

DISCOURSE

BY

APOSTLE ERASTUS SNOW,

DELIVERED

In the Salt Lake Assembly Hall,
Sunday Afternoon, February
26th, 1882.

REPORTED BY GEO. F. GIBBS.

Since coming to the stand I have been requested to address the congregation.

I will read the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th verses of the 25th chapter of Genesis.

And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

How far I shall confine myself to the matter contained in this passage I cannot say. The present eventful period of our lives, the prejudices which now move the people of our nation concerning us, and the pressure that is being brought upon us chiefly through the religious element of the country to influence Congress to extraordinary legislation against us, are perhaps, the reasons why my mind reverts to the historical facts contained in the Scripture I have just read, which was given unto us by men of old who, until quite a recent date, have been generally revered by all Christians; and even now a large majority of the Christian sects of America respect and reverence the ancient fathers, their teachings and writings while the sacred Book is closed, but ignore in their daily lives what those worthies believed and practiced.

The word translated concubine in this Scripture must not be confounded with the modern practice which obtains so largely in the great cities of Christendom, and with the more wealthy portions of old communities. I refer to the practice sometimes called concubinage, the practice of marrying under the law one wife and at the same time keeping privately one or more mistresses who are not obtruded upon society, having no claim to the honored name of wife—a practice which permits those who indulge in it to gratify the carnal passions at the expense of public virtue, and at the risk of entailing disease upon unborn posterity, as well as at the expense of the present and eternal welfare of their partners, I will say in sin; for no right-minded, correct-thinking person can pronounce it otherwise than it has been pronounced by the sacred writers both of the old and New Testament—a species of lewdness and, if not classed with open harlotry, a violation of sacred marital vows. Those who have solaced their consciences or justified themselves in this departure from law and public sentiment, no doubt feel partial justification from the practices of the ancients who were looked up to and revered; but such was not the concubinage of Abraham nor any of the ancient patriarchs, such was not the system that obtained under the law of Moses in ancient Israel.

The word translated concubine in King James version of the Bible, is translated by Luther and is found in Scandinavia and Germany where the Lutheran translation still prevails, as meaning an associated wife. In the Danish Bible it is *huustro* for wife and *medhuustro* for concubine; the sacred name of wife is given to both classes, the preposition *med* connecting them together and conveying the idea of the second class being an associated wife, or a wife in a secondary or subordinate position, in contradistinction to the first. Close students of the Bible have not failed to recognize this as being the character of the plural wives of Moses and the prophets. And it was practiced as an institution of the Jewish nation down to the coming of our Saviour, and, so far as any scriptures appear in the New Testament, this institution was neither abrogated nor in anywise condemned, while harlotry and promiscuous intercourse of the sexes—adultery and fornication are condemned in the severest language.

We have a great variety of views in Christendom, as to the will and mind of God pertaining to the union of the sexes as relating to each other, to the state and to our present and future happiness. The Latter-

day Saints regard the intercourse of the sexes, both in time and in eternity, as regulated by sacred law given by our Father in heaven who has organized us male and female for a wise purpose in Himself, and that purpose is made manifest in the first great command given to our first parents, namely, to multiply and replenish the earth. And the saying to the woman after her transgression as written in the book of Genesis, that her desires should be towards her husband and he should rule over her—the desires planted in the breast of the woman tending to draw to the opposite sex culminating in a union, is a wise dispensation of Providence for the accomplishing of the great end in view to encourage and stimulate them to multiply and replenish the earth, and take upon themselves the cares, labors, anxieties and responsibilities attending the rearing of families. And among the many different views entertained in Christendom concerning the commerce of the sexes we might say, there exists every variety of belief and practice growing out of those beliefs. We have in Christian America a religious sect—not very numerous to be sure—who held the union of the sexes to be sinful in any form whatever. This sect I hardly need say is the Shaking Quakers; and to become a member of their society—a person already married would be required to dissolve his marriage relationship; a husband and wife joining that society would be required to do the same, and to abstain from each other for ever afterwards, all connection with the sexes being strictly forbidden as an evil that may be tolerated in the carnal world, but not among those who desire to appear pure and holy before the Lord. This first commandment referred to, as having been given to father Adam and mother Eve, was in the days of their purity, before their transgressions, when they were worthy to converse with God face to face; this being the case, if there was no other reason, what philosophy can condemn that command or a proper and just effort to keep it? There is no reason, to my mind, to condemn it when regulated by law as an act of impurity; to do so would be a direct reflection upon the wisdom and purity of God Himself.

Of course, this is the general view taken of it by Christian nations, as shown in their acts and in their laws regulating it. Although the Roman Catholic Church prohibits intercourse with the sexes to sacred orders, they being, according to the rights of the church forbidden to marry. And however much some may doubt the iniquity of their holy vows, it is a matter too well known to call in question. The more general sentiment of Christians recognize the purity and uprightness of marriage of a man to one woman; and they quote the following words of the Apostle Paul to testify to it, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whosoever is joined together in the Lord, shall be one flesh." But the majority of modern Christians consider that for a man to marry more than one wife while she lives and is his wife is sin. Now I will undertake to say respecting the two conditions of marriage, single and plural, that where the duties and obligations are the same, and the husband is equally honorable, just and virtuous, faithful and true to his wives and children, that there is not necessarily any greater impurity existing between such a man and his plural family, than between a man and his single family; that there is not necessarily a defilement of the marriage bed, that there is not necessarily defilement of the body or spirit. When the institution of marriage is founded in religious sentiment and is confirmed by the enduring love of husband, wives and children, and the responsibilities attending that relationship, as we find it in many of the ancient worthies. There is not necessarily any defilement in plural marriage. There was not necessarily defilement in father Abraham and other ancient patriarchs and prophets who took to themselves a second or a third or fourth wife, any more than there was in those who confined themselves to one wife. Nor have I ever heard from any creature—and I have read and heard much and reflected much, because our institution of marriage has invited discussion and reflection upon this subject. I have never yet heard an argument that, to my mind, appeared sound against the marriage of an honorable man to two women any more than to one. And the only argument that

has ever been presented that has had a semblance of soundness is the generally admitted fact of the near equality of the sexes which would seem to foreshadow the general purpose and design of providence that one man should have only one wife. I have never heard an argument relating to the physical effects of the institution, nor as relating to the state or society that could not be applied just as appropriately to monogamy. The opposers of plural marriage make many declarations against us which are untrue which they do not understand because they accept the reports of certain persons who give way to a lying spirit, and misrepresent and belie people far better than themselves. The selfishness and weakness of human nature, the evils which manifest themselves from time to time between families and between husband and wife, and between wives and children are quoted as evils greatly to be deplored as growing out of this system. I will only say in regard to this, that those best acquainted with the inner workings of the system among the Latter-day Saints throughout all of their settlements, if they testify honestly and truthfully as to the result of their careful observations extending over a period of over thirty years—the time that this system of plural marriage has been practiced by us in these mountains, they would, in effect, say, that there is less discontent, less strife and fewer family broils and less divorce, and less casting off of wives and casting upon the community of children without care, than would be found in the same number of monogamic families. And I may here say, that statistics will bear me out in making this assertion. To those who are not posed in the matter this may appear incredible; and the majority of the Christian world would think it impossible judging from their standpoint; and what they see and hear among themselves, and judging by the spirit by which they are animated, they would, I admit, pronounce this a thing impossible. But it is simply because they are not imbued with the faith of the Latter-day Saints, and this being the case they cannot understand the motives that prompt us to enter into this relationship. They cannot comprehend the spirit that governs us, the devout God-fearing spirit of self-sacrifice which leads us onward to all that is noble, for bearing and long-suffering, that teaches us to love one another and to be charitable to all men, and which teaches us that the relationships which we make through the marriage covenant are but the foundation of eternal glory and exaltation in the worlds to come; and it also teaches us that the glories of the future that open up before us are greatly dependent upon the faithfulness of our relationships and associations in this life; and that a man must be found capable to properly govern and guide his family and preserve in time the wives and children that are given to him, leading them in the way of life and salvation, and rearing his children in all that is pure and praiseworthy so that he can receive them in the morning of the first resurrection, there to have the father confirmation upon him his wives and children, the foundation of his individual kingdom which will exist for ever and ever. The outside world cannot comprehend this, and simply because they cannot believe it. It is this same religious sentiment that prompts women and the best of women, the most devout women, women of the purest motive and character to enter into this sacred relationship, and to cause them to determine in their own minds that they would sooner be associated with a man who has proven himself a man of integrity, a man of strict virtue and honor, who can be relied upon by God and man—they would rather trust themselves with such a man than to be the only wife of a man devoid of these qualifications, a man who, perhaps, for the want of such high motives would be the victim of many vices, of whoredom, of concubinage or illicit intercourse with the sexes, and defile himself and destroy the confidence of his family in him, or he would perhaps indulge in drunkenness and other kindred vices which would be the means of producing the same result. And such has been the experience of many women in monogamy. And I do not say that the weaknesses of mankind do not manifest themselves in plural families; I do not say that there are not some who may be urged on by fleshly lust, but if there are it results in their making

shipwreck of their faith and becoming, in time, a lasting disgrace to themselves. But where there is one example of this kind, under our polygamic system there are at least two under the monogamic order that might be cited, who make shipwreck of their faith, who sacrifice their honor, and whose family send forth a wall of grief for the loss of confidence in husband and father. Adultery, fornication, whoredom God will judge; every form of licentiousness He has condemned in His word from the beginning of the world to the present. And if follies are manifested by some who profess to be Latter-day Saints in this direction, so we may cite similar weaknesses manifested by ancient men of God; not, however, to justify such cases but merely as examples of human weaknesses.

Referring again to Abraham, and his wife Sarah. They are held up in sacred Scripture as models of noble character, purity of purpose, piety, devotion and superior integrity to God, who hesitated not to obey Him at all hazards even to the sacrifice of that which was nearest and dearest unto them. This Sarah, one of the noblest of women, received the promise of her son Isaac while in old age, a promise made to her by the angel of God, and this because of her barrenness, and because too of the integrity of her heart towards her husband and her willingness to sacrifice her womanly feeling in giving to her husband other wives. And after she had given to Abraham Haggar that she might bear him children, mark the Scripture: It was for the purpose that he might not be childless because she was childless. It was after she had thus sacrificed her womanly feeling, thereby manifesting her love and integrity to her husband, that the Lord had compassion upon her and granted the desire of her heart, promising her that she should in course of time bring forth a son, and telling her that his name should be Isaac, in whom and in whose seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. And it was after this lad was partly grown that God commanded Abraham to take this promised child on to the Mount Moriah, and there build an altar and offer him up as a sacrifice. Abraham in this was tried as few men ever were tried; for his love was great for his son whom he would naturally regard as a special gift of the Lord to him, through whom no less a personage than the Messiah himself should come. Yet Abraham doubted not, he paused not to consider what the possible result might be of keeping this command; but he trusted in God as Paul said of him, "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." He trusted in God and doubted not; and proceeded to Mount Moriah and there built an altar, and when everything was in readiness he bound the lad, and while in the act of raising the deadly knife, he heard a voice saying, "Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." And then the Lord went on to say, that because of this willingness on the part of Abraham to obey Him even to the sacrificing of his only son, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore," etc. Now, I will give back unto you your son, and in blessing I will bless him and multiply him, and in him and his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. It was because of this precious promise, no doubt, that he desired to give his sons opportunities to develop and to make manifest among the surrounding tribes the character that was in him, that he divided up his goods and gave gifts to the sons of the other wives and sent them away, but gave his chief inheritance to his son Isaac.

While contemplating this I can hardly refrain from dropping a word of exhortation to my brethren who may be drawing near the close of life, not to neglect to make such disposition of their worldly effects as will suitably provide for their wives and children while they (the brethren) yet live, following the example of Abraham, not that by any means would I encourage this example in all particulars; for it is not always as it was in the case of Abraham that God has made choice of one particular son in whom their seed shall be called; but common

justice and equity requires of every father to deal fairly with each wife and child according as God has dealt with him in this world's goods, that he may retain their esteem after he shall have departed from them. Nor should he trust too much to the uncertainty of courts at the present time; for we have in too many instances seen our sorrow that federal courts whenever they have had it in their power, or whenever they could either by strained construction of law or by omissions of the law wrong a plural family by giving the first wife and her heirs that which should have been equitably divided among all the family, that have never missed the opportunity of doing it, thinking that by bringing oppression and injustice to bear they will succeed in discouraging the practice of this system of marriage. There is nothing in the faith of the Latter-day Saints or the laws of God touching this matter that would prompt aught but justice and equality to all the wives and children. The duty of a husband is plain in this respect. And the duty of all wives and children is to love each other and their husband and father; all cherishing that love of the Gospel which binds our hearts together, and while alone can carry us through the trials and tribulations of life, and lift us up at the last day.

One would suppose from the lament and cry a road in the land, which emanates chiefly from the clergy, that they are averse to the institution of the Latter-day Saints will be a taint to the whole land. What hypocrisy! I can hardly exercise patience sufficient to treat it with any degree of sobriety.

I am a native born American, was reared in the State of Vermont. In my early days the doctrine taught to our first parents, to multiply and replenish the earth, was popular; but during the period of my life that has elapsed it has been almost totally ignored by the social circles of New England. When I last visited the old homestead, an old aunt nearly ready to go into her grave, told me that it was irregular for people now-a-days to have large families. And it seems that this is the prevailing sentiment of that region; for in traveling through New England it was rare to see a woman with more than two or three children. Any of the older families, those honored matrons of New England, who live contemporarily with my mother, thought it honorable to raise large families; but my old aunt who was one of the last of that stock, by giving way to allowing the influence of death has imbued false notions; and when she thus expressed herself to me I knew she was speaking the honest sentiments of her heart. To-day infidelity and vice are called the diseases of women whose special practice is preventing fecundity, thereby securing to them gratification without bearing the responsibilities of maternity, and the troubles and expense of rearing children. These doctors and dressers and the American students who have learned to practice the hellish arts, are to-day engaged in undermining the constitution of wives and mothers; yes, calling murder, this detestable doctrine of devils has become popular throughout New England, and is fast spreading over the American continent. And now it is the Irish woman who believe in raising children, the foreign element that comes to the country that are considered the vulgar people and were it not for this flood of foreign immigration the staid New England element would soon become extinct, and I say, in the name of Israel's God, the sooner the better unless they repent of their murders, their whoredoms and their abominations that ascend to the heavens and are a stench in the nostrils of the Almighty. And yet it is this New England element whose garments are stained with the blood of innocence, that have found its way through our western States, that has worked heart and soul with the hireling priesthood in firing up the national heart, and that is urging on hostile legislation against the best and purest people that exist upon the American continent. Is it public morality they seek? Is it the cause of public and private morality they champion? If so, we may repeat what we have so often said, which is so extremely unwelcome for them to hear: We