemies to crush it have lent to it new wings to carry it into regions beyond, and have given a deeper emphasis to its living voice. In raising a storm of persecution against it, the

devil has overshot his mark and defeated his own purposes. This is seen in the persecutions which attended the introduction of the Gospel into Europe. Its preachers were opposed by all the powers of the world, and by all the arts that malice and bigotry could suggest; and with a persistence which nothing but the deadliest hatred could sustain. The chief of the opposition in nearly all cases proceeded from unbelieving Jews. Their desire was to write "failure and falsehood" upon the Gospel, to arrest its march, and to cast it to the limbo of discarded delusions. At Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, the first places in Europe visited by the heralds of the cross, the mad spirit of bigotry and revenge flamed out in acts of cruel violence. At Philippi it indicted upon the preachers of the Gospel scourging, imprisonment, and bonds; at Thessalonica it raised a spirit of tumult and disorder which shook the city, but in neither case was it able to prevent the planting of a Christian Church. It was made the means of extending the Gospel to Berea, where it found hearts longing for its light and its message of mercy. These Bereans were, it seems, a more refined and educated people than the Thessalonians, and had much wealthier connections. But it was not their descent, nor their culture, but their conduct in relation to the Word of God which the inspired historian commends. Their willing reception of the Gospel, their candid and patient investigation of its claims, and their submission to it dignified them with a nobility higher than that of blood and lineage, culture and titles. These qualities of mind and heart displayed by these Bereans gave a man a place among the aristocracy of the universe, and a crown compared with which the jewelled crowns of earthly monarchs are baubles. There is:—

I.—WILLING RECEPTION OF THE TRUTH. "They received the word," etc.

We know what truth it was they thus received. The great truth which Paul everywhere preached was that Jesus was the Christ, the sent of God, the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He made everything subordinate to this. We can trace with tolerable clearness the method he pursued in setting forth this great saving truth in the cities and synagogues into which he entered. He began by reading or quoting from the Old Testament the prophecies relating to the Messiah, then proceeded to point out how completely they were fulfilled in Christ, and urged his hearers to accept Him and believe in Him, the King of all ages and nations. There was much in this truth to arouse the hostility and shock the prejudices of the Jew. It was new, it was humbling to his pride, it clashed with his opinions and feelings. Brought up in all the traditions of the law, and to indulge

in the most splendid hopes of a temporal Messiah, he could not endure such a revolution in his opinions without feeling that he had much to give up. And while the case stood thus with the Jew, it was little better with the Greek. Cradled in poetic fancies which made the world a vast pantheon of divinities, and inducing a pride of intellect which was all the more conspicuous for the moral poverty with which it was associated, he had difficulty in accepting for his King and Saviour one who had been crucified at Jerusalem. Yet such was the candour of these Bereans—both Jews and Greeks—such their freedom from narrowness, and from the blind exclusiveness of prejudice, that they listened to the apostle with all readiness of mind. This is noble. The narrow exclusiveness, the unreasoning pride which refuses any other truths or any other forms of truth than those we happen to hold, is ignoble and foolish. No man, however saintly and wise; no Church, however wealthy in Gospel light, contains all the



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From a Photograph published by J. W. Allingham.

truth. There are truths in the Book of God, gems far down in the exhaustless mine, pearls in waters so deep that no eye but God's can see them. Just now there will come a God-commissioned man, with his soul full of light and the flame of heaven quivering on his lips, who will discover to us new worlds of truth and beauty in the Divine Book the world has been studying for ages. Our attitude in relation to this book should always be that of reverent inquiry. We should always keep our souls sensitive to the faintest breathings of the Divine Spirit, watchful for new gleams of light, listening for the softest whisper of the Heavenly Oracle.

The conduct of these Bereans displayed *their love for the truth*. Truth was their desire, the object of their search. For this they were willing to surrender their cherished opinions, their hoary traditions, and their splendid dreams of