

Saturday Talk

By an Ex-Editor.

In my last SATURDAY TALK I mentioned some of the results which followed the circulation of falsehoods concerning the condition of affairs in Utah in 1856-7. But those results extended to greater distance and for a longer period than I there described. In fact, their effect is not entirely removed today. There are impressions prevailing in some quarters that at the time of which I speak there was an actual rebellion in Utah, that the court records were then destroyed and the Federal judges driven out, and that the sending of an army here was a necessary and timely proceeding to overawe the people and keep them under proper restraint. Occasionally this action of the government has been referred to of late years to sustain the idea that the Mormon people were rebellious and disloyal and not to be trusted. And yet, as I have said, the whole of these operations had nothing but falsehood for their basis.

It seems too monstrous for belief that in these United States any administration could be induced, upon such testimony as then passed current, to send an army and fit out a costly expedition to a distant territory for such purposes as were then avowed. Yet it is indisputably true that this was done. There was not even an attempt made to find out the true condition of affairs before giving the orders for the military expedition to march to the Territory. Those who engaged in this infamous plot did not want any investigation of the stories that had been told. Their purposes were better served by having the troops march to Utah than by having a quicker, less expensive and less sensational method of learning the truth.

After the troops and Governor Alfred Cumming had reached here he reported to the government that the charges about the court records, etc., were false; but that report was not permitted to see the light. The reasons for suppressing it were clear. They appealed strongly to several classes.

First, there was the Administration; it had no interest in showing the country that the sending of the flower of the army of the United States to Utah was an unnecessary and farcical proceeding and a useless expenditure of the people's money.

Second, there were the contractors of all kinds who were making large profits out of furnishing and transporting supplies for the army. Their influence with men in power was potent and far-reaching; for they had money to squander. They wished it to appear that life in Utah was not safe unless there were Federal soldiers here to keep the Mormons in subjection.

Then, third, there was the press of the country, which, by its circulation of sensational and untruthful reports concerning Utah, had so inflamed the public mind that the name of Utah or Mormon had become hateful to the ear—it had no wish to change its tone and

acknowledge that it had been imposed upon by lies. It saw no advantage in taking such a course.

This being the situation at Washington and in the East, what interest was it to anybody but the Mormons to have the truth known?

Millions of dollars had been expended in equipping and sending out the Utah expedition!

Millions of dollars was the price which the people of the United States paid for believing falsehoods!

Millions of dollars, and of which, as citizens, the Latter-day Saints had to pay their share; but who can estimate what this wretched and in defensible expedition cost them in addition?

Governor Cumming's report after it had been sent to Washington slept quietly and unnoticed. No one seemed to have any interest in making it public, or in letting the public know that millions of the public money had been wasted for lies. Nothing being heard from it for months, it seemed necessary that some effort should be made to make public the facts concerning the true condition of affairs in Utah, with the hope that they might remove the violent, blind and unreasoning prejudice which prevailed everywhere against the Mormons. This mission happened to be assigned to me.

The leading editors in the Eastern States I found, almost without an exception, filled with the idea that the Mormons were turbulent and rebellious, that they were opposed to the government of the United States and had exhibited this hostility in committing the acts of expulsion and destruction of which they had been accused. Such a delirium of excitement had swept over the country concerning Utah through the sending of troops here that it was not easily calmed. The public mind was thoroughly saturated with misconceptions by the lies which had been told, and it took time and persistent labor to correct these even to a limited extent.

One of the methods adopted by those whose interest it was to keep up the delusion concerning the conduct and attitude of the Mormons, was to fill the country with false reports through the Associated Press dispatches. In those days there was only a monthly mail between Utah and the East. When the mail reached Fort Leavenworth a summary of the news was made and telegraphed to the principal papers. These dispatches gave in some instances colored, and in other instances false, statements concerning affairs in the Territory. It was apparent they were doctored for the purpose of keeping alive the excitement and strengthening the belief that troops were absolutely necessary in Utah to preserve peace and to insure the safety of non-Mormon citizens and their property. Whether the agent of the Associated Press was paid for this work or not, did not appear. But there must have been some powerful motive to induce him to frame and circulate lies as he did. Contractors and others did derive profit from the presence of troops in Utah, and, sympathizing with them, he may have done this dirty work on their behalf from philanthropic motives; but this is hardly probable. Before this rascality could be stopped I found it necessary to go to the agent of the Associated Press at

St. Louis, and prove to him by unquestionable evidence that occurrences in Utah were being garbled and falsified in the press dispatches. But even then nothing was left undone to prevent the removal of the troops; and perhaps they would have remained here till the present had not the exigencies of the war made their recall necessary.

Allusions to the efforts made before the war to create a robust public opinion against Utah and in favor of having Federal soldiers here, recall the many falsehoods which have since been told to accomplish the same end. The country has been told many times that if it were not for the presence of troops non-Mormons would not be permitted to live in the Territory; their property and their lives would be in danger. The men who made such statements knew they were telling falsehoods when they published them. They merely took advantage of and imposed upon the credulity of the public. But this kind of falsehood has always been selected by opponents who wished to do the Latter-day Saints the most injury. The reason is plain. Such a charge, when believed, arouses anger and sympathy in the breast of every patriot—anger at the thought that in America the flag of the Union is not sufficient to protect every citizen, and sympathy for citizens who are said to be threatened by a horde of religious fanatics. But untruths of this character are becoming stale and losing their effect. There have been too many visitors to Salt Lake City of late years for them to be believed as widely as they were once. Still, these lies are made to do duty on pressing occasions, such for instance, as when an attempt is made to have the Territory admitted as a state.

It would require considerable space to even mention the variety of falsehoods about the Latter-day Saints which gain currency at times when it is thought proper to deal them a blow. But there is one line that is so common it ought to be mentioned. I refer to the statements widely circulated that the Latter-day Saints are very rich and that they use their gold to accomplish their ends by bribery. Of course when men give the rein to their imagination and enter upon the business of falsification they frame the stories which they think likely to have the best effect; but they may overdo the business.

It is a cunning trick to discourage friendship and to weaken friends to talk about bribery; for no man, even if he is willing to accept a bribe, would like to have it suspected, and certainly no honest man would wish to occupy a position where he could be accused of being influenced in his action by improper or sordid motives. The persons who publish such hints at bribery have the best of reasons for knowing they are false, because if anyone designed to use money in that way those who make these charges would be the first to be approached, the purpose in doing so being to silence them. This accusation has been resorted to in the same way and for the same end that the epithet "Jack Mormon" has been used—to scare people who might be inclined to be friendly with and not an-