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AN EPISTLE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

TO THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS.

Dear Brethren and Sisters:

Six months have passed away since we last had the pleasure of addressing you through our General Epistle, and we find ourselves face to face with the Fifty-sixth Semi-Annual Conference of the Church in this dispensation. The past six months have been very fruitful in events in which all of us have been deeply interested. The season has been a healthful one; no sickness worthy of note has affected our people unpleasantly. The summer has been both unusually dry and hot, and many of the crops have not yielded as good a return as usual. Nevertheless our land is still filled with plenty, and man and beast have sufficient to supply their wants.

PERSECUTION AND ITS EFFECTS.

Our enemies during the past half year have not slackened their activity in the work of persecution. If there has been any difference, it has been pursued with greater vindictiveness and more flagrant disregard of law and justice than at any time previous. Those who have been compelled to endure the penalties inflicted upon them have submitted, in nearly every instance, with a cheerful equanimity and fortitude that must have won the admiration of heaven and of all just men. That which has been accomplished furnishes but little cause for gratification to those who have been engaged in the inhuman task of persecuting a people for the practice of their religion. There have been but few persons in all who have been tried and convicted who have felt sufficiently terrified at the prospect of punishment to express a willingness to accept the rulings of the court instead of the law of God, as the guide for their consciences.

The faith of the Latter-day Saints seems to grow stronger from these efforts to destroy it; and men, women and children who have been living in the practice of the requirements of their religion feel more determined than ever to maintain their integrity and to do all that the Lord requires at their hands with cheerful willingness, whatever may be the consequences from a worldly point of view.

This persecution is not without its effects upon those who have made a pretense of being faithful members of the Church. Iniquity is being brought to light. The wrongdoer is being made to feel, in a most remarkable manner, that his sin will find him out; and the evidence that God is pleading with and awakening the consciences of those who have been living in sin is frequently furnished to us. There have been many violations of the law of God practiced among us which have been hidden from the public gaze. The trials through which we are passing have the effect of causing these evils to be brought to light. It seems as though the Lord is tearing the covering, not only from the nations of the earth, but from the Latter-day Saints; and the time is not far distant—in fact, it has reached us already in part—when the sinner in Zion shall tremble, and fear shall seize upon the hypocrite.

THE PURIFICATION OF ZION.

So far as we can learn there is an increased disposition on the part of the faithful officers of the Church to do all in their power to cleanse the Wards and Stakes in their charge from those who will not conform to the requirements of the Gospel. Greater strictness is being shown, and the Saints who have the love of the truth within them feel that the time has come to put away their follies and their sins far from them and to conform to a higher standard of righteousness. The great, crying sin of this generation is lasciviousness in its various forms. Satan, knowing how powerful an agency this is in corrupting men and women, and in driving the Spirit from them, and bringing them under condemnation before the Lord, uses it to the greatest extent possible. It requires an incessant warfare to check its spread and to prevent the people of God from becoming its victims. No people who practice or countenance these sins can be accepted of the Lord or find favor in His sight. His anger will fall upon them unless they thoroughly and heartily repent of every such evil. When we take into consideration the teachings we have received upon this subject, the holy covenants into which we have entered, and the professions which we make, unchastity should have no existence among us. It is sorrow-

ful to contemplate that Satan finds those among us who are willing to yield to his temptations, and thus bring misery upon themselves and all connected with them. We solemnly call, as we have done so often before, upon all the officers of the Church to set their faces like flint against practices of this character. Those who indulge in them must be dealt with according to the laws of God, and they must be made to feel that if they do indulge in this wickedness they cannot have the fellowship of the Saints nor a standing in the Church of Christ. If men and women would only profit by the experience of those who have fallen, they would resist the allurements of sin and walk in the path of righteousness. "The wages of sin is death." The misery which it brings upon the guilty, and upon all connected with them, furnishes some idea of the dreadful condition of the wicked who die in their sins and do not obtain the forgiveness of their God. O! that men and women could be warned, and that they would turn to the Lord and seek unto Him, humble themselves before Him, put away their sins, and obtain His Holy Spirit to be their guide and their companion, then no matter what the circumstances might be in which they were placed, they would have the peace of heaven, the joy of the Holy Ghost, and a conscience void of offence towards God and man! And this is the condition in which every Latter-day Saint should live.

PROPHECY FULFILLED BY THE SITUATION.

The circumstances which surround us, though in many respects painful and trying, are not such as to discourage the faithful Saint. We have been taught to expect just such scenes as these through which we are passing, or, at least, just such opposition as we now have to contend with. What we now behold is in direct fulfillment of the predictions of God's servants to us in this generation, and unless these events take place His word could not be fulfilled.

Not only have the Prophets in our day spoken about the events which should take place in connection with the latter-day work and the opposition it would have to contend with, but the Prophets of old foretold with accuracy and minuteness that the people of God should be few and their dominions should be small, because of the wickedness of "the great whore" which should make war against them. But notwithstanding that the multitudes of the earth should fight against the Church of the Lamb of God, the power of God would descend upon the Saints and upon His covenant people; and they should be armed with righteousness and with the power of God and great glory. The scenes in which we are now taking part were known to men of God by the spirit of revelation, thousands of years ago. But while they predicted the troubles and difficulties with which the people of God would have to contend in the last days, in every instance they broke out in language of encouragement respecting the result of the struggle and predicted the complete triumph of God's kingdom over all the opposing powers of evil. Therefore, in this contest which is forced upon us we do not wage a defense that is hopeless. The God of heaven is on our side. He has made promises to Zion which cannot fail. He is mightier than all of earth's hosts, and by His wonderful providence can bring to pass, in His own way, the fulfillment of all the words of His inspired servants. Upon this foundation we can rest secure. No weapon that is formed against Zion can prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against her in judgment shall be condemned. Our enemies gloat over the prospect of our destruction. Even those who feel inclined to be friendly cause no prospect for our deliverance except by the abandonment of our religion. But it is better for us to die than to abandon our God! We cannot do this without throwing away all hope respecting the future and the great eternity that awaits us. We know that there is no faithful Latter-day Saint who feels for one moment like yielding to the demands of the wicked. Our religion is given to us from our God. We have received it by the revelations of Jesus to us. When all the world was in darkness and struggling and contending about doctrines and ordinances, He descended to restore the Everlasting Priesthood from the heavens and His Gospel in its purity and fullness and power. We were left no longer to grope in the dark and to follow the traditions of our fathers or the false teachings of uninspired men. The path of salvation was plainly marked before us, confirmed to us by the unerring testimony of God's Holy Spirit. Our souls, in walking in that path, have been filled with ineffable joy and peace. While others who have rejected the truth have been apprehensive and fearful concerning the events that were taking place and that were likely to take place, we have had a peace, a satisfaction of mind, and a contentment that have made our position unique. God has given unto us the fruits of His Gospel in great abundance. We behold them in our family organizations. We behold them in our Wards, and in our Stakes, and in our entire Church. His blessing has visibly rested upon us, and His power has been displayed in our behalf. Every faithful Latter-day Saint has rejoiced in the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit

which He has bestowed; and no promise that was made to the ancient Saints, or that has been made to us, upon the condition of our faithfully obeying the Gospel, has been withheld from us. We have been a people greatly blessed of the Lord, and our hearts should swell with gratitude and thanksgiving to our God for His abundant mercies.

SHOULD BEAR EACH OTHERS BURDENS

We again call upon the Presidents of Stakes and the Bishops of Wards to look carefully after the wants of all who are within their jurisdiction and stand in need of assistance. Especially should the families of those who are in prison, or who have been compelled to flee, or who are upon missions, be tenderly cared for. They need both aid and sympathy. Those upon whom the heavy hand of persecution does not personally rest should be willing to share the burdens of their afflicted brethren and sisters, by contributing to the comfort and sustenance of those who are deprived of the society and guidance of husbands and fathers for righteousness' sake. By so doing they will lay up treasures in heaven, and share the reward for these trials. The weight of this persecution falls upon the women and children. Deprived of the presence and support of their husbands and fathers, upon whom they have been accustomed to rely, they are comparatively helpless and naturally a prey to deep anxiety. The care and training of the children thus bereaved devolves upon their mothers, whose burden is made doubly heavy to bear. The Teachers should be particularly diligent in visiting such families, and in watching over their welfare. Thus the hands of the mothers should be strengthened, the young encouraged, the wayward admonished, and the heroic example of the heads of those households held up for admiration; and everything possible should be done to make their situation tolerable and pleasant. In this way we can bear each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ, and witness to our God and to the world, that though we may not personally suffer persecution, our sympathy and faith are with those who are afflicted for adherence to their religion, and that we are ready and willing to do our part and manifest our devotion to the cause of Christ.

JUDICIAL PERVERSION AND OPPRESSION.

The District Courts of Utah still pursue their extreme, vindictive and unrelenting course. The law is perverted, not justly administered; the object appears to be, not the maintenance of social purity nor the rectification of alleged evil, but the oppression and distress of individuals because of their religious position. The Latter-day Saints are under the most sacred obligations to do the will of God. At the same time they wish to obey every valid law of the land. But by the strained interpretation and the unwarrantable application of the Edmunds Act, men are made offenders because of their religious scruples, and rendered criminals when they are not fairly amenable to the law. Defendants who, according to the evidence, have only lived with one wife, are "presumed" to have cohabited with another wife, and thus are convicted of "cohabiting with more than one woman," when the presumption is obliterated by the proof.

In other cases when parties, in their desire to observe the requirements of the Edmunds Act, have privately agreed to the voluntary relinquishment of association as husband and wife, the husband has not escaped the vengeance of the law. Though there are numbers of instances where such parties have honestly endeavored to live within the law, yet whenever indictments have been found, husbands have almost invariably been convicted and sentenced to the full penalties of fine and imprisonment. We take this opportunity of recording our high appreciation of the spirit of self sacrifice which has been manifested by our sisters throughout the entire crusade. They have shown a fortitude, a courage, a devotion and love which must be the admiration of posterity. They have not faltered in their devotion to the principles of righteousness, have not shrunk from the consequences attending obedience to God's law, and have been a source of strength and encouragement to their sons, their husbands and their fathers. There are numerous instances which have come to our knowledge of wives offering to make the most heroic sacrifices to save their husbands from the penalties of the law.

Contrary to the jurisprudence of centuries, legal wives are compelled, under threats of imprisonment, to testify against their lawful husbands and disclose family secrets that should never be bare to the public eye. This is a gross violation of the law under which they act, and opposed to recognized public policy and family rights. And by the system of "segregation" an offense which, according to the law, is punishable at the utmost extent by six months' imprisonment and a fine of \$500 is multiplied into many offenses and the full sentence inflicted for each fraction of that offense.

The plan of finding several indictments for the one offense has been discarded and the scheme adopted of making several counts in the one indictment. The number of these counts is not regulated by law, but is left to the arbitrary disposition of a grand jury selected from the class in hostility to the defendants, and usually sub-

ject and pliant to the will of an extremely bitter and unscrupulous Prosecuting Attorney. The petit juries empaneled for the trial of persons thus indicted, are also picked out for their known antagonism to the society to which the accused belong. And in almost every instance they find verdicts as requested by the Prosecuting Attorney, oblivious of the exculpatory portions of the evidence. Juries are thus selected, not only for the trial of cases under the Edmunds law, which permits challenges of "Mormons," but by the open venire process strong anti-"Mormon" are chosen to try "Mormons" accused of offenses not included in the Edmunds act, and thus again is the law perverted and prostituted to work oppression and injustice. The Courts, as a rule, decide on questions of law and procedure as desired by the District Attorney and ignore the request of defendant's counsel for legal instructions to the trial jury. Thus the victims marked for the sacrifice on the altar of hate, are, humanly speaking, entirely at the mercy of their persecutors.

Another new step in the progress of this iniquity is the rule, recently enforced, of compelling persons charged with violations of the Edmunds act to plead guilty or else have their families forced upon the witness stand, to be plied with shameful questions concerning the most private acts and relations of their husbands and fathers. Children of tender years are compelled to give evidence on subjects unsuited to their immature minds, and to become the instruments of their parents' incarceration. Formerly, defendants were permitted to plead not guilty and then go upon the stand and testify against themselves, declaring the facts and leaving the result with the jury and the court. By this means a conscientious man who did not consider himself guilty of crime, could explain his position, and meet the issue without doing violence to his convictions. But this poor consolation is now denied by the malevolent District Attorney. The unfortunate defendant must do violence to some extent to his conscience by pleading guilty, or suffer the anguish of witnessing the tortures of his wives and children when subject to the legal rack of a brutal cross-examination, in which no regard is shown for a wife's affection or a daughter's love, the sensitive shrinking of a virtuous woman from exposure of her marital associations, or a child's fearful aversion to disclosing the secrets of home for the conviction of a father. Such proceedings prove that the object is not the vindication of the law but the promotion of human suffering, providing the victims are members of the "Mormon" Church. Many of the objects of this malevolence are aged men who have passed the allotted three score years and ten, who have contracted no new marital obligations, but are engaged in caring for their families as honor and righteousness dictate. The heartless severity with which such defendants are pursued is, also evidence that the object is not the public benefit but the wreaking of vengeance upon members of a Church.

Another indignity which has been heaped upon the heads of Latter-day Saints is the charge of perjury which the reckless District Attorney has publicly but not legally made. Witnesses who have been compelled to testify against their dearest friends, when answering "I do not know" to questions concerning matters of which they were not cognizant, have been insulted and abused and branded with perjury. All evidence they disclose which suits him uses as undeniable truth before a commissioner or a jury, but everything elicited from the same witnesses that does not suit his purpose he denounces as perjury. And he has the hardihood to claim that this crime is taught and encouraged by the "Mormon" Church. The refutation of this atrocious calumny is found in the standards of Church doctrine, and in the fact that the brethren who are now lingering in prison for declining to repudiate their wives, have been sent there, in nearly every instance, through their own testimony or the testimony of their families. And it is well known that every one of them could have escaped the penalties of the law if they would but promise to obey the law, in future, as construed by the courts. It would have been easy to make the promise and avoid imprisonment. But their regard for their word was such that they would not make a promise which they did not intend to keep, so they accepted a loathsome prison and pecuniary loss in preference to the appearance of falsehood. It may seem to those who do not understand the situation that the requirement of future obedience to the law is but reasonable and that every good citizen should make this agreement. But, an explanation of the facts will speedily dissipate this conclusion. Obedience to the law as construed by the courts, would be difficult of comprehension if the numerous and diverse definitions of the law were considered. But according to the latest rulings, a promise to obey the law signifies an agreement to violate the most solemn covenants of marital fidelity that mortals can make with each other and their God. It means the utter repudiation of loving wives and the separation either of the father and some of his children or of the mother and her children. It is a promise not to visit, go to the same place of worship or amusement, or recognize, associate with, or even call on when sick or dying, or when her child is sick or dying, the plural wife

who has been faithful in all things. It means dishonor, treachery, cruelty and cowardice. It places, not the law but a gross and wicked perversion of the law, above the revealed will of God and the noblest promptings of the human heart. It is a promise that no true Latter-day Saint can make and that no humane being would demand.

Thus the legal difficulties that surround the Saints are not so much the effects of a special and partial law aimed at a feature of their religion as of the wicked and absurd constructions of that law and its improper and unprecedented administration, prompted by malice, inspired by Satan and intended to crush out a system of religion which cannot be overcome by truth, reason and the agencies of enlightened humanity.

RETALIATION DEPRECATED.

Before leaving this uninviting subject we desire to say to the Latter-day Saints, that though we are suffering so acutely from the inhumanity of our fellow men, we must not descend in the slightest degree to acts that would savor of retaliation, or in the least seek to curtail any man in his individual rights. We wish it fully understood by the Saints and by all the world that we have a profound respect for all wholesome and constitutional laws. We are the firm and unequivocal advocates of law and order, and of every principle associated with human freedom, and though we regard the Edmunds Act, in its provisions and its administration, as *ex post facto*, cruel, oppressive and unconstitutional, yet we are not contending against it in our own interests alone, but we are also fighting the battle of civil and religious liberty, and of freedom of conscience in behalf of our common humanity and in the interest of every people. We feel assured that, as the founding of these United States formed an epoch in the history of human liberty, so this action of ours will have due weight in restraining the tendency to intolerance and oppression that to-day uprears its head to stay the progress of human freedom. We say, as Elder Parley P. Pratt very forcibly expresses it in one of his poetical effusions:

"Come ye Christian sects, and Pagan,
Popes and Protestants and Priests,
Worshippers of God or Dagon,
Come ye to fair freedom's feast.
Come ye sons of doubt and wonder—
Indian, Moslem, Greek and Jew,
All your shackles burst asunder;
Freedom's banner waves for you."

THE REFUGE OF LIES.

Probably at no period in the world's history has Satan had such power over the hearts of the children of men as he appears to wield at the present. He has flooded the earth with lies, endeavoring by means of these deceptions to retard the work of God, to destroy its influence, and to make victims of its believers, especially those who have the authority to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. A more striking illustration of his power in this respect has not been furnished us than was witnessed at the meetings which were attended by some of the members of the Grand Army of the Republic who were passing through here. It would be incredible to believe that people could be so deceived by the false statements which were made to them by our enemies who reside here, had it not been witnessed. The most abominable falsehoods, which could be disproved with the greatest ease, were told with an unblushing effrontery that was Satanic; and though many of the visitors had opportunities of seeing for themselves, and of mingling with the people, some went away fully imbued with the idea that the Latter-day Saints ought to be exterminated from the face of the earth. But to the credit of humanity be it said, others became thoroughly disgusted with the proceedings, and denounced unsparingly the folly and wrong of condemning a people affording so many evidences of the qualities that go to make excellent citizens, from the one-sided statements of their avowed enemies.

The course of the former class is an illustration of the malignant power of falsehood wielded by Satan in other directions and places. If lies could overwhelm the work of God, we should be completely crushed under their weight. It is this great influence upon which Satan depends to thwart the purposes of God and check the spread of truth; and, unfortunately for the world, it appears willing to drink in his spirit and to believe his fabrications. It is this that arouses mobs and causes them to indulge in acts of violence and hostility against unoffending servants of God, and that has incited them to shed the blood of innocent men in the most cruel and barbarous manner.

By means of this incessant stream of falsehood which is continually being sent forth, the rulers of our nation are urged to adopt the most extreme measures against us. It appears vain to point to our works, to show what we have done in reclaiming this land from its original sterility, and building up a grand commonwealth in these mountainous—a commonwealth rich in all the elements of greatness, lightly taxed, free from debt, with peace and union prevailing to an unparalleled extent throughout all these mountainous where Latter-day Saints reside. It is in vain that we point to our frugality, our temperance, our comparative freedom from crime, and the peace and good order which exist wherever we are in the majority. All these evidences of thrift and virtue go for nothing, and the National Legislature feels that it is under the necessity