

DISCOURSE

BY

PREST. GEORGE Q. CANNON,

DELIVERED

In the Tabernacle, Provo, Sunday afternoon, Nov. 20th, 1884.

REPORTED BY JOHN IRVINE.

In attempting to address you this afternoon, my brethren and sisters, I trust I shall have the assistance of your faith and prayers, that I may be led to speak upon those principles that are adapted to your circumstances and wants. We as a people are living at a time when we need the assistance and direction of the Spirit of God. To be taught by men and by men's wisdom in our position would be of little or no avail to us, from the fact that the conditions which surround us are different in many respects from those which surround every other people. We are a peculiar people. We are not bound together by associations such as exist among other peoples. We have not come together because this land suited us and was desirable for us to make a living in, but we have gathered to this land through force of circumstances over which, to a certain extent, we had no control. We have come together impelled by motives such as do not operate upon ordinary people, and having objects to accomplish such as are not thought of nor labored for by others. Other people, when they form settlements such as we have in these mountains, are generally drawn together, if they are new settlements, by the advantages of locality, by the opportunities for making a living or increasing in wealth, or for some consideration or reason of this character—that is in the first place. Afterwards, in succeeding generations, they stay there because it is their birthplace, because it is the home in which they have been reared. But these considerations have not influenced us in our settlement in these valleys. It is due to none of these causes that we are organized in communities as we are today, but it is due to causes that are higher and diverse from those that operate upon other people where they form settlements such as we have done. Hence, this being our condition, it requires wisdom, it requires strength, it requires enlightenment from God to enable us to maintain ourselves upon the principle that we came here in the beginning for, and to escape the evils by which we are threatened. We believe that it was God who led us to this land; that it was God who prepared this land as an abode for us; that it has been His Almighty power that has preserved us thus far, and has ameliorated the condition of affairs—that is the soil and the climate and the water—that has produced changes that have made this land desirable and a delightful home for us—and that there has been a purpose and a design in all this, and that we have been the instruments in the hands of God of working out and accomplishing that design up to the present time. Hence there is, as I have said, a necessity that we should receive from the same source that has hitherto guided us, continued guidance and continued instruction, so that we shall not stop half way in the work that we have undertaken, but by divine help be able to accomplish it.

There were some reflections that passed through my mind as I sat in your meeting this morning concerning the circumstances which surround us that if I can get the Spirit I would like to speak upon.

In the first place it will not do to judge or measure us by the standards that obtain among other people, and by which people are measured in other places. To form a correct judgment of the Latter-day Saints—men must understand the motives which prompt them to action, the considerations which affect them, and the objects they have in view to accomplish; to form a correct estimate of our character these all must be taken into consideration. But it is often the case that we are measured by standards that do not apply to us, which may very well answer for measuring other people and other communities, but not for us, and in consequence of this we are frequently misjudged, and men and women come to incorrect conclusions respecting us. Fault is constantly found with us by our enemies because of these peculiarities which they do not understand, or which if they do not understand, they pay no attention to. For instance, it is frequently said to us that we are a disloyal people, that we are not friends to the government, that we respect a power and an authority in our midst which we consider paramount to the authority of the government; and because of the circulation of this accusation and its wide spread belief we are refused rights to which we are fully entitled, which belong to us, which should not be withheld from or denied to us. It is very remarkable when we think about our numbers, how few we are, comparatively speaking,—it is very remarkable that there should be such jealousy entertained about us as there is. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were never more afraid apparently of the great power of the children of Israel in their midst than our fellow citizens, and many of them too that are in high places, appear to be afraid of us. They seem to look upon us as aliens, as an alien power, and treat us accordingly, when there is not the least justification for doing so.

Now, you remember, doubtless, Pharaoh's treatment of the Israelites. He saw that they were increasing, and he became alarmed. "Why," said he, "if we were going to have a war, these Israelites are becoming so numerous they may join our enemies and take away our kingdom from us. We must stop their increase." And he counseled with his people as to the best method to stop this increase. He issued a decree that all male children that were born of the Israelites should be destroyed and cast into the river Nile, but that the female children should be spared. In this way he hoped to check the increase of the children of Israel in Egypt. There is nothing in history that has come down to us to furnish grounds or justification for this cruel action on the part of this king. But this action was well adapted to force the children of Israel into the feeling that the government under which they lived was a harsh, a cruel and an unfriendly government, and to create antipathy in their breasts against it. In this way this tyrant, as all tyrants have ever done—in trying to accomplish the object he had in view, took the very means to bring upon himself and his nation the evils that he dreaded; because if he had desired to make the Israelites join the enemies of the nation and be traitors in the midst of the kingdom he could not have taken a more effective method than that which he did take.

And so it is with us. If we had not had a profound attachment to the Constitution of the United States and to the institutions of this government, the course that is taken against us by those who have represented the government has been and is of a character to have driven us into open and avowed enmity to the government years and years ago. Without that deep rooted attachment we should have lost all our respect for a government under which we have suffered such cruel wrongs. There could be no better evidence of the kind feeling and the loyalty of the Latter-day Saints to the government of the United States than the fact that in our breasts and throughout these mountains there prevails an unquenchable love and respect for the Constitution and the institutions that spring therefrom, notwithstanding we have been denied our rights and been treated with the utmost cruelty. There is scarcely an act of oppression that could be practiced that we have not had to endure, from the time the church of which we are members was organized up to the present time. We have been falsely accused of all kinds of crimes, have been mobbed and repeatedly driven from our homes with the entire loss of our property, have been outraged, warred upon, subjected to violence of almost every description, and murdered. One by one our rights have been assailed. We have been stripped of them under forms of law; we have been denied justice, and treated with extreme vindictiveness. Our families—if those who had the execution of the laws in their hands could have accomplished it—would have been rent asunder; wives would have been torn from their husbands, children from their parents; households would have been destroyed; distrust and enmity and hatred would have been engendered in the breasts of the people one towards another—that is, if the measures that have been framed against us could have been successfully carried out as they were designed by those who framed them. Just think of it! Think of the manner the women of this community have been tempted to turn traitors to their husbands and their friends! Every inducement possible has been offered to them to turn against and betray their husbands, and the seeds of enmity have been sown, or have endeavored to be sown, in the breasts of families and of children against parents and against each other throughout the entire land. When you contemplate all these acts they equal in cruelty and perfidy and inhumanity any of the acts of which we read in the Scriptures. Men are shocked when they read the story of the treatment of the Israelites by Pharaoh. All the preachers throughout the land when they read that, comment more or less upon it to their congregations, and talk about the cruelty of which that king was guilty, and praise the Israelites and praise Moses for that which they did. At the same time they are guilty themselves of as great crimes. They are guilty of inciting a government against its citizens—its peaceful citizens—and stirring up the government to acts of harshness, of cruelty, and even some of them go so far as to defend the use of the army by the government to destroy a peaceful people from the face of the earth.

Now, as I have said, no people in the world have given greater proofs of attachment to their own government and of devotion to those sacred principles of liberty that we have inherited than the Latter-day Saints have done in these mountains. But, as I have said, the cry is still that we are disloyal; that we unite church and state; that we have an authority in our midst that we respect and obey, while we disregard the civil authority of the land. These things are a frequent cause of complaint against us, and we are denied our rights. We to-day should be a State. This Territory of Utah should be one of the United States. We should have the right to elect our own Governor, to elect our own Judges, to elect every officer in fact that executes the laws or has anything to do with the administration of the government in our own land. We have been here 37 years and during 34 years of

that time we have been an organized Territorial government, longer than any other community on the continent except New Mexico, which was organized at the same time. Other Territories have sprung up and had speedy recognition as States and are now numbered as members of the Union years after we settled this country. There is no good reason why we should not have had this same right granted unto us; no good reason whatever. We have shown our capability for good government, for maintaining good government. Our Territory to-day is an example for maintaining to all the Territories and to many States so far as good government is concerned, and freedom from debt, and everything in fact that makes life enjoyable and easy for the citizen. We are lightly taxed, and we have maintained ourselves without aid from the general government or from any other community; while other communities that have had nothing like the difficulties to contend with that we have had have been beggars either at the door of the National Congress, or of their neighboring States and their fellow citizens. When other places were visited by grasshoppers the whole land resounded with appeals for aid; but though we for five years in succession, in some of our settlements, had crops destroyed by the same cause, yet no wall went up from Utah asking the nation for help. We have been so independent and so disposed to sustain ourselves and to fight our own battles with the difficulties that environed us, that we have managed to get along without having recourse to this method of obtaining assistance, and in this respect our course has been unexampled.

Now, as I say, there is no good reason why we should not have been admitted as a State in the Union, except for the reason, and that has no foundation in truth, that we are not to be trusted, that we are in such a condition that if we were to get a state government there would be danger resulting from that grant of power unto us. Of course all of you, my brethren and sisters, know how untrue this is, how utterly without foundation such accusations are, but, nevertheless, they are listened to and believed.

Efforts have been made among us to change this condition of affairs. There have been, and still are, perhaps, some who call themselves Latter-day Saints who are almost ready to lend themselves to any scheme that has for its object the obtaining of a State organization for Utah. Such persons look upon this as so great a blessing and so great a boon that they are almost willing to forego their religious belief and to pander to those who have got power and to make some sort of a concession to them in order to achieve this, what they consider, very desirable end. There has been some agitation in years past respecting plural marriage, and some people, calling themselves Latter-day Saints, have been almost ready to go into the open market and bid for a State government at the price of conceding this principle of our religion, for the privilege of becoming a State of the Union. Those who are ready to do this are ready also to cast off obedience to the Priesthood of the Son of God, and to say, "We do not believe that men who hold an office in the Church should have any voice in the affairs of the state." They are ready to sell out their belief as Latter-day Saints, and their veneration and reverence for that power which God has restored, for the sake of obtaining a little recognition of their rights as citizens, on the part of those in power. It does not require much familiarity with the Spirit of God or with the principles of our holy religion to understand exactly the position that such persons as these to whom I allude occupy among us. When a man is ready to barter any principle of salvation for worldly advantage that man certainly has reached the position that he esteems worldly advantage above eternal salvation. Can such persons retain the Spirit of God and take such a course as this? No, they cannot. That other spirit will lead such persons astray, and they will be left to themselves. Will there be such persons continue among us and be associated with us? I do not question it. I expect we shall have such characters with us during our future career as we have had in the past. We have had all sorts of people connected with this Church. As the work rolls forth, as it increases in numbers, so will these characters increase—that is, for a certain time, until the day comes when the kingdom of God and the reign of righteousness shall be fully ushered in.

Now, regarding this accusation that is made concerning the Priesthood: it is the most common charge that is made against us that we listen to the Priesthood, that we are more obedient to the Priesthood than we are to those who hold civil authority. The question may be very properly asked: Have we not had good reason for this? Should we not be most consummate fools if we did not listen to our friends instead of our enemies? From the time that Prest. Young was superseded as Governor of this Territory until the present time what kind of officers have we had sent into our midst to administer the affairs of the government? Has there been a man who has come here as Governor who has had the ability, even if he had the disposition, to guide and to counsel the people of this Territory, and to manage its affairs as well as the men among us who have had leading positions in the Priesthood? Why, there is not an instance of the

kind. You take the best disposed Governor we have had—and they are easily mentioned, the few that we have had who have been well disposed—you take them and compare them with the men who laid the foundation of this commonwealth, who laid the foundation of this Territorial government and built up this government, and there is no comparison between them. So that, aside from every other consideration, men are justified in seeking wisdom and guidance at the best fountain, at the best source. If I want counsel I will go to the men who are best fitted to give me counsel. If I were not a Latter-day Saint it would make no difference to me who the person was if he could give me good counsel. If he was a man of ripe experience I would feel justified in going to that man and getting his advice.

This has been our position as a people. We have had men among us who have proved themselves in the best possible manner, beyond dispute, to be entirely capable of directing and managing and counselling in all matters that pertain to our earthly existence. Have they not shown this through years and years of experience? The people have proved them. Now, would not the people be great fools, would it not be the height of folly for people who have this knowledge to say: "No, I won't ask these men for counsel; I won't go to them for advice; I won't listen to anything they say, because if I do so I am listening to the Priesthood; but I will go to somebody who does not know anything; I will go to some man of my kind and ask his counsel, and have him tell me what to do, because I am anxious to show that I am loyal to the government of the United States."

Now, would not you call any man who would do this an idiot, when he could have got good counsel from his friends; when he would turn his back on his friends, and go to somebody for counsel who did not know anything, not as much as he, the person, did himself about the question he submitted to him? I would say, and you would say, that people who would do such a thing were little less than idiots.

Well, now, what crime are we guilty of? If we have men among us who have more experience than they, and who have proved themselves capable of guiding the people, what crime are we guilty of in giving heed to their counsel and seeking it? Because they hold the Priesthood are their mouths to be stopped up so that they cannot speak; are they to be deprived of the rights of citizenship, and all the rights that men have that are born free, because they hold the Priesthood? Is that a good reason? A more senseless reason never was given. If these government officials and these men that represent the government are so much better and so much more capable of guiding the people and have so much greater right to be listened to and obeyed, let them show it by their works. When they have proved it I suppose there will be no lack of disposition on the part of the people to go to them and listen to them and to expect from them all the necessary teachings and counsels. There will be no lack of disposition on the part of sensible men and women such as we profess to be; but until they do this, until they show this capability and this power, they had better hold their tongues and say nothing about others leading the people. The fact is this, and it is apparent to all of us, that there are certain men who can destroy much easier than they can build up. It required a great deal of skill to build the Temple at Ephesus; it required the highest skill in architecture; but a fool destroyed it with a little blaze. It takes men to build up, but children can burn down and destroy. It takes men to build a commonwealth and lay the foundation of that which we see around us; it takes labor and years of experience and wisdom to accomplish such results; but any poor creature that is half witted can destroy all these labors in a very short time, and those that have come among us in too many instances representing the government have been men of this calibre; they would like to destroy, tear down, and reduce to chaos. That would suit them far better than it would to build up.

My brethren and sisters, I would like to have us as a people look at these matters, if we can, from a sensible point, from the standpoint of common sense and reason, and not allow ourselves to be diverted from the course that we have adopted by the outcry that is made against us and by the howls that are raised about us. It would be exceedingly foolish for us to do so.

God has given unto us, as we believe and as we testify, His Gospel; He has given unto us His Church; He has given unto us the authority by which men and women are led into His Church and governed in His Church—the authority which He Himself recognizes and the only authority that He has given to man on the earth to act in His stead. We believe this, we testify of it. At the same time while we have this belief, and form ourselves into a Church organization, we never have at any time in our history attempted to make our Church organization the only organization and the dominant organization in matters that pertain to everyday affairs and to civil government. There has always been among the Latter-day Saints great respect shown for civil authority and for the laws of the

land. In fact, as soon as possible after our first settlement here, a Legislature was organized and the provisional government of Deseret was formed, when there was no one but Latter-day Saints in the country at the time. We could have been governed by our Church organization; it was sufficient for our purpose during the winter of 1847-8 and during the summer of 1848. It was quite sufficient. There was no other organization. But as soon as the Pioneers returned, President Young and the rest of the brethren—there was no time lost in organizing a civil government—the Provisional Government of the State of Deseret—and laws were enacted in due form by the civil authority, and from that day until the present it has been respected and honored among us, and will be from this time forward as long as this people exist. There is no people on the face of the earth that draw a nicer distinction than we between that which belongs to the Church and that which belongs to the State. But it is frequently said—and I have had to meet it often in my life time, particularly in Washington; they have said and do say, "Why, your Probate Judges are Elders and Bishops, and your other officials hold offices in the Church."

Well, is this a crime? Is there anything in the law or the Constitution of our country, or is there anything else that is recognized as binding among men that would prevent Elders and Bishops from holding office? I do not know of anything. I do not know that a man is any worse for being a Bishop or an Elder, or any more unfitted for civil employment, or the discharge of civil functions, than if he were not a Bishop or an Elder, especially among a people organized as we are. As I say this charge has been frequently brought against us in my hearing, and I have had to meet it before committees of Congress and elsewhere. The reply I have made to such charges is this: that among the Latter-day Saints in Utah, every reputable man in the community bears some office in the Church. As soon as he arrives at a sufficient age, if he is a reputable man he receives an ordination in the Priesthood. The best and the most active men in our community are the men who become prominent in church affairs. Our Bishops live without salaries, or support from the people, they, before being chosen, having shown their ability to sustain themselves. They are not like members of other denominations who are a burden to the people, or who receive an education especially for those duties, and thus live by the salaries that are furnished them by the members of their congregation. In a community where there is a class of that kind there may be some propriety in saying that ministers of religion shall not take part in the affairs of state, although there is nothing of that kind said anywhere in the constitution or the laws; but there may be some propriety in saying this where men are educated especially for the ministry—where they devote themselves to that labor and withdraw themselves from the practical affairs of life and depend upon their parishioners furnishing them support. There might be some propriety in saying to a class of that kind, "you are not fit to take part in civil affairs, and the practical every day affairs of life, because of your calling and because of the nature of your duties." But we say there is great impropriety in saying that those who labor in the ministry among us shall not take part; for this reason: that all the men among us who are the most practical, the most energetic, and the most business-like—from these men the ministers are chosen, that is, men who labor in the ministry as Bishops, as Elders, as missionaries, and in other capacities. They have proved that they are capable of sustaining themselves by their own efforts, and at the same time devote a certain portion of their time to public affairs. Hence, you will find among us as a rule that our Bishops are all practical men; our Presidents of Stakes and their Counselors, and the Bishops and their Counselors, the Teachers and others, are all active business men among us. They have gained experience, and because of that they are sometimes chosen to fill local offices. Take the Legislature of Utah Territory, composed as it has been of some holding positions in the Church, and you will find a body of practical men, the superiors of whom are not to be found—I say it without fear of truthful contradiction—anywhere in any Legislature in the country, men who understand the wants of their constituents and of the people and the kind of laws that are best adapted to them. I have had some experience in mingling with men in public life, and I must say that for practical wisdom and for a knowledge of the affairs of the country and of the people represented in Utah Territory, there was found, previous to the passage of the Edmunds law, a class of men that had not their superiors anywhere in this land, for practical wisdom and the ability necessary to lay the foundation and to perpetuate the institutions of a great country.

Is it wrong for men who have the Priesthood and who act in this capacity, to act in civil offices and to let the people have the benefit of their experience in these matters—is there any wrong in this? I can see none, and I am sure no man who is a true friend to his country can. There is no good reason why these men should be excluded; in fact there is every reason why they should be invited to take part in establishing the affairs of the country. I have often said, in speaking to our brethren and sisters in vari-