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REMARKS

By Elder GEORGE A. SMITH, delivered in the Old Tabernacle, Dec. 29, 1867.

REPORTED BY D. W. EVANS.

In the dealings of God with the children of men in almost every age of which we have any account, we find that a certain weakness of the human heart has ever manifested itself; that is, its proneness to stray from the Lord. On almost every occasion when the children of Israel began to get prosperous and wealthy, they forgot their duty and strayed from the Lord. After Joshua had led them across the Jordan, subdued their enemies and placed them in possession of Canaan, he called the people together *en masse* and exacted of them a covenant that they would serve the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt and had wrought so many miracles in their favor; and it is recorded of that generation that they served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua. This is about as long a time as Israel ever did abide by the law of the Lord. In reading the Book of Mormon this same trait of character is very noticeable, in the history of the Nephites and Jaredites. When the elders were stirred up to preach and prophecy to the people; or when through the scourging of the Almighty they were brought to repentance and to the knowledge of their fathers, it would be but an incredibly short time—a few years of peace and industry with their attendant blessings—before they would again go astray from God, follow new doctrines and forms of worship designed by men, and wickedness would soon again overspread the land. This was repeated time and again by the Nephites from the time they separated from the Lamanites until their final destruction. It is remarkable, however, in the history given in the Book of Mormon, that after the mission of the Savior to this Continent and the reception of the gospel by the whole of the Lamanites and Nephites, that for several generations they remained faithful to its precepts and principles, and walked before the Lord with such a degree of humility and thanksgiving that they were prospered and blessed in all things. This is the longest period of peace and the most like a millennium that we have any account of in any of our records where time is given to us. It is true that Enoch and his followers were more faithful than this, for it is said that he walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years; but as we have no detailed account of the transactions in his cities, or of the regulations in Zion under his direction, we are not prepared to use the short account we have of him and his people by way of comparison.

All these lessons taught in the Bible, the Book of Mormon and by our own experience are to warn us of the danger of going astray, and to show us how prone we are to lust after the leaks and onions of Egypt, or to sacrifice principle to gain some temporary advantage or to answer some mercenary purpose; and they should be so firmly fixed upon our minds and so applied in our lives that nothing could induce us to do so, for however great the seeming advantage resulting from such a course, it would in the end prove a serious disadvantage, for in following it we sacrifice our integrity, violate our faith, weaken our confidence in God and our power with Him, and lay ourselves liable to fall into snares from which it is impossible for us to extricate ourselves.

As I have already said, when I first read the Book of Mormon this trait of character astonished me, and I have been equally astonished at seeing it manifested by this people during the thirty-seven years I have been conversant with their history. In relation to the Word of Wisdom see what a variety of opinions and feelings have arisen amongst us. It is now about thirty-six years since that was given by the Lord to His people, not by commandment or constraint, but a principle with promise, and yet to-day, many of us find it difficult to leave off our tea or to do without our tobacco. Had we as a people pursued an even,

straightforward course in obedience to the counsels of the Almighty, many of us, who to-day, are in bondage to these and other pernicious practices would never have indulged in them.

I moved into Kirtland with five families. The question immediately arose, "where shall we settle?" Why, right here in Kirtland, the Lord designs to make this a stronghold for a few years, and here we are to settle; which was the counsel of the Prophet.

The very first thing that occurred after this advice was, that two out of the five came to the conclusion that they had better go to the neighboring town, because they thought they could gain some temporary advantage. To Chagrin they went, in opposition to the advice of the Prophet, and in a few weeks they were in darkness, and not long after they were numbered with the enemies of Zion, and were soon using all their power for the destruction of the Saints. He that gathereth not with us scattereth abroad. Joseph, the Prophet, told us to go to work and build up the cities of Zion, and not to build up strange cities. Kirtland, of course, contained but few Saints, and they were poor, and many of the brethren who were mechanics would go to Cleveland, Painesville and other places, while the residue were willing to take the advice of the Prophet and stay in Kirtland and get what work they could among the brethren, and make improvements, and at the end of the year it invariably turned out that those who had obeyed counsel had made the most means, and what was more, they had the best spirit, and, as a general thing, they are still in the midst of the Saints; while those who went abroad, contrary to the counsels and instructions of the servants of the Lord, became darkened in their minds, and eventually apostatized. The fact is, in relation to this, that we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and to use all our efforts to sustain His Kingdom and each other, and to sustain and uphold those who uphold the Kingdom of God, and when we neglect to do this, and suffer temporary interests to drag us to the right or the left, we lay a foundation for darkness and destruction. However many objections we may feel to abiding the counsels and instructions which are given to the Saints, we will find, under all circumstances, that they are invariably for the best, and that when they have not been observed, the result was unfavorable. It seems to me that most of us can look back the last four or five years and see the course that has been pursued by some in their eagerness and determination to disobey counsel. By these lessons and examples in the school of experience we ought to make ourselves acquainted with the principles of progress and profit by them. If we will do so, God will strengthen our hands and enlighten our minds, and enable us to pull unitedly together; and when we are united as a solid mass, all the powers of earth cannot prevail against us.

Our weakness consists in division among ourselves, in not living up to our calling, in not abiding by the counsels which the Lord inspires His servants to impart unto us, and not abiding by the covenants which we make when we lift up our hands to Heaven and vote to sustain our President, or Prophet, as a seer and revelator unto us. This failure on our part weakens both his hands and ours. Bro. Woolley said this morning, "we are progressing," and there is no doubt we are, but it is slowly.

May the Lord bless us, unite our hearts and quicken our progress, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

A FEW THOUGHTS RELATING TO RIGHTS, DUTIES AND COMPARISONS.

BY HISTORICUS.

Having heretofore seen statements to the effect that Congress contemplated repealing the Organic Acts of Utah and Montana, and passing an Act relating to trials, jurors and marriage or non-marriage in Utah, I have been induced to pen

a few lines relating to Rights, Duties and Comparisons, which, if you think worthy of a place in the News, you are at liberty to print.

My thoughts have flown back to the principles upon which Governments are formed, and as I have derived profit from a frequent recurrence to those principles, I have indulged the hope that others might also be benefitted by them. In referring to principles, comparisons will naturally enough flow into the mind, so, in a few instances, I have drawn comparisons between the inhabitants of this Territory and the early settlers of New England, occasionally referring also to the early inhabitants of the other Colonies.

Relating to the foundation of Governments and of laws I have often asked myself: Is there a God? If so, has He any right to interfere with the affairs of men? and if so, what right? Has He interfered and given laws? If so, where are they and what are they? Must I obey them, if known to me? I know there are laws of man; and I also know my fellow men demand of me that I shall obey their laws. By what right? Have I consented to them? Have my ancestors consented to them and thus bound me? or does this rest on some other principle than consent? Has any man, or any class of men, a divine right to govern me and the society in which I dwell? If so, who is the man, or who constitute the class of men?

All these and many more questions which may be asked are involved in the principles of civil and religious liberty, though it is by no means necessary to answer them all to enable us to understand the principles and foundation of the Government of the United States and the principles and foundation of the Government of Utah. I shall not, therefore, attempt to answer these questions in any other manner than to state a few facts, and give a few of the views of the framers of the Constitution and laws, confining myself to principles and omitting details.

In sixteen hundred and twenty, the first settlement in New England was made at Plymouth rock, by a community who had left their native country and come to the new world to enjoy the right to worship God as their consciences might dictate. On their landing, they bowed, gave thanks to God and consecrated themselves and their new country to Him. This, if there be no God, or if He have no right to interfere with the affairs of men, was a vain and delusive thing; but if there is a God, and if He has a right to interfere with the affairs of men, it was a wise, judicious and appropriate ceremony. Of this all must judge—judge for themselves. I approve and commend the act.

Over that country there was at that time an acknowledged right of Great Britain to the sovereignty, though there never before had existed the laws of civilized man, nor had there—so far as then known—ascended to God the voice of praise and prayer. Yet there was one elementary principle, one pillar, one chief corner stone on which the entire American Government rests, it was the law of self-preservation, in which may be included life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and the right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, abbreviated,—civil and religious liberty.

Exercising their rights under this great first law, the New England colonists, before landing, assumed the necessary powers of government by an agreement among themselves, which continued about eight or nine years when a charter was given by the King that authorized the whole body of the proprietors to assemble in person and make laws, not repugnant to the laws of England, for the government of themselves.

Pursuant to the authority conferred by this charter, which may be considered as sanctioning the right of the colonists before assumed, the male inhabitants, for more than fourteen years,

assembled in person and enacted laws; thus affording an illustrious example of the principle that all just powers emanate from the people. This was as purely a democratic government as any which has ever been established on this continent.

At early times charters were given, confirming the right to make laws, and the right of civil and religious liberty, and establishing the right that the colonists and their posterity should enjoy all the rights and liberties of Englishmen at home.

Under these charters the colonists at various times asserted their right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

In Maryland, a colony settled by the Catholics, the Legislature, in 1649, declared by law, that no persons professing to believe in Jesus Christ should be molested in respect of their religion or in the free exercise thereof, or be compelled to the belief or exercise of any other religion against their consent.

In 1636 the right of conscience was established in Rhode Island by Roger Williams, which was confirmed to the people in their Charter of 1663, in these words: "No person within the Colony at any time hereafter shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted or called in question for any difference of opinion in matters of religion, who do not actually disturb the civil peace of the Colony."

About the same time the proprietors of Carolina declared that all persons settling therein shall enjoy the perfect freedom of religion.

In 1664 the proprietors of New Jersey, in a charter of liberties, secured to the inhabitants the full and perfect enjoyment of religious liberty, by adopting the same language as that used in the Rhode Island charter.

In 1683 in New York, under the Duke of York, the General Assembly granted complete enjoyment of religious faith and worship to all persons who professed faith in God by Jesus Christ.

In 1701, under the auspices of William Penn, Pennsylvania declared that no man on earth had power or authority to rule over men's consciences in religious matters, and that no person should be called in question, or punished, or hurt in person, estate or privilege for the sake of his opinion, judgment or worship in the concerns of religion.

All these declarations of rights came from men who had left countries where there was an established religion, and in many cases they emanated from men who had suffered from religious intolerance, and generally, if not universally, from those who believed in the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments. They were made, too, when they were colonies owing allegiance to the governments in the old world.

Thus we see the doctrine of full and complete religious faith, and the enjoyment of the right to exercise that faith and its privileges unmolested, was established long before the Declaration of Independence. True, in some few instances it was confined to those who believed in God by Jesus Christ, which would exclude the Jews, as they did not believe in Jesus Christ. In others it mattered not whether they were Catholics, Protestants, Jews or Gentiles, Christians or anti-Christians; all were to be protected in their concerns of religion; none could be lawfully molested therein, nor in the exercise thereof. Religion was left to God and the person.

I conclude, then, that the right to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, and to fully and freely exercise that right, is one of the absolute rights of American citizens—one of those rights which are inalienable, inherent in man; one that can not be bought, sold or surrendered. I take it to be good, sound law that an American citizen can not sell his life, nor his liberty, nor his right to pursue happiness, nor his right to worship God as his conscience may dictate, nor surrender those rights to any other person or to any earthly power.

He may, for crime, forfeit any or all; but he can not, without crime, yield them up. He may, to preserve his rights and to aid others in preserving theirs,