

DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Ogden Tabernacle, Sunday Afternoon, January 18th, 1885.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

It is very interesting to us to meet together as we do to-day, and from time to time, according to the appointments which are made, to have brought to our attention our condition and circumstances as a people. Even if we hear the same truths told that we are familiar with, when they are told under the influence of the Spirit of God, there is a freshness, a sweetness, and a novelty, I may say, about them that makes them interesting to us, and we feel refreshed and strengthened in our spirit by listening to them and contemplating them in the Spirit of God. That is one peculiarity which the Gospel possesses, when men and women live as they should do it is always sweet and attractive to them, and does not become worn and threadbare, or wearisome.

When we come together in conferences like these, if we come in the right spirit and with the right feeling, we are sure to receive the instruction that is adapted to our circumstances, and when we leave the conference we feel that we have been profited and that our hearts have been made to rejoice in the truths that have been dwelt upon by the brethren who have spoken. I have no doubt that this is the feeling to-day; this is the feeling this afternoon in listening to the remarks of Brother F. D. Richards in the instructions he has given to us. And it does not require a man to be an Apostle to edify; it does not require even that a man should be an Elder, or that he should hold some official rank and position in the Church to edify. I have received, and have no doubt that all of you have, much edification and pleasure in testimony meetings, in listening to the saints, men and women, and sometimes children, bearing testimony to the work of God and describing their feelings therein. It is especially interesting to listen to the brethren and sisters describing the manner in which they received the truth—how they were impressed by the truth when it was first brought to them. I suppose that no more interesting material could be collected for the reading of future generations, for the reading of the children born and grown up in the Church, than would be the testimonies, if they were written, of their fathers and their mothers, and the brethren and sisters generally who have joined the Church in the nations of the earth—the manner in which the Spirit of God reached their hearts, and how they were affected when they heard the truth, the impression that its declaration made upon them, the effect that it had upon their mind and their understanding. All these testimonies are most interesting to every one who takes an interest in the work of God.

It is marvelous the manner in which God is working at the present time, and has worked among the nations to accomplish his purposes, to bring to pass the fulfillment of that which He has spoken hundreds and thousands of years ago by the mouths of the holy prophets. This work has not, as we have heard several times to-day, been formed by man, neither does it depend upon man for its strength, nor for its development. God has taken His own way to build up His Church and to accomplish that which He seeks to bring to pass. For instance, the Book of Mormon, the way in which that has been revealed and communicated to the world, comes directly in contact with man's ideas respecting the way such a work should have come forth. If the Book of Mormon had been brought forth according to man's methods, it would doubtless have made its appearance under very different circumstances to those under which it was revealed. It is a cause of stumbling among the nations of the earth that God does not accompany the work that He has established by such signs as they think He has the power to give. They say, "If God the Eternal Father, has the power that is attributed to Him, and this is His work, why does He not accompany it by manifestations and signs that would carry irresistible weight and conviction to the minds of all those unto whom it is brought. It would be a very easy thing for Him," they say, "If He wished to convince the world of the truth of this being His Gospel to give such signs and manifestations as would compel men and women to receive and to believe it to be His work."

This is man's idea about the work of God. But God, our Eternal Father, has not seen fit to take this method. He places us in circumstances where we are compelled to exercise faith, to put our trust in Him, and to seek by faith for that knowledge which He is willing to bestow; and it is not His object, neither would it be consistent with His purpose to convince all men and all women concerning His work whether they would be convinced or not.

This is a feature of the work of God which sometimes our young people do not understand—our young men and our young women, and those who are inexperienced in the Church of God. They fail to comprehend the reasons there are for God taking the course that He has done and is doing in connection with this work, and because of this some are led to doubt the existence of God, especially His connection

with this work, because of the peculiar manner in which He carries it forward.

Now, how easy it is to appeal to inexperienced persons, to young unsophisticated people, and say to them, as I have partly said already: "If God be the God of the whole earth; if He be the being that He is represented to be, why does He not give more manifestations in order to convince the world that He is God, and that this is His work."

There is one great principle, brethren and sisters, that you should understand connected with God's purposes and God's dealings with the children of men in order that you may rejoice in God's providences, and be in a position to explain them to your children, and to others with whom you brought in contact; for there is nothing connected with the work of our God, there is no feature of it that does not show forth the wisdom and the goodness of our God. That which I refer to is man's agency. God has given unto us the same agency that He himself possesses. He cannot consistently with himself and with the laws by which He is governed, and by which eternity is governed—He cannot compel any one of us, no matter how humble or how small an individual may be, to receive His truth and to be obedient to it. He cannot, in other words, force us into His Kingdom, and compel us to receive of His glory. If we go there, we must go there because we ourselves choose to do so, and in the exercise of our agency take the necessary steps to lead us there. Never since Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, has man beheld the face of God except under some very peculiar circumstances. After they fell they were banished from His presence, then they heard the voice of God, but they did not behold Him. He withdrew Himself from them, and there was a veil drawn between God and man. A few men such as Moses, and the brother of Jared, and Joseph Smith, and a few others of the children of men were able through faith to penetrate, as it were, the veil and to behold God under certain conditions. But to the whole world of the children of men God has been willing to communicate through His Spirit, through the manifestations of His power, through angelic visitations, through dreams and visions, and through methods of communication that He has adopted or that come within the power of man to receive—He has communicated His mind and His will and revealed Himself with sufficient plainness to enable His children to do that which He requires at their hands, to press forward and to keep His commandments and to rejoice in the knowledge He has bestowed. He has done sufficient to enlighten men and women and to cause them to rejoice. And let me ask you, my brethren and sisters, how much could we exercise our agency if God left us with such perfect knowledge or gave unto us such perfect knowledge that we should be convinced in spite of our will? Would there be any happiness in our exaltation if we gained it, such as we will have under present circumstances? I do not think so. I rejoice myself in the fall of man. I rejoice that Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, for he did so knowingly and understandingly, comprehending fully the results that would attend his partaking of that fruit. It was not so with Eve. Eve was deceived, Eve was beguiled. The adversary, Lucifer, through the serpent, beguiled Eve and deceived her, and induced her to eat of the forbidden fruit. But it was not so with Adam. He was aware of all the consequences that would follow that which he did; but he knew that unless he did partake there would be an eternal separation between him and the partner that God had given to him, so he transgressed the law. Death would inevitably come upon her because of the transgression and she would be thrust out from the presence of God. He knew this, comprehended it, and knowing it he nevertheless partook of the fruit, and he fell. As Lehi says: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are that they might have joy." Because had he not partaken of the fruit they would have been eternally separated. Now, in the beginning, right in this act, or before they committed this act, God gave unto them their agency. They had given their full agency in the Garden of Eden. He said unto them: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." He gave unto man this command. He left Him perfectly free in the garden to eat of every tree in the garden; left him free to eat, also, of the forbidden fruit, that is, of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. According to some people's ideas he might have prevented man, or prevented Eve from partaking of the forbidden fruit. But, no! That would not have been consistent with man's agency. He gave him the command; He told him the consequence; then Adam and Eve were left free to do as they pleased. Eve partook unwittingly—that is, being beguiled, being deceived, and her husband partook knowingly, understanding fully the consequences that would follow.

Now, I say, I thank God for this. Why? Because of this transgression we are here: we have an existence. "Well, but," says one, "would it not have been better if man had not been permitted to do this?" I say no, according to my view; because it was necessary that a probation should be given to man. The courts of heaven were thronged with spirits that desired tabernacles. They wanted to come and

obtain fleshly tabernacles as their Father had done. Their progenitors, the race of Gods with whom they associated and from whom they have descended, they had had the privilege of coming on earthly probations and receiving tabernacles, which by obedience they had been able to redeem. Hence, I say, the courts of heaven were thronged with spirits anxious to take upon themselves tabernacles of flesh, agreeing to come forth and be tested and tried in order that they might receive exaltation. God knew beforehand that Adam would fall. By His fore-knowledge He knew that the adversary would succeed in beguiling Eve. He knew all things from the beginning to the end. He comprehended it; and, therefore, before anything was done upon the earth, before man was placed upon the earth, before he was exposed to the temptations to which he yielded, God had previously prepared, through His fore-knowledge, a Redeemer for the world. He had prepared a plan of salvation, knowing, as I say, what the result would be, and that was that there should be a Savior; that Jesus, His Son, the Firstborn, should come in the meridian of time and atone for Adam's transgression and bring to pass the redemption necessary to save man from the effects of the fall. One of the consequences of the fall was that in the day that man ate of that fruit he should surely die; so far as the temporal body was concerned; that body should be consigned to the tomb, from which it could not be resurrected until the redemption was effected. To effect this resurrection, before man was placed upon this earth, before Eve was exposed to the temptation of the adversary, God prepared a Redeemer in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, He being "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." Thus has a means been prepared by which the spirits—our spirits and the spirits of all men—should come forth and receive tabernacles, and a work of probation commence here upon the earth. Now, this was consistent with the purposes and designs of our Father; and it was consistent with His purposes and designs that man should be in a state of partial darkness here upon the earth; that there should be a veil between Himself and mankind; and that when men found out anything concerning God it should be by the exercise of faith and by those powers with which He had endowed them and which they inherited from Him. This has been the case from that day until the present—a state of probation for all the children of men, or, if I may use other language, for all the family of God.

Men have had set before them a choice. They have had on the one hand God and everything connected with God. Everything that is glorious and great has been offered to them by the Father. On the other hand they have had offered to them that which is evil by the adversary of God and the great enemy of all His plans and purposes. We have the choice, therefore, in the exercise of our agency. Man can be saved if he will. There is no power on earth or in hell that can prevent his being saved, if he exercise his agency to that end. Do you understand that, brethren and sisters? that if you ever go to hell it will be because you yourselves choose to go there, and not because any power forces you to go there. There is no power on earth or in hell that can compel a man to go to hell or to be damned if in the exercise of his agency he chooses to serve God. Therefore when men lift up their eyes in torment, the misery of their torment will be increased by the knowledge that they themselves through their own action, and through the exercise of their own agency, have brought upon them this condemnation, and not because any human being forced them there, for there is no such thing possible. There may be circumstances that are unfavorable to man. If there be God will take them into consideration in meting out justice to His children, and he that knoweth but little will be beaten with but few stripes, but he that knoweth the master's will and doeth it not will be beaten with many stripes. His punishment will be according to the knowledge possessed, to the light he has, to the opportunities that God has given unto him—his punishment will be in accordance therewith, while on the other hand, no man, nor any power, God our Eternal Father Himself, will not force any being to go to heaven. If we go there—if we ever sing the song of the redeemed, it will be because in the exercise of our agency we have chosen to do those things that God has required at our hands, and by doing them have gained His favor and approbation, His blessing and the exaltation that He bestows upon those who keep all His commandments. And hence, this being the case, in the exercise of our agency, we bring to ourselves joy—that is, if we do right—we bring to ourselves happiness, we bring to ourselves every blessing that is desirable, and it adds immensely to our glory, satisfaction and happiness to know that we have received those blessings through the exercise of our own agency and doing that which God required at our hands. But after all this, remember that the glory of our salvation will be due to God: it is by His grace we are saved. Under the most favorable circumstances, we shall have to acknowledge the grace of God. We shall have to acknowledge—as we all do, or ought to do—the goodness of God, His mercy and kindness to us. At the same time feel that we ourselves have exercised the powers bestowed upon us; that we

have done right because it has been a pleasure for us to do right; that when temptation has assailed us, our hearts have been firm and fixed to keep the commandments of God, and to do His will. This I say will add amazingly to our happiness in the eternal worlds, this recollection and this knowledge of having done right; while on the other hand, as I have before said, if we are condemned through refusing to do that which is right, through rejecting the offer of salvation, through rejecting the voice of the Spirit of God, and the entreaties that are addressed to us through that Spirit and by the voice of His servants—if we do this and are condemned in consequence of it, we shall have the full knowledge that we have brought it all upon ourselves.

When we view the plan of salvation in this light we can see how wise has been the action of our Creator in placing us in these conditions and circumstances. As I have said, if He were to reveal Himself to us and leave us without any opportunity to exercise our choice we should not then be the free agents we are to-day. But He has left us in this condition, and He calls upon us to exercise our agency, and tells us that if we will pursue a certain path we shall be brought back into His presence crowned with glory, immortality and endless lives, and that we shall attain to the godhead. That is the object of our Father in sending us here. He would like all His children born on the earth, to become as He is, to become as Jesus is, and there is no end to the glory that He promises to us. God rules over the universe, controls all things, and He has promised unto us that if we are faithful we shall be with Him and shall share with Him in all His glory; we shall attain unto the fullness of His greatness; we shall enter upon a career of never ending glory if we will take His counsel, if we will be guided by Him; but before we can reach this wonderful condition, this exalted station, we must be tested and proved in this probation, as we are now being tested and proved.

Therefore, the knowledge of the past is hidden or withdrawn from us. We come here as strangers in this life, as though it were the beginning of our existence. Our memories do not go beyond the time when we were two or three years of age. Our memories do not reach into the previous existence, and some argue, because our memories do not reach that far, that we had no previous existence. As well might a man say that he never was born because he cannot recollect his birth or cannot recollect being nursed by his mother. Shall a man say that he therefore did not exist? It would be just as reasonable as to argue that because he cannot recollect the fact that we existed previous to this, in another condition—that because we cannot recollect the circumstances that then surrounded us, we therefore had no such existence. This would be very fallacious. We did have an existence before we came here; but for purposes wise in the mind of our Eternal Father, the recollection of that existence has been kept from us. We come here, as I have said, as strangers, as though beginning a new life, commencing a new existence, an existence for the first time. God, in His wisdom, conceals from us the glory that awaits us. We get foretastes occasionally by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon us. But the fullness of it is concealed from us in order that life here may be a state of trial, of probation, a state wherein we shall be thoroughly tested to prove whether we are worthy of that exaltation that He desires all of us to attain unto.

Will all the family of our God attain unto that exaltation? We are assured from the Scriptures and from experience that all will not attain unto that glory and exaltation that our Father and God has attained unto, but that only a small portion of His children will reach that. Nevertheless, every member of this Church has been taught to ask God the Eternal Father, in the name of Jesus, to give unto him or her celestial glory, which is the glory of our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ; every one has been taught to ask for this, and it ought to be the supreme wish, the supreme desire of every member of this Church, because that is the glory that God designs for us. However, such is the difference that exists in the family of man that there will be but comparatively few who will attain unto that glory. They will attain unto different degrees of glory. God will give unto every human soul all the glory that he or she is capable of enjoying. According to the revelation, some will rise to the conception of the higher laws; some will rise through faith to the comprehension of the great glory that God has in store, and they are willing to sacrifice everything for it.

The Latter-day Saints as a people are distinguished in this respect. They have been willing to make every sacrifice almost for the sake of the Gospel, conceiving how great is its glory, and having some conception of the reward in store for them. But after doing so, many of them falter and fall away, many become slack in their faith, dull in their comprehension. They are willing to go a certain length in obeying the laws of God, and then they say, "I have gone as far as I can." Instead of seeking to control circumstances, such persons seem to be controlled by them. Others, however, overcome, and rise superior to conditions and circumstances, and say in faith, "I am going to serve my God and keep all His commandments," and they will brush away every obstacle from their path. It was so with the Prophet Joseph Smith; it was so

with the Prophet Brigham Young; it has been so with many of the Elders of this Church, some of whom have not been particularly distinguished in the Church, but they have been full of that mighty and unconquerable faith that enabled them to keep the commandments of God. Though death should lay in their pathway, they would still press forward in view of that glory God had in store for them—determined by His help to attain unto it; and in this respect you can see among ourselves different degrees of faith. Some are retarded by certain obstacles or circumstances; others, as I have said, break them down, brush them away, and press forward despite every obstacle to accomplish that which they have set out to attain—that is, celestial glory.

God has given unto us but one probation, and during this probation it is for us to see that we attain unto celestial glory. Will we attain unto celestial glory? Will we press forward in faith, putting our trust in God, keeping all His commandments, and secure to ourselves that exaltation that He has promised, or will we falter by the wayside? Will we court self-indulgence and look after our own comfort and say "this is of more importance than keeping the commandments of God?" If we do, just as sure as we do we shall not attain to that high glory God has in store for us. Instead of the celestial glory we shall receive a lower degree of glory. We shall receive that glory the laws of which we obey, and no more. God will not give us a glory if we have not complied with the laws that are connected with that glory and exaltation. We must be obedient to the laws of exaltation; we must be obedient to the conditions required; we must be in a position to receive the blessing or it will not be bestowed upon us no matter who we may be, no matter what our surroundings may be. God requires obedience from His children, and He requires that they shall be diligent while in the flesh in keeping all His commandments and carrying out that which He requires of them. They must seek by faith to overcome the evils and the difficulties that are in their pathway, going on from faith to faith, from knowledge to knowledge, from one degree of comprehension to another degree of comprehension until they are prepared to enter into the presence of God and the Lamb, and receive the glory that He has promised unto those who are thus faithful. Others, again, will not even attain unto a terrestrial glory; they will fall even in getting that glory, and they will go into what is called a telestial glory. So that all the family of man throughout the earth, and all the generations of man from the days of Adam, our father, down to the last that shall be born on this earth—that is, born a mortal soul—will receive a glory according to his diligence and his capacity in keeping the commandments of God. If he has only obeyed a telestial law he will receive a telestial glory, a glory so far beyond our comprehension of glory that if we could perceive it probably many of us would be satisfied with it. Others, again, will press forward and receive a terrestrial glory; and then others, again, will press forward and receive a celestial glory, a glory to which is attached all that man or that God can desire.

My brethren and sisters: These laws are before us; these conditions are placed within our reach. It is to be seen whether we shall be valiant for the truth; whether we shall lay aside all our prejudices, all our traditions, all our false notions, everything that is of human origin connected with us, and bring everything in connection with us in subjection to the laws of God, to do His will, to serve Him with full purpose of heart, having no will of our own that comes in contact with the will of God.

God grant that we may all take the right course; God grant that in the exercise of our agency we may be faithful, faithful unto death, always be found faithfully battling for the cause of our God, not counting our own lives dear unto us, or anything else, for the greatness and glory that is in store for us, which I ask in the name of Jesus, Amen.

SOME POINTED QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

An esteemed correspondent of this city forwards the following:

SALT LAKE CITY,
January 29th, 1885.

Editor Deseret News:

I have (as well as others) been trying to find out if the Edmunds law was intended to be a one-sided measure or general in its application. I have failed so far, and appeal to you to enlighten us, for it is claimed by some, that while it is made to fit the "Mormon" back, it is impossible to make it stick or taut part of the Gentile form. Also that a good many things are done in the Commissioner's court with a high hand that could not be attempted (for fear or otherwise) in the justices' courts. Mr. Dickson, Marshal Ireland, the irrepressible Sam Gilson, Jim McCurdy, Capt. Greenman and a host of others of that ilk are dragging into court every "Mormon" who is suspected of having more wives than one or is supposed to be guilty of the crime of having opportunities for unlawful cohabitation, causing the suspected parties a good deal of trouble, expense and annoyance.

Could it not be worked by the major-