

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

Delivered by Pres. GEO. A. SMITH,
in the New Tabernacle, Salt Lake
City, Aug. 22, 1869.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

The remarks of Elder J. R. Clawson are calculated to forcibly impress upon our minds the importance of fulfilling our covenant, which has been so often renewed, and which was first made within the walls of the Temple at Nauvoo,—that we would exercise our influence and property and use our utmost powers to gather the Saints from bondage to a shelter in the Rocky Mountains. This covenant was made in that sacred building which had cost us so much labor and sacrifice to build, when our Prophet and Patriarch had been murdered, hundreds of our houses burned, the life of every faithful elder jeopardized, and when hostile forces surrounded us on every hand. Yet though we are now surrounded by circumstances so very different in their character, and we, peradventure, can not see the same urgent necessity for gathering the Saints; that necessity, nevertheless, still exists, and we ought to remember our covenants.

We have done much, yet much remains to be done, and I hope that the Elders in Israel who have been privileged to go on missions, and those who have not, will all remember and contribute liberally of their means until all who have proved themselves faithful and true among the nations shall be relieved from bondage and gathered to inherit the blessings of freedom in this land.

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

"And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

At the time the covenant I have referred to,—to help one another to gather to the Rocky Mountains,—was made, we were surrounded by very singular and unfortunate circumstances. We were in Illinois, a free State, and under a Constitution that guaranteed us freedom of faith and thought, and, in fact, every liberty that could be desired by those who wished to do right. We were an industrious and law-abiding people, being, on all matters of this character, above suspicion. We were the most industrious and persevering citizens on the Mississippi river, as our works plainly showed to the passer-by. Out of a swamp and a wilderness we had erected a beautiful city, crowned by a magnificent Temple, and turned a wild country into gardens, orchards, farms and pleasure grounds in an incredibly short space of time, and under very adverse circumstances. Religious intolerance had murdered our Prophet and Patriarch, and lighted a flame that had consumed hundreds of our dwellings to ashes; many of our barns, grain stacks and fences had also been given a prey to the devouring element and a great number of our people, scattered around in that region, had to flee into the city for protection, leaving their property to the mercy of their persecutors. A convention of delegates, from nine counties, had framed a decree and formed a resolution that the Latter-day Saints must leave the State on pain of extermination. Thomas Ford, the Governor, through General John J. Hardin and Hon. Stephen A. Douglass, had informed us that it was impossible for us to be protected in the State under the circumstances. We had previously sent petitions to the Governor of every State in the Union, except the Governor of Missouri; also to the President of the United States, asking for an asylum and protection from persecution and that our people might be permitted to reside in their States, and enjoy the common rights guaranteed to American citizens by the Constitution. Only one deigned to send us an answer, that was Arkansas. Governor Drew, of that State, advised us to go to Oregon.

An arrangement was entered into with the leaders of the mob in Illinois that, on condition that all vexatious lawsuits should be stopped and mob violence and house-burning cease, we would leave the State,

but before doing so, we would, at whatever cost, finish the Temple. One of the conditions of this agreement was that the leaders of the mob should aid us in disposing of our immense property.

Notwithstanding this it was but a short time before murder and the firebrand were again resorted to by the mob against us, and the venerable Elder Edmund Durfee was slain. Others were fired upon and their buildings and stacks burned. In order that they might carry out their agreement to leave the State the people of Nauvoo organized into companies of a hundred each, and every hundred, and I may say every fifty, established a wagon shop, and almost every man in the town who knew anything about "butchering" wood commenced the business of wagon making. Green timber, just as it was cut in the woods, was boiled in brine and converted into wagons, and thousands of wagons were built in the fall and winter of 1845-6. The Mississippi river was closed up, rendering it impossible to get all the iron that was needed in their construction. All the iron that could be got in the towns of the neighborhood along the river had been bought and used, and the residue of the wagons made at that time, instead of having the necessary iron work, were fixed up with rawhide, hickory withes and every other simple invention that could possibly answer the purpose; many wagons made the whole journey, from the Mississippi to this valley without iron tires.

On the 6th of February 1846 the exodus of the Saints from Illinois commenced. Comparatively no property had been sold. Men gathered up what teams they could; oxen were cheap, and nearly all the old wagons in the country around had been purchased. Furniture was left in the vacated houses, and much property which it had taken years to accumulate. As many as could took a few of their best articles, others only that which was considered indispensable. About two thousand wagons crossed the Mississippi river, a large portion of them on the ice. I remember, clearly, the feelings that thrilled through my breast, when I turned my little family,—feeble in health,—out of doors into a borrowed wagon to commence the journey to the Rocky Mountains in the midst of an inclement winter. Such feelings as we then experienced it is impossible to imagine or describe; the circumstances must be passed through to understand them.

We passed over the river to the opposite bluff, and took a farewell view of our beautiful city. It was like a city of retired country-seats. There were hundreds of beautiful gardens and magnificent buildings, the centre crowned with a majestic Temple, radiant with all the beauty of architectural taste and skill, and which had cost us nearly a million dollars. We bade farewell to all, and pursued our journey. About fifty miles took us beyond the last settlement into the wilderness portion of Iowa, without roads or bridges, a journey of unknown length before us and apparently no possibility of obtaining the necessities of life. During the Spring, which seemed to be the most rainy, stormy and inclement I ever knew, the sufferings of the camp were intense. We sustained our animals with grain that we carried with us and with the brush that we could obtain along the streams; occasionally we sent down to the northern settlements of Missouri and obtained small supplies. In this way we traveled slowly along westward, making the roads as we went along. I think we bridged about thirty streams, among them the forks of the Grand river, the Locust, the Madison, the Hundred-and-Two, the Nodaway and the Nishnebatona, which required considerable labor. Our teams were so weak that we were frequently compelled to double,—that is, we took a few wagons two or three miles with double teams, when, unhitching them, we would return for a few more and so continued until all were in camp. In this manner we worked our way through the wilderness portion of Iowa until we reached Council Bluffs, which was about the last of June or early in July.

When we reached the Missouri river, at the place where the city of Omaha now stands, we built a ferry boat and had ferried over a few hundred wagons, when we were visited by Captain James Allen, a United States officer, with a requisition upon us for

five hundred men to maintain our country's flag in the war against Mexico. They were required to march, as infantry, by way of Santa Fe. These men were mustered into service on the 16th of July and marched to Leavenworth, a distance of about 180 miles. There they received the arms and accoutrements of infantry, and soon after continued their journey. Before doing so, however, all who were not considered in every way competent for the journey were sent back; the battalion continued their journey, over a route of about 1,850 miles through an unknown desert, to San Diego. I presume that the history of nations might be searched in vain for a parallel to this march of infantry under such adverse circumstances. These men were sometimes on half rations, and sometimes on quarter rations, and occasionally without any; and the blessings of the Almighty, were as apparent to many of them in their preservation, and as wonderful, as the preservation of the Children of Israel by showers of manna when in the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to the Holy Land.

Up to the period that this battalion left it had been the intention to push forward to the Rocky Mountains, a company having been sent across the river for that purpose. But as it was then late in the season, and the camp was badly crippled by the loss of so many efficient men, it was considered absolutely necessary to remain on the Missouri during that winter. A town site was surveyed, which we called Winter Quarters, now known as Florence, Nebraska. There seven hundred log cabins were erected and one hundred and fifty dug-outs, as we called them, were made, that is a cabin half under ground. On the opposite side of the river camps were formed in probably twenty different localities on the Pottawattamie lands, the settlements then formed having since grown to be the towns and villages of the present day. Great quantities of prairie hay were cut, but most of the animals were driven up the Missouri River and wintered on the rush bottoms, with some loss. The people were under the necessity of obtaining their supplies from Missouri, exchanging for them their trinkets, jewelry, bedding and the most valuable articles they had brought with them from Nauvoo. Missouri at that time was about as interesting to our people as Egypt was anciently to Jacob: there was corn and pork in Missouri. Many of the teams were engaged through the winter in supplying the camp with provisions, which had been rendered very destitute by the journey of the spring and summer. A thousand acres of land had been put under cultivation at two points where settlements had been formed, to sustain them through the winter; one of these places was called Garden Grove, and was on the east fork of Grand River; the other, on the west fork of the same river, was called Pisgah. When we reached the Missouri river it was too late to do anything in the way of cultivation.

We had barely got our cabins finished in Winter Quarters when a very important personage, claiming to be an officer of the United States, came into our camp and ordered us all to leave, telling us that we were on the Indian lands, and we must get out of the way. We told him of the requisition the War Department had made upon us, which we had answered, and that in consequence it was impossible for us to proceed on our journey. He put on a very stiff shirt collar and threatened us with troops. The Department, at Washington, it seems, thought better of it, for we were permitted to remain for that season.

Early in the spring of '47 arrangements were made for the prosecution of our journey westward. In the meantime, I believe the Pottawattamies in Iowa had sold their lands to the Government, hence our camps, which had been formed in that country were allowed to remain. As many as were able fitted themselves up as well as possible, and we continued our journey westward. As early as the 14th of April, a month before a spear of grass grew in that country, the pioneer camp, consisting of President Brigham Young and one hundred and forty-three men and three women, started forward slowly up the Platte river, our animals subsisting on the buds and bark of the cottonwood trees and the grain that we carried along with us. We took a route that had never been traveled before. The Oregon emigrants and the mountain trappers had always traveled the south side of the Platte river, but we made a road on the north side for upwards of six hundred miles, until we reached Laramie; then we crossed over to the south side of the North Fork and traveled for three or four hundred miles on the old trappers' trail, mending and improving the same, where necessary, as we went along.

The plains for hundreds of miles, were covered with buffalo, and so numerous were these animals that we often had a difficulty in keeping our animals from running off in their herds. We were also surrounded at times with immense bands of Indians, who manifested a disposition anything but kindly; but our organization

was so complete that we were able to protect ourselves. When we reached Bridger we struck off for the lake. We had no guide on the journey. Brigham Young was our pilot and God was our guide, and we were determined to find a place somewhere on the face of the earth that nobody would covet. We had made fine farms, handsome houses and beautiful improvements five different times and had been driven from them through religious intolerance; this time we were determined to get so far away and into such an inhospitable desert that none would covet it.

The labor in making a road from Bridger here was very great; and while performing this we were anticipating that the day was not far distant when a railroad would be constructed over the whole route. During our journey we located a route for it, and the railroad now completed, in many parts, has adopted our trail, and would have done much better to have followed us in many other parts.

When we arrived on this spot, on July 24th, 1847, the ground was dry and barren; there were no trees, and scarcely the least sign of any kind of vegetation. The ground was covered with large black crickets, which had eaten up what little vegetation had grown in the spring. There were a few willows along the edges of the creek, but the vegetation was not a rod wide. Providence, however, had guided us here. During the troubles and sorrows that had surrounded the Saints, President Young had a vision, opening out to him this spot, and when he reached it, pointing to Ensign Peak, said he, "I want to stay here." He also told the brethren that they might explore the country in every direction, but they would all come back and say this spot was the best.

We built a dam and turned out the City Creek and planted along its sides a few potatoes and other things; but beyond a few of the potatoes, which grew to be about the size of chestnuts, our cultivation the first year was a failure. We cut a ditch from the Temple block to where the 6th Ward now is, and turned the whole creek into it, but the ground was so dry that it took two or three days for the water to settle the soil so that it would run that distance. Some of the brethren got long faces over it, and said "we shall never be able to irrigate here." Not a man had ever seen irrigation done or knew anything about it. But while we had all the disadvantages of a sterile desert to contend with and overcome, we rejoiced greatly over the fact that there was no mob to disturb us, the only denizens of the country, besides ourselves, being a few naked Indians, who seemed inclined to steal, the mountain goat and grizzly bear.

We laid out and surveyed a fort, and commenced building, with logs from Red Butte Canon. To get out timber from the canons, was the work of great difficulty and labor; even now, after years of labor in making roads and bridges, every man who fetches lumber from these canons pays for it richly in hard labor; but the toil and trouble requisite now are nothing in comparison to then. We built a large portion of our fort with adobies or sundried brick. Some of our party went to the Twin Peaks and carried a barometer with them to ascertain their height. Some of our friends who visit us now at this season of the year, and see the snow on those Peaks feel a desire to visit them. It is much more easy to do it now than then, but to do it now with any degree of comfort they would need a balloon, and if they should happen to land in some of the hollows up there they might find it rather difficult to get away again. I think the reading of the barometer showed that they were 11,800 feet above the level of the sea; we, here, are about 4,300 feet above sea level.

After our company had remained here about a month it was deemed necessary for a portion to go back to our families on the Missouri River, and one party started out with oxen and the other with horses. I would say, however, that during this period the Pioneer Company had been increased by the arrival of one hundred and seventy-five, including a company of Saints from the State of Mississippi and the invalid portion of the Mormon battalion, who had been left on the Arkansas; these arrivals had increased our numbers, making us a population of about four hundred souls. Of that number one hundred and fifty started back to the States in order to bring their families. The Sioux Indians stole a portion of our horses and we were compelled to perform most of the return journey on foot, depending upon game for our subsistence, and having no horses suitable to chase the herds of buffalo, we had to live on the flesh of old bulls, which is really tough eating; but as those obtained were insufficient in quantity there was little grumbling about quality. Any one who will try it will very soon be satisfied that the meat of an old bull buffalo requires masticatory powers of the very best quality; but poor eating as they are a keen appetite will render them palatable. The hand of Providence was over us, for, strange as it may seem, during the last hundred miles several of our animals were so worn out that in the morning, before starting on their journey, they had to be lifted up and set on their feet; but the whole company, and all the animals, except those taken by the Indians, reached Winter Quarters in safety, and were recruited up and ready for the return journey by the following Spring. On our way down we passed six hundred wagons en route for this place; we met the